

EFFECT OF EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT ON SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISE GROWTH IN NASARAWA STATE

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Abstract

Overtime, it has been observed that small and medium enterprises in Nigeria especially in Nasarawa state has consistently remained small and not grown to becoming large corporations. This ugly scenario has reduced SMEs chances of contributing immensely to the economy of the state and nation at large and hence the need for this study which was to investigate the effect of external environment proxied by competition, technology and infrastructure on growth of SMEs in Nasarawa state. Data was collected from a sample of 162 registered SMEs in Nasarawa state who were selected conveniently. Multiple regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses formulated. The study found that competition has positive but insignificant effect on growth. Also, the study found that technology has negative and significant effect on growth. Lastly, the study found that infrastructure has positive and significant effect on growth. Based on the foregoing, the study recommended among others that SMEs should continue to innovate and keep themselves abreast with the happenings in the business environment and survive in the face of intense competition. Also SMEs should ensure that their employees have technological capabilities that will enable them to use up-to-date technology which will support the growth of their businesses. This is necessary because availability of technology without relevant skills by the employees might affect growth negatively as this study revealed.

Keyword: Competition, Infrastructure, Growth, SMEs, Technology

INTRODUCTION

Business enterprise cannot operate successfully in isolation without dependence on supportive institutions, variables and factors (Oginni, 2019) i.e business organisation exists and operates within an environment where there is complex interplay in terms of activities as well as networks of relationship between and among human resources, material resources and other systems. In the views of Aborade (2017) all business decisions are found to be contingent upon a good analysis of the environment which is often the bane of all the constraints as this environment creates the opportunities, threats and problems for the business organization

The environment within which the business operates is very important for running small and medium scale enterprises. For instance, where there is a change in the government policies, the business has to make the necessary changes to adapt it to the new policies. Similarly, a change in the technology may render the existing products obsolete, for instance the flat televisions (LCDs & LED) have made the black and white televisions out of fashion. Again a change in the fashion or customers' taste may shift the demand in the market for a particular product e.g. the demand for locally made wears and shoes have reduced the sales of foreign wears and shoes (Ajayi, 2016).

All these factors are beyond the control of the business. A business environment comprises of such factors as infrastructural, legal, natural, financial, cultural, economic, social and political environments. These environmental forces have been found to be capable of either impeding or facilitating entrepreneurial activities in any economy. The World Bank is of the opinion that improvement in the enabling environment leads to greater levels of investment by the private sector, more wealth, job creation and poverty alleviation (Adeoye, 2013). The relationship between business and its environment is one of mutuality; that is, the environment exerts pressure on the business while the business, in turn, influences some aspects of its environment.

Every business desire is to grow from being a small enterprise to a large enterprise. Also, in recognition of the importance of SMEs to every nation's economy, the Nigerian government has overtime tried to create a conducive atmosphere for SMEs to thrive through provision of soft loans, at lower interest rate, exempting certain SMEs from tax payment (finance Act, 2020), establishment of SMEDAN to regulate and provide support to SMEs. However, despite these efforts, SMEs especially in Nasarawa state have observed to be experiencing abysmally stagnant growth with many even dying off at a tender stage usually between 1-3 years. This situation is worrisome thereby creating the need to examine factors that are likely to be responsible and hence this study which seek to examine the effect of external environmental factors in SMEs growth in Nasarawa state.

This study was guided by the following specific objectives:

- i. To examine the effect of competition on SMEs growth in Nasarawa state.
- ii. To determine the effect of technology on SMEs growth in Nasarawa state.
- iii. To ascertain the effect of infrastructure on SMEs growth in Nasarawa state.

LITERATURE REVIEW

External Business Environment

External environment has been defined by various author(s), Hunger et al (2012) sees external environment as the group of external factors that exist around the organization which are formed by economic, political, legal, social and technological factors. In many cases, the organization cannot control these factors, thus, they pose either opportunities or challenges to the organization. The external environment of organizations is an integrated, dynamically developing characteristic, which includes a complex of social, technological, economic, political and legal factors that are beyond the control of business and impose their limitations on the activities of the organization. The survival and success of an organization depends on the skillful interaction of the company's management with the external environment and timely responses to changes in this environment, analyzing and accounting for its impact on the organization and business in general (Kuznetsova & Alekseeva, 2016; Kuznetsova, 2015; Srimuk & Choibamroong, 2014).

The external environment is a set of factors that are exogenous in relation to the organization and influence organizational efficiency (Njoroge et al., 2016); the initial conditions faced by entrepreneurs in any economy (Alkali, 2012). Regardless of the industry in which organizations compete, the external environment affects firms, as they seek to ensure strategic competitiveness (Hitt et al., 2011).

The concept of external environment is an attempt to understand the outside forces of the organizational boundaries of business (Shaikh, 2010). It consists of all elements existing outside the boundary of the organization, which have the potential to affect the organization. They are relevant to organizations operation and must be carefully monitored. There are two types of external which are Direct (Task) Environment and Indirect (General) environment (Adeoye, 2012). Direct (task) environment: These are factors that directly affect the organization operation and performance; these are customer's competitors, suppliers, government regulatory agencies, labour union. Indirect (general) environment: The elements that compose it have an indirect influence on the organization. This environment is typically composed of factors such as social values, educational political, economic, legal, behavior demographic, natural environment, natural resources, technologies etc.

External environment is important for effective firm's operations; most business organization attempt is to understand the outside forces of the organization boundaries because it helps to shape them positively or negatively. The key dimensions of the external environment principally consist of a micro environment and macro environment. The micro environment of a firm consists of, human resources (employees) of a firm. It analyzes the customer-base of a firm, those representing the minor and major clients. It deals with suppliers and the chain of network. It deals with technological resources of the organization; he further posit that, macro environment involves the overall issues of firms broader dimensions, because it principally

consist of economic, technological, political, legal and international environment; competitive environment (Birkinshaw, Hood & Young, 2005). For the purpose of this study, external environment was measured using three variables: competition, technology and infrastructure

Concept of Competition

Small and medium scale enterprises in Nasarawa State must also consider the competitive environment, by evaluating the nature of competition in the industry, as well as the profitability within the industry because these often produce direct influence on the development of such industry, given this, Dess et al., (2008) posits that a firm competitive environment consists of many factors that particularly relevant to resource strategy, they include: competitor's potential or existing customers and suppliers. There is an increasing trend for firms to expand their operations and market reach beyond the borders of their "home country. Globalization provides both opportunities to access larger potential markets and a broad base of production factors such as raw material, labour, skill managers and technical professionals. However, such endeavors also carry many political and economic risks (Dess et al., 2008). More importantly, Kazmi (2008) suggest that factors in the global environment that have high impact on firm's operations, includes: Globalization, Global financial system, Global trade and commerce, its process and trend, Global demographic patterns and shifts, Global human resource institutions, availability nature and quality of skills and expertise mobility of labour and other skilled personnel, Global technological and quality systems and standards, Global markets and competitiveness.

Concept of Technology

According to McNamara and Watson, (2005), technology can be defined as the totality of means, means such as knowledge, methods, materials, and tools used to achieve practical outcome. A way for the company to establish work methods, work patterns, and information structures. It is the tools and the means, but not the primary goal or result to be pursued. Technologies have the potential to improve speed, quality and efficiency. In the mainstream of modern culture, technology is considered to be one of the answers to most problems and/or restrictions in business. It is seen as the way that a business can emerge from the past and enter a brighter, more efficient future. There are many and various technologies that could be addressed in terms of benefiting SMEs.

Miyo (2016) posits that 'budget for the technology' as seen to be quite expensive and also 'lack of proper infrastructure' (incompatibility between the old and new technology). Available technologies for SMEs are Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) which is a technology that "allows you to make telephone calls using a computer network, over a data network like the Internet" (Chandler, 2005). The major benefit of VoIP is that it takes what would otherwise be a long distance call and makes it a local call. The reduction in cell phone bills alone for one company can make up for the costs of implementation. There are several different technologies that fall under the category of data protection. For those networks that are linked both internally and externally, a firewall is necessary to keep would be hackers and pilferers out.

Concept of Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the physical and organizational structure that is essential and needed for the operation of a society or enterprise (Oxford, 2009). And it is the services and facilities necessary for an economy to function (Sullivan & Steven, 2003). Infrastructure can be defined and explain as a set of interconnected elements that issue or provide a framework that support the entire structure for development, and it is an essential term for judging a region's or country progress that is around the circle of development. The term refers to technical structures that guide and support the society, in terms of water supply, electricity grids, bridges, roads, telecommunications, sewers, and also infrastructure is explain as the physical components of interrelated systems that provide products and services essential to sustain, enable, or enhance societal living conditions (Fulmer, 2009). Functionally, infrastructures facilitate the production of products and services, and also facilitate the distribution of finished goods to the markets, as well as promote the essential social services such as hospitals and school.

Infrastructure is the totality of fundamental physical facilities upon which all other ranging from economic, social and political activities significantly depend on (Ukong & Iniodu, 1991). According to Hirschman (1958) infrastructure are those services without which primary, secondary, and tertiary production cannot work and function and that will lead to negative SMEs performance. In a study carried out by Rao and Srinivasu (2013) opined that infrastructure in general, is a set of facilities through which products and services are produced to the citizens and the infrastructure installation does not produce goods and services directly but provides inputs for all other economic, social and political activities.

Nkechi et al. (2012) opined that it is a universal belief that infrastructural facilities aid the development of the mind, body and assist productivity in any environment and at the same time increase SMEs performance effectively and efficiently. Infrastructure is classified into sub-groups, depending on the issue of interest. The division is between economic infrastructure and social infrastructure, and economic infrastructure includes structures such as roads, railways, port facilities, power facilities and telecommunications networks, while social infrastructure includes facilities such as educational institutions, hospitals, justice facilities and community facilities (Shanks & Barnes, 2008).

In a study conducted by Kessides (1993) opined that infrastructure contributes to economic growth, acting through both demand and supply (SMEs function: buying and selling) in an aggregate sense, the character and availability of infrastructure influence the high productivity of private capital, public investment, and it also complements private investment. At the microeconomic level, the effect of infrastructure is seen specifically through reduced costs of production, infrastructure thereby affects profitability, level of output, income and employment, particularly for small and medium scale enterprises. Infrastructure also has an impact on the costs and service quality in international trade (trade logistic), which determines competitiveness in export/import markets. Infrastructure contributes to the diversification of the economy in rural areas, for example, by facilitating the growth of alternative employment and consumption possibilities. Infrastructure (especially telecommunication) provides access to applications of modern technology in many sectors. Infrastructure development is a phenomenon because its improved transport, which reduce workers' time spent on non-productive activities or which improve health status (example, better access to clean water and sanitation), raise the economic return to labour. By the same token, the lack of affordable access to adequate infrastructure is an essential factor determining the nature and persistence of poverty. Finally, infrastructure has an impact on domestic transaction costs and access to market information thus permitting the economy to enjoy efficiency gains from policies of market liberalization.

Empirical Review

Competition and SMEs Growth

Adeoye and Elegunde (2012) studied Impacts of External Business Environment on Organizational Performance in the Food and Beverage Industry in Nigeria. The specific objective of the study is to investigate the influence of economic and political environment on organisational performance. A questionnaire was developed to collect information from the respondents based on a sample of 3 companies with 150 sample size. Data collected were analyzed multiple regression analysis. The findings of the analysis shows that the external business environment (political, economic, competition, technological, etc.) have impact on organizational performance (effectiveness, efficiency, increase in sales, achievement of corporate goals etc.). It was thus recommended that organizations should pay more attentions to their environment by doing periodic scanning

Heather, (2010) studied External Environmental Analysis for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). According to the researcher, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) face unique challenges in the business environment. SMEs need to successfully deal with the prevalent forces for change if they are to survive and grow and meet the expectations to create investment and employment opportunities. Successfully adapting to change from technological advances, customer expectations, supplier requirements, the regulatory environment and increasing competition requires successful implementation of organizational change. The

'Degrees of Turbulence' Model is proposed as a self-assessment tool to aid SMEs in their environmental scan and to assist in assessing the potential impact and adjusting to the impending changes in the external environment to ensure continued viability

Technology and SMEs Growth

Mai and Phuong (2013) studied 'The Impact of External Environment, Technology and Innovation Capacities, and Leadership Development on Organizational Performance in Food Industry: A Qualitative Study of Food Enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam'. The study investigates the current issues for conducting technology transfer and innovation processes at food processing enterprises in Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam. By conducting an extensive qualitative study comprised of 8 in-depth interviews with Executive managers and R&D managers, we identify seven main themes that emerged from the data concerning the specific contents for food processing enterprises. Correspondents described how the relative issues of externals, capacities, leadership in their organizations contribute to technology transfer and innovation effectiveness, and in turn lead to sustainable performance. In addition, respondents also noted challenges associated with implementing technology transfer projects. Based on prior studies and these challenges, we propose a conceptual model of innovation process and technology transfer in food processing enterprises as influenced three main factors - external environment, technology transfer and innovation capacities, and leadership. Changes in any of the three factors can potentially influence both technology transfer and innovation effectiveness and overall organizational performance.

Maurice, Walter and Romanus (2017) examined the effect of technology on performance of Micro, Small and Medium-Scale Agro-food processing enterprises in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study adopted correlational research design which sought to establish relationships between the variables in the study. It also applied stratified and random sampling techniques in data collection. Qualitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics which included mean, frequencies and percentages while quantitative data was analyzed using inferential statistics including regression analysis, correlational analysis, analysis of variance and chi-square test. The study concluded that technology positively affected performance of Micro, Small and Medium-scale Agro-food processing enterprises in Nairobi County. The research work used the appropriate methodology and statistical tools that explained further the extent to which each unit increase in technology, lead to unit increase in performance of Micro, Small and Medium-Scale Agro-food processing enterprises in Nairobi County.

Fabian, Isabella, Sascha and Thomas (2017) investigated antecedents of technology/social network usage in SMEs and respective performance outcomes. After using regression analysis, the results show that SMEs performance is positively related to technology/social network usage in SMEs, whereas responsive market orientation shows no effect. Social network usage is not directly related to SME growth; yet, it mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and SME growth. Interestingly, large firms show the opposite effects regarding antecedents and performance-related consequences of social network usage. However, they failed to recognize the ability of a technologically oriented SMEs. They have the ability to use social network to internationalize their operations through both direct and indirect export.

Infrastructure and SMEs Growth

Anga (2014) investigate the Determinants of Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) performance in Nigeria. Survey questionnaire was used to collect data from two hundred and thirty sample of SMEs under study, and the data collected was analyzed by SPSS and also logistic regression analysis was employed to measure the determinants of SMEs whereby internal and external factors which involve information communication technology, and social infrastructure all influence performance of SMEs. The result shows that information communication technology (ICT) and other social infrastructures have a positive relationship with the performance of SMEs, and the last result indicate that infrastructure affect the performance of SMEs in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The study was premised on the system theory. The systems theory holds that an organization is a system that needs to work harmoniously not only within itself but that it is a system within a collection of other systems and, therefore, needs to work also in congruence with the other systems around it. What happens in the larger system is capable of affecting the organization either positively or negatively. Boulding (2006), the economist torched on the systems theory but termed it “The General Empirical Theory” slightly different from Bartalanffy’s (2008).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey research design. Data were collected using a well-structured close-ended Likert-scale questionnaire from registered SMEs in Nasarawa state. According to SMEDAN, (2017) report, there are 2,604 registered SMEs in Nasarawa state. Convenience sampling technique was employed to select a total of 162 SMEs in Nasarawa state. This technique became necessary considering the timeframe for the study. Furthermore, the questionnaires were tested for reliability and validity using the Cronbach alpha and expert validation. All the items on the scale scored alpha values greater than 0.6 which is the minimum threshold suggested by Sekaran, (2003). Questionnaires were issued directly to the SMEs owners/managers to elucidate information regarding the study constructs. Multiple regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses formulated. The model for the multiple regression analysis is specified thus:

$$GRW = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CMP_i + \beta_2 TCH_i + \beta_3 INF_i + e_i$$

Where: GRW = Growth, CMP = Competition, TCH = Technology, INF = Infrastructure, β_0 = Intercept, $\beta_1\beta_2\beta_3$ = Coefficient of independent variables, e = error term.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive Statistics

	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error
CMP	162	1	5	3.96	1.236	-.949	.191
TCH	162	1	5	4.33	1.063	-1.612	.191
INF	162	1	5	4.01	1.169	-1.017	.191
GRW	162	1	5	3.78	1.120	-.463	.191
Valid N (listwise)	162						

The table above indicates the behavior of all the variables under study. The average value of competition (CMP) recorded was 3.96 while the maximum and minimum value stood at 5 and 1 respectively. Also, the skewness value which stood at -.949 indicates that the variable is normally distributed since it is less than 1. Also, technology (TCH) recorded a minimum and maximum of 1 and 5 respectively, while the mean value stood at 4.33 with a skewness value of -1.612, the variable also indicated normal distribution.

Infrastructure (INF) recorded an average value of 4.01 as well as a minimum and maximum values of 1 and 5 respectively. The variable also, has shown to be normally distributed as indicated by the skewness value of -1.017.

Correlations

		CMP	TCH	INF	GRW
CMP	Pearson Correlation	1	.704**	.671**	.568**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	162	162	162	162
TCH	Pearson Correlation	.704**	1	.631**	.454**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	162	162	162	162

INF	Pearson Correlation	.671**	.631**	1	.799**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	162	162	162	162
GRW	Pearson Correlation	.568**	.454**	.799**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	162	162	162	162

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Competition (CMP) showed a strong and positive relationship with technology (TCH) which stood at 0.704 which is significant at 1% level of significance. Infrastructure (INF) also had a moderate and positive relationship with competition (CMP) which stood at 0.671 and is significant at 1% level of significance. Competition (CMP) showed a strong and positive relationship with Growth (GRW) which stood at 0.568 and is significant at 1% level of significance.

Technology (TCH) and infrastructure (INF) was found to be moderate, positive and also stood at 0.631 which is significant at 1% significance level. Also Technology (TCH) showed a strong and positive relationship with Growth (GRW) which stood at 0.454. Also infrastructure (INF) has a positive and significant relationship with growth (GRW) which stood at 0.799. All the variables under study satisfy multicollinearity as though none of the independent variable is strongly related to another.

Regression Analysis

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	RStd. Error of the Estimate
1	.806 ^a	.650	.644	.669

a. Predictors: (Constant), INF, TCH, CMP

The result, as shown in the tables above revealed an R-square value of 0.650 which signifies that 65% of the variation in SMEs' growth (GRW) could be explained by the combination of the three independent variables under study i.e. competition, technology and infrastructure. The remaining 35% variation could be explained by other factors or variables not included in this study.

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	131.356	3	43.785	97.928	.000 ^b
	Residual	70.644	158	.447		
	Total	202.000	161			

a. Dependent Variable: GRW

b. Predictors: (Constant), INF, TCH, CMP

The f-statistics stood at 97.928 and also the probability of the f-statistics was found to be significant at 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$) which therefore, indicates that the model is fit to measure the association between the variables under study.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.884	.229		3.865	.000
	CMP	.121	.066	.133	1.834	.069

TCH	-.155	.073	-.147	-2.111	.036
INF	.769	.064	.802	12.051	.000

a. Dependent Variable: GRW

The regression line $GRW = 0.884 + 0.121CMP$ indicates that an increase the level of competition (CMP) will lead to 0.121 increase in growth (GRW). The probability of t-statistics stood at 0.069 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance and as such the study rejects the alternative hypothesis and accepts the null hypothesis which states that competition has no significant effect on growth of SMEs in Nasarawa State. The regression line $GRW = 0.884 - 0.155 TCH$ indicates that a unit decrease in technology (THC) will lead to -0.155 decrease in SMEs growth with statistical significance. The probability of t-statistics stood at 0.036 which is less than 0.05 level of significance and as such the study reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that technology has significant effect on SMEs growth in Nasarawa State. The regression line $GRW = 0.884 + 0.769INF$ indicates that an increase in level of infrastructure will lead to a 0.769 increase in SMEs growth with statistical significance. The probability of t-statistics stood at 0.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance and as such the study rejects the null hypothesis and accepts the alternative hypothesis which states that infrastructure has a significant effect on SMEs growth in Nasarawa State.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the effect of external environment on SMEs growth in Nasarawa state, Nigeria and further tested three hypotheses the results of which are discussed below;

Competition and SMEs growth in Nasarawa State

Firstly, the study found a positive and insignificant effect of competition on SMEs growth which is an indication that an increase in level of competition will lead to an increase in SMEs growth. This indicates that competition is capable of forcing SMEs to think innovatively resulting in improved quality of product. However it may not be absolutely due to the capital intensive nature of innovation. This finding agree with that of Adeoye and Elegunde (2012) who concluded that there exist a direct and positive effect of competition on SMEs growth.

Technology and SMEs growth in Nasarawa state

The findings from the second hypothesis revealed that technology has a negative and significant effect on SMEs growth. This could imply that investing huge amount in technology without qualified hands to manage such technology may only lead to wastages and machine breakdowns thereby causing the firm's growth propensity to decline. This finding disagrees with the findings of Ginantra, et al., (2017) who found a positive effect of technology on SMEs growth.

Infrastructure and SMEs Growth in Nasarawa State

Lastly, the finding of the last hypothesis revealed a positive and significant effect of infrastructure on SMEs growth in Nasarawa state which by implication means that an improved infrastructure, specifically social infrastructure will lead to an increase in SMEs growth. This could also imply that the cost incurred on the provision of social infrastructure could be rechanneled into other productive areas that could lead to growth. The findings agree with the findings of (Ahamd et al. 2012; Okeyo et al. 2014; and Amwele, 2013), who found significant effect on SMEs growth but disagreed with the findings of (Okpara, 2011; Olugbenga, 2012; Kinyua, 2014) who indicated that infrastructure did not influence the performance of SMEs. Of all the variables studied, infrastructure showed the highest effect on SMEs growth with a better coefficient value of 0.769.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the finding of this study, the study concluded thus:

Competition is key in improving or increasing SMEs growth as though it enables the SMEs to think innovatively on how to always improve the quality of their product and service to get a larger market share. Also the study concluded that infrastructure has a positive effect on SMEs growth as though availability of infrastructure will enable them to expand and grow beyond the survival level the case is with most of the SMEs in the study area. Furthermore, access to sufficient infrastructure will allow them more resources to invest in other areas that will lead to growth. However technology was found to have a negative but significant effect on SMEs growth, as though the study concluded that technology have negative effect on SMEs growth where there are no competent hands to manage the technology. Based on the foregoing, the study recommends;

- i. That SMEs should continue to innovate and keep themselves abreast with the happenings in the business environment to enable them survive in the face of intense competition.
- ii. SMEs should ensure that their employees have technological capabilities that will enable them to use up-to-date technology which will support the growth of their businesses. This is necessary because availability of technology without relevant skills by the employees might affect growth negatively as this study revealed.
- iii. Government should provide the basic social infrastructure such as water, electricity, good road networks and industrial estate that will propel SMEs to grow.

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