

Evaluation of Learning Attitude and Achievement of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Niger State Nigeria

Evaluación de la actitud y los logros de aprendizaje de las pequeñas y medianas empresas en el estado de Níger, Nigeria

Abdulrazak Mohammed ¹, Hamzat Rukayat ², Sakariyahu Shehu ³, Abdullahi AbdulRafiu ⁴

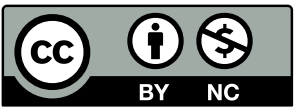
INFORMACIÓN DEL ARTÍCULO

¹ Ph.D. Department of Business Education, Faculty of Education, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin. Kwara State.
E-mail: mabdulrazak@alhikmah.edu.ng
Código ORCID:
<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5553-1720>

^{2,3,4} Department of Business Education, Faculty of Education, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin. Kwara

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Abstract

A study was done in Niger State, Nigeria, to evaluate the achievement and learning attitude of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The population comprises of 1,045 registered SME's of which 377 were sample randomly for the study in Niger State and were given a structured questionnaire to answer as part of the survey design used in this study. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used for data analysis. The results of the study revealed a strong and favorable relationship between SMEs' performance and their learning attitude. As a result, the findings imply that encouraging a good learning attitude may help to solve the under performance issue among SMEs in Niger State, which is a concern for both stakeholders and residents. The report concludes by recommending that the Niger State government routinely provide seminars and workshops for the state's registered SMEs in cooperation with pertinent regulatory organizations like SMEDAN and Ministry of Commerce and industry in the state. The main goals of these seminars have to be to disseminate information about shifting consumer demands, rival tactics, market dynamics, and technological breakthroughs. By doing this, SMEs can become more innovative and provide goods and services that surpass those of rivals, which will improve their standing in the state.

Keywords:

Learning Attitude, Competitor Attitude, Inter-Functional Coordination, Performance, SMEs.

JEL Classification: L26.

Resumen

Se realizó un estudio para evaluar los logros y la actitud de aprendizaje de las pequeñas y medianas empresas (PYME). La población está compuesta por 1.045 PYME registradas, de las cuales 377 fueron muestras aleatorias para el estudio en el estado de Níger y se les entregó un cuestionario estructurado para responder como parte del diseño de la encuesta utilizado en este estudio. Para el análisis de datos se utilizó el modelo de ecuaciones estructurales de mínimos cuadrados parciales (PLS-SEM). Los resultados del estudio revelaron una relación fuerte y favorable entre el desempeño de las PYME y su actitud de aprendizaje. Como resultado, los hallazgos implican que fomentar una buena actitud de aprendizaje puede ayudar a resolver el problema del bajo rendimiento entre las PYME, que es una preocupación tanto para las partes interesadas como para los residentes. El informe concluye recomendando que el gobierno del estado de Níger ofrezca sistemáticamente seminarios y talleres para las PYME registradas en el estado en cooperación con las organizaciones reguladoras pertinentes como SMEDAN y el Ministerio de Comercio e Industria del estado. Los principales objetivos de estos seminarios deben ser difundir información sobre las cambiantes demandas de los consumidores, las tácticas rivales, la dinámica del mercado y los avances tecnológicos. Al hacer esto, las PYMES pueden volverse más innovadoras y ofrecer bienes y servicios que superen los de sus rivales, lo que mejorará su posición en el estado.

Palabras Clave:

Actitud de aprendizaje, actitud hacia los competidores, coordinación interfuncional, desempeño, PYMES.

Clasificación JEL: L26.

Introducción

In Nigeria's economy, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are essential. They act as a stimulant for local entrepreneurship, support the development of jobs, promote the use of regional resources, and enhance domestic technology (Ismail, 2018). This pattern is consistent with the trajectory of industrial development observed in many countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where small and medium-sized enterprises have played a pivotal role in propelling development (Ismail, 2018). As a result, these regions' governments have welcomed SMEs as a tactic to promote industrialization, increase employment, and reduce poverty. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are widely acknowledged as the primary drivers of socioeconomic transformation and economic progress in Nigeria and other emerging nations (Osolor, 2018). In a dynamic economy, SMEs are important catalysts for innovation and growth, making a substantial contribution to GDP and job creation (Egbesola, 2017). In 2017, the Statistician-General of the Federation emphasized that SMEs offer an essential platform for developing technical, technological, and entrepreneurial skills in important demographic segments (Ibru, 2018). He also underlined how SMEs provide opportunities for wealth growth, income redistribution, and employment creation in society.

SMEs in Nigeria have not lived up to expectations and have not completely realized their role in the economic development and expansion of the nation,

despite these potential benefits. The contributions of SMEs to economic development continue to be inadequate, despite persistent efforts by federal, state, and municipal governments to foster the development of entrepreneurship (Ismail, 2018; Gbandi & Amissah, 2019). Given the variety of incentives, advantageous laws, rules, and special assistance that the government offers to encourage SMEs, this disparity is alarming (Ndumanya, 2018).

According to Ibru (2018), lack of success of SMEs in Niger state is a critical issue of the modern day that needs to be addressed right away. The collapse of SMEs in the area has affected entrepreneurship, market loss, unemployment, and Niger state's total economy, according to a study from the SMENDAN Niger state office (2021). Empirical research of (Slater & Narver, 2012) have proposed that a learning attitude might be used to solve the under-performance and low contribution of SMEs to the nation's development. A learning attitude, according to Slater and Narver (2018), offers a strong basis for enhancing a firm's performance. Nevertheless, there aren't many published research looking at how learning attitude affects small and medium-sized firms' performance in Niger state. Thus, the purpose of this study is to ascertain how learning attitude and the performance of SMEs in Niger state, Nigeria, are related to each other.

Small and Medium Scale Enterprise (SMEs)

According to Gomezelj and Smolcic (2016), the classification of SMEs

frequently depends on the number of employees, a factor impacted by laws governing income tax deductions and payroll systems. Government policies in Nigeria are designed to support and encourage the expansion of small businesses, acknowledging their significant economic contributions to the country in areas such as employment creation, poverty reduction, human resource development, and social welfare (Aceleanu, Traşca, & \urban, 2014). Small businesses are important sources of employment, a stepping stone for aspiring entrepreneurs, and the main source of revenue, especially in developing countries like Nigeria (Kanu, 2015). The importance of small-scale enterprises in Nigeria's political and socioeconomic environment cannot be overstated, particularly in light of the government's goal of providing dividends to its people (Aceleanu et al., 2014).

The range of SMEs differs greatly in terms of their size, revenue, and compliance with local and international regulations (Muisyo, Alala & Musiega, 2014). Due to their critical role in diversifying industrial production and accomplishing developmental goals, small-scale firms are the engine of economic development and industrial expansion (Madurapperuma et al., 2016). They make up a sizable share of enterprises in almost all economies and make a major contribution to output and employment in the private sector (Abiola & Asiweh, 2018). It is commonly known and extensively established that small businesses have a catalytic effect on overall economic performance (Ngerebo

& Masa, 2018). The World Bank (2016) asserts that small businesses are essential to the advancement of sustainable development. According to Madurapperuma et al. (2016), supporting SMEs should therefore be given top priority if developing countries like Nigeria are to see economic growth.

Learning Attitude

Learning attitude is an organizational value system that influences a company's ability to create, share, and apply knowledge (Sinkula, Baker, & Noordewier, 2018). Organizations commonly use learning, which is defined as the ongoing sharing, analyzing, and application of information, to obtain a competitive advantage (Sinkula, Baker, & Noordewier, 2018). As a result, businesses that operate in dynamic and changing surroundings ought to support learning procedures, behavioral adjustments, and improved performance (Slater & Narver, 2017). Organizational learning produces many positive results, including successful product innovation, customer retention, increased profitability, and the achievement of desired quality standards (Sinkula, Baker, & Noordewier, 2018). It does this by placing a high priority on the comprehension and efficient fulfillment of both apparent and latent customer needs (Slater & Narver, 2017). Furthermore, enhanced organizational adaptability facilitates prompt reactions to new prospects and challenges (Slater & Narver, 2017).

According to Liu and Zhang (2018), learning is viewed as the tactic

integrating and regulating internal and external stimuli. Learning is the synthesis of internal organizational data (Slater & Narver, 2017). According to Kreiser, Marino, and Weaver (2021), SMEs learn through applying the knowledge they have learned. Organizations can use learning attitude as a tool to improve their capacities and competitiveness in fast-paced market contexts, which encourages creative approaches to business operations (Sinkula et al., 2018). In partnerships between firms, it makes knowledge interpretation, renewal, and sharing easier for staff members and other stakeholders.

However, cultivating an organizational learning culture is the main obstacle that every company must overcome (Dickson, 2019). Organizations can improve organizational performance by gaining new insights and knowledge through learning attitude, which in turn affects individual behavior (Calantone, Cavusgil, Zhao, 2022). In order to create better goods and services, learning attitude entails gathering and disseminating knowledge on changes in the market, consumer expectations, competitor activity, and technology improvements (Calantone et al., 2022). To translate learning into greater performance, senior management support, training programs, and recognition are necessary (Calantone et al., 2022). To increase performance, employees should be encouraged to question the status quo, come up with creative ideas, and assess their work on a regular basis.

Scholarly interest in the relationship between learning attitude and company

performance has grown as a result of multiple researches showing that learning attitude improves ventures achievement (Sinkula et al., 2018). Learning attitude is the internal value that a company places on learning, according to Nasution et al. (2021). In order to effectively address the demands of their consumers through innovative products and services, learning businesses prioritize knowing their customers (Kreiser et al., 2021; Mahmood & Hanafi, 2023). According to Barney (2019), an organization's ability to identify and specify distinctive inputs, such its aptitude for forming relationships, gives it a competitive advantage. Organizations that prioritize learning are better positioned to make effective and efficient use of their learning resources. Businesses can gain a competitive edge by understanding customer needs and creating superior values through learning attitude (Mahmood & Hanafi, 2023). Additionally, Nasution et al. (2021) have noted that it is a crucial component that is closely related to both innovation and consumer value.

Different Types of Learning Attitude

Senge (2019) defined learning attitude as the combination of three disciplines: open-mindedness, shared vision, and commitment to learning.

I. A dedication to education: An organization's emphasis on learning procedures and the development of a supportive atmosphere are indicators of its dedication to learning. Businesses that are dedicated to learning see it as an essential investment that is required for

the sustainability of the business and the development of critical skills (Sinkula et al., 2017).

2. Commitment to Learning: This type of learning attitude refers extent to which the organization give priority to learning as a fundamental aspect of its operations. It involves not only fostering learning processes but also creating and nurturing a culture of learning within the organization. A committed commitment to learning is viewed as an essential investment for the organization's sustainability and enhancement of key capabilities (Mahmood & Hanafi, 2023).

3. Shared Vision: Shared vision is another dimension of learning attitude that focuses on aligning organizational goals and objectives with the collective vision shared by all stakeholders. It involves fostering a common understanding of the organization's purpose, values, and direction, which serves as a guiding framework for decision-making and actions. A shared vision promotes cohesion, collaboration, and alignment of efforts toward achieving common goals (Calantone et al., 2022).

4. Open - mindedness: Open-mindedness refers to the ability and readiness of individuals and organizations to accept new innovations, perspectives, and feedback. It involves being receptive to diverse viewpoints, questioning assumptions, and challenging the status quo. An open-minded learning attitude encourages creativity, innovation, and continuous improvement by fostering a culture of curiosity, exploration, and

experimentation (Calantone et al., 2022).

5. Proactive Information Seeking: This type of learning attitude emphasizes the proactive pursuit of knowledge and information to stay abreast of changes in the external environment. It involves actively scanning the market, monitoring competitors, and seeking feedback from customers to identify emerging trends, opportunities, and threats. Proactive information seeking enables organizations to anticipate change, adapt quickly, and capitalize on new opportunities (Mahmood & Hanafi, 2023).

Research Framework



Figure 1. Research Framework.
Source: Made by authors.

The study develops a framework to illustrate the relationship between learning attitude and the performance of SMEs, drawing upon the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory (see Figure 1). The RBV theory, originally proposed by Wernerfelt (1984), posits that strategic capabilities stem from a firm's internal resources, which in turn generate competitive advantage. In this context, learning attitude is construed as a crucial capability that contributes to a firm's competitive edge and superior performance (Slater & Narver, 2012). Thus, the RBV theory provides a suitable framework for elucidating the relationship between learning attitude and SME performance. To guide the study, the following hypothesis are formulated:

H01: There is a significant

relationship between learning attitude and performance of small and medium scale enterprises in Niger State.

Methodology

The research design used in this study was survey-based. 1,045 small enterprises that are registered and operating in Niger State, Nigeria, were the target population. GPower, a statistical software tool for power analysis and sample size calculation that is often used in the social and behavioral sciences, was used to estimate a sample size of 377 SMEs. The statistical data verified that 377 SMEs was an adequate sample size to reflect the entire population. The study followed Sekaran and Bougie's (2016) advice that researchers may use or modify pre-existing measurements for their research by modifying measurement tools from earlier, pertinent studies. For every issue, respondents were asked to rate their answers on a five-point Likert scale. Three subject-matter experts were given the questionnaire to complete in order to test the instrument's face and content validity.

In order to assess the consistency of the modified measures, reliability tests were also conducted using data from the main study and the pilot study (Hair et al., 2017). The internal consistency of the measurement scales was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, as is typical in PLS-SEM studies. Seventy small-scale enterprises in Kwara State, which is outside the main study area but has similar features to the study

sample, participated in a pilot test. The pilot test's sample size of 70 individuals was within the advised range of 25 to 75.

Results

Construct validity The construct validity of the study was established through a two-step process as explained by Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2017). First the convergent validity was tested and then assessed for discriminant validity. Discrimination validity was tested using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and convergent validity was assessed by calculating factor loadings, AVE and reliability measures (see Tables 1 and 2). Factor loadings were expected to be greater than 0.7 and the average variance extracted (AVE) value needed to approach 0.5, while Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability should exceed 0.7 in order to confirm convergent validity [30]. According to the outcomes displayed in Table 1, the results suggested that construct validity was confirmed.

Discriminant validity was established through comparison of the square root of AVE with the correlations in the correlation matrix (Hair et al. 2017). The evaluation results of using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Table 2) show that the square root of the AVE for each construct is larger than its highest correlation with any other variable, and therefore these constructs are well differentiated. Values in bold are indicative of cases where the square root of the AVE surpasses its correlation with other constructs. Confirmatory factor analysis results/validation support --

discriminant validity of the constructs was achieved as well.

Table 1.
Result of CFA for measurement model

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Performance	PER1	0.841	0.846	0.896	0.648
	PER2	0.904			
	PER3	0.820			
	PER4	0.734			
Learning Attitude	LO1	0.720	0.936	0.945	0.634
	LO2	0.788			
	LO3	0.839			
	LO4	0.817			
	LO5	0.746			
	LO6	0.840			
	LO7	0.799			
	LO8	0.848			
	LO9	0.757			
	LO10	0.800			

Note: The loadings of PER5 and PER6 are less than 0.70 and they were deleted (Hair et al., 2017).
Source: Made by authors.

Table 2.
Discriminant validity of construct

	PER	LO
PER	0.988	
LO	0.505	0.873

Source: Made by authors.

Smart PLS 3.3.3 yielded results that are shown in Table and Figure 3. P-values, t-values, and coefficient values are included in the output, which were used to make the hypothesis decision. These findings came from the bootstrapping process, which followed Hair et al. (2017)'s guideline and used 5000 sample iterations for 500 cases. The statistical results shown in Table 3 demonstrate a substantial and positive correlation between SMEs' performance and their learning attitude ($\beta = 0.555$, $t =$

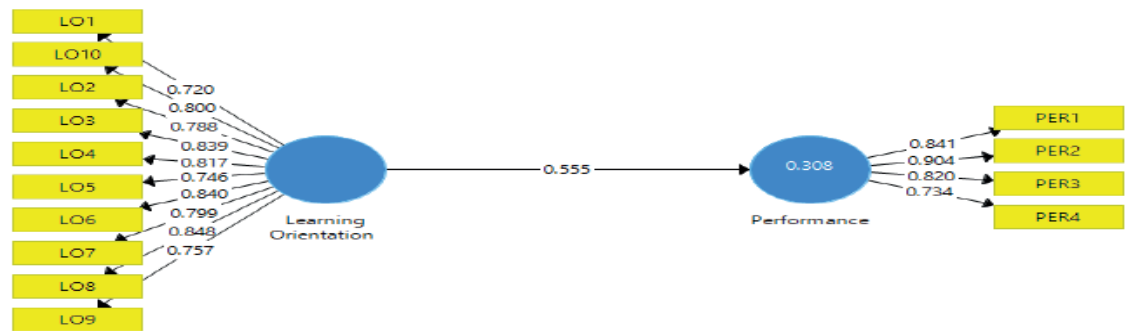


Figure 2. Measurement Model.
Source: Made by authors.

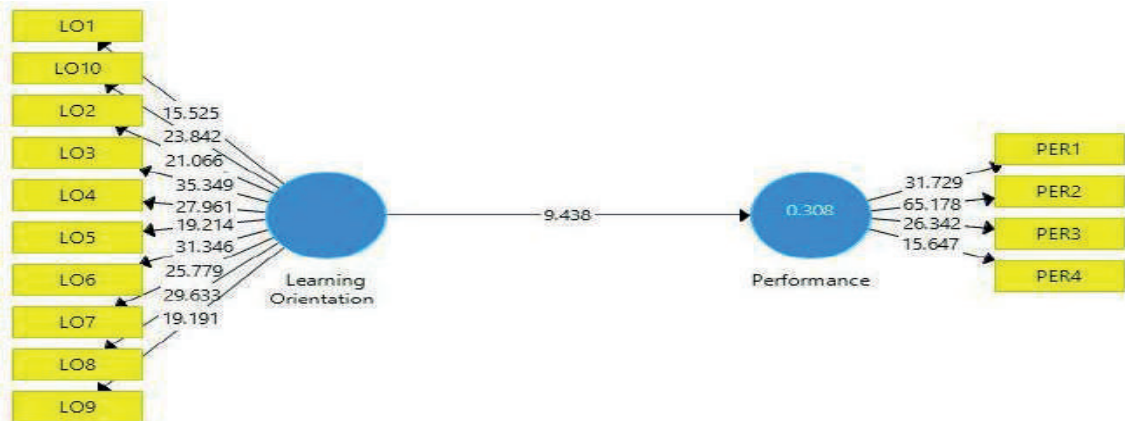


Figure 3. Structural Model.
Source: Made by authors.

9.438, $p < 0.05$). This implies that the proposed connection between the two constructs is supported.

Table 3.
Hypothesis testing

Hypotheses	Std. Beta	T value	P value	Decision
LO -> PER	0.555	9.438	0.000	Agreed

Source: Made by authors.

Discussion

The study's findings show a strong correlation between SMEs' performance and their learning attitude. These findings are in line with other studies, such as the Wahyuni and Sara (2020) study, which demonstrated a direct and noteworthy improvement in business performance as a result of learning attitude. In a similar vein, Zhang and colleagues (2017) found a favorable correlation between learning attitude and firm success in China's small and medium-sized businesses. Comparable results were also reported by Beneke et al. (2016) in the South African setting, emphasizing the important impact of learning attitude on organizational success.

Conclusion

This study's main goal is to find out how learning attitude affects the productivity of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Nigeria's Niger State. Based on the study's empirical findings, learning attitude and SME performance in the area are significantly and favorably correlated. As a result, it implies that the implementation of learning attitude techniques might successfully lessen the problem of

under-performance among SMEs in Niger State-a topic of great concern and discussion among stakeholders and residents.

Recommendation

The study's conclusions lead to the following recommendation being put forth: The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), among other pertinent regulatory organizations, and the Niger State administration should work together to provide frequent seminars and workshops for the state's registered small enterprises. The main goal of these seminars should be to enlighten business owners on the value of gathering and disseminating data about consumer preferences and expectations, market dynamics, rival tactics, and technological breakthroughs. Giving SMEs the know-how to properly use market data will enable them to innovate and create better products or services that exceed those of their rivals.

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