

Entrepreneurial Competencies and SME's performance in Yobe State Nigeria

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Entrepreneurial, Competence, SME's Performance

Received : 3, May

Revised : 17, May

Accepted: 30, June

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ABSTRACT

This research has studied 'Entrepreneurial Competencies and SME's performance in Yobe State Nigeria'. Based on facts and figures, it has been observed that an entrepreneurial competency has challenges affecting SME's Performance. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to investigate the challenges affecting SME's Performance in Yobe State. Three hypotheses were formulated for testing. In testing the hypotheses, the study made use of inferential statistics. Cross sectional method was used to collect data from 386 respondents out of which only 255 responded. Data analysis was done using Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) i.e. Pls3. The results The low performance in the country has led of to the rise in both poverty and unemployment rate. This is attributed to the fact that the SMEs are being faced with challenges relating to lack of entrepreneurial competencies. Because of this, this study, which uses data from a sample of the state's registered small and medium-sized enterprises, fills a knowledge gap by demonstrating the impact of innovation, networking, and risk-taking competencies on SME success.

INTRODUCTION

Small and Medium enterprises (SMEs) are seen as the engine room for economic growth and development across nations due to the numerous roles they play in any economy, from poverty reduction to employment creation, re-engineering of existing businesses, growth of gross domestic product (GDP), innovation, income redistribution, resources utilization and revenue generation that ensures growth, competitiveness as well as the wellbeing of the entrepreneurs and the public in general (Bappoo, et al. 2022; Mamza, 2022; Schneider & Albornoz, 2018; SMEDAN & NBS, 2020). It is therefore apparent that, the benefit of SMEs to economic building and economic development cannot be overemphasized.

Performance and growth of SMEs have received increasing attention all over the globe from academic researchers, development economists, entrepreneurs, governments, venture capital firms, financial institutions and non-governmental organizations as well as other policy makers due to the role enterprises plays (Cahyono et al 2023). Hence, the growth and increasing performance of enterprises remain the priority of most entrepreneurs as many of them have developed various measures to improve their enterprise performance (Tiruneh & Fayek, 2020).

Based on available statistics, the SMEs represent large percentage of businesses across the globe. For instance, according to the European Commission's Statistics (2021), SMEs represent 99% of all businesses in the European Union, generating about 85% of employment. Similarly, the Asian Development Bank Institute (2021) reported that the SMEs in China represent more than 90% of the enterprises in the country, contribute over 60% to the GDP and accounting for 80% of the country's employment. The report further revealed that SMEs in Indonesia represent about 99.9% of the country's businesses and account for 97% of the country's employment.

In Nigeria, the MSMEs survey report (2020) indicated that the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises constitutes about 95% of all businesses, generating about 30% of manufacturing output. The survey further puts the number of MSMEs in Nigeria at 38,413,420, contributing 43% percent to the GDP in nominal terms. However, out of the 38,413,0420 enterprises, only 670,474 were categorized as SMEs. Given that the population of Nigeria exceeds 220 million (World Population Review, 2023), there are unlimited opportunities for SMEs in the country.

However, despite the statistics and contributions of the entrepreneurial sector, there is ample evidence that the performance of SMEs in Nigeria have not significantly contributed to the economic growth and development of the country (Nwokocha & Madu, 2020). For instance, the World Poverty Clock (2023) reported that 32% of Nigeria population lives in extreme poverty. Furthermore, the 2020 national NMSMEs report indicated a decreased of 3.5% to the contributions of NMSMEs to the GDP. This creates the urge for research in the area of entrepreneurial endeavors in Nigeria so as to provide possible solution to the poor performance of SMEs in Nigeria. It is well established that the SMEs are the engine for economic growth, employment creation and poverty reduction

among many other benefits. Given the fact that SMEs are the biggest employers of labour and means of economic development in the world, there is much need for Nigeria to have an SME sector that is capable of generating employment, wealth creation, poverty reduction and economic growth.

Consequently, given the low performances of the SMEs when compared to SMEs in other developing and developed countries (Sanusi, 2021; SMEDAN, 2017). This is largely attributed to the fact that the SMEs in Nigeria are facing challenges leading to low performances (Ango & Solomon, 2018; Kowo, Adenuga & Sabitu, 2019). Some of the key issues affecting the SMEs in Nigeria as identified by scholars include; unfriendly business environment, lack of finance, inadequate human competencies, lack of entrepreneurial and managerial skills, lack of commitment to the business, lack of ability to learn and adopt new technology as well as developing competitive strategies for survival (NBS & SMEDAN, 2020; Shafi et al., 2020; Elbaz, Agag, & Alkatiri, 2018). Thus, Salijan, Tehseen and Adeyinka-Ojo (2016) and Reim et al (2022) further emphasized that these challenges are related to entrepreneurial competencies and hence can be acquired by the entrepreneurs in order to enhance their enterprise performance.

Entrepreneurial competencies are very crucial for the survival and superior performance of SMEs as they include qualities such as skills, traits and knowledge that entrepreneur invest on the job in order to achieve higher performance for the firm (Ibidunni et al 2018; Zizile & Tendai, 2018). Aliyu (2017) ascertained that entrepreneurial competencies are unique abilities and skills that drive an enterprise to perform exceptionally well. An entrepreneurial competency is a most needed value for an entrepreneur as most of them operate in small scale type of businesses which depends mainly on the competencies of the owner (Maldonado-Guzmán et al., 2019, Freixanet, Rialp, & Churakova, 2020). With limited funding and technology support, small and medium-sized businesses can benefit from having entrepreneurial skills. (Utami et al, 2021). These competencies are considered as the abilities to transform ideas and opportunities into action by mobilizing resources to complete a task and by utilizing resources that can enhance productivity and improve performances (Murphy & Wilson, 2020). Similarly, Man, Lau and Chan (2002) observed that competent people frequently have a tendency to complete difficult tasks effectively. The skills that entrepreneurs possess are therefore expected to support economic growth and firm performance, enabling SMEs to successfully compete. (Abdul-Mohsin, Halim & Ahmad, 2020). This study will contribute to the body of knowledge on how the competencies of an entrepreneur affect SMEs performance in Yobe State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Performance is distinct as a strategic approach to delivering success to enterprise, this is achieved through the improvement of the performance of the people working in the enterprise and by developing their capabilities (Armstrong, 2006). Ngatno et al (2014) viewed performance as the ability to meet planned output quantities, meet market demand for product or service, to deliver quality products or service to customers and to meet planned profit levels.

Performance of an enterprise is generally centered on either efficiency or effectiveness since the business enterprise must eventually be profitable to survive.

Nasuredin, Halipah, Shamsudin (2016) viewed performance as the actual output or results of a task measured against its intended outputs (goals and objectives). Mahapatra (2010) succinctly defined performance as the ability of an enterprise to fulfill its mission through sound management, strong governance and dedication to achieving results. It also entails the provision of values to its stakeholders (Aminu & Shariff, 2015).

Performance is also seen as the long-term wellbeing of an enterprise compared to those of competitors. Performance explains the degree of fulfilment of managerial goals in business practices and realized outputs of these goals by the end of a specified period (Umoh, Umana & Effiom, 2020).

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Entrepreneurial competencies on the other hands refers to the set of skills entrepreneurs requires to help them perform their jobs efficiently and effectively. These skills are identified and effectively initiated in training courses or programs integrated manner that will lead to an outstanding performance. Sarwoko et al (2013) defined entrepreneurial competence as the individual characteristics including attitude and behavior which allow the entrepreneur to achieve business success. Similiarly, Man, *et al* (2002), defined entrepreneurial competencies as set of characteristics involving personality traits, skills and knowledge which enables the entrepreneur to perform his role successfully.

Innovation competency is the ability to continuously modify knowledge into new product, process or system in order to generate profit for the enterprise. Harun et al (2020) stated that the innovation competency is the integration of different process such as business knowledge, skill and resource to generate technical innovative activities (such as product, service or process technologies) and non-technical innovative activities (such as management, administration and marketing). Innovation competencies is very important for businesses since it generated new product, service and process which are different from the competitor and attracted customers and business performance (Gautam *et al* 2016). Innovation can lead to increased market share, greater production efficiency, higher productivity growth, and increased revenue.

Network competency is defined as the ability to build social interactions that enable the execution of tasks such as planning, coordination and control. Network competence deals with the ability to build and utilize networks with partners like investors, technology and marketing partners, and other stakeholders (Sanyal, Hisham & Baawain, 2020). Networking facilitates social interactions that enable resources to be exchanged and benefits to be created. Studies have shown that entrepreneurs with good networking skills are better

placed in achieving beneficial outcomes than those who lack the same (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013). Entrepreneurs more often engage in a lot of negotiations, continuously meeting and interacting with individuals within and outside their business. Therefore, networking competence is important to help entrepreneurs accomplish the goals which would enhance their venture success. Risk taking competence is regarded as the ability of an entrepreneur to see opportunities in a risky situation and consider either to engage in groundbreaking activities or to transform it in a more manageable/controllable situation. This is grounded on a realistic appraisal of the entrepreneur's own experience, knowledge and capacities on the one hand and a realistic estimate of the risks involved on the other hand (Olu-Daniels & Ndu, 2020). asserted that taking risks is linked to an entrepreneur's capacity to function in a demanding environment and that taking risks can affect decision-making, which is likely to have an effect on the success of the business and its long-term growth (Games, 2019).

This paper reviews empirical research, with a view to establish research gap for this study. Ivy and Nur (2021) examined the effect of innovation, risk taking, and proactiveness towards business performance. The sample used in the study were owners of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in North Jakarta. The results of study revealed that innovation has a significant positive effect on business performance. Similarly, Umar et al (2018) studied the mediating effect of innovation on the relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and SMEs Success in Malaysian SMEs, the study adopted a cross sectional research method and a sample of 407 owners and Managers involved in SMEs, findings revealed a very strong positive relationship between innovation and SMEs success. However, the study fails to discuss the other dimension of entrepreneurial competencies such as risk-taking, as well as discuss relevant theories that support the relationship between the variables. The goal of this study is to close the aforementioned gap in the literature.

Al-Mamun and Fazal (2018) examined the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on competency and micro-enterprise performance. Findings revealed a positive but insignificant effect of innovation competency on micro-enterprise performance in Kelantan, Malaysia. However, the study has failed to consider other dimensions of entrepreneurial competencies such as risk-taking and networking. Also, the study emphasized that findings were only limited to micro enterprise in Kelantan, Malaysia, and could not necessarily be made generalizable to other types of business. As such, this creates the research gap for this study.

Al Mamun, Fazal and Zainol (2019) examined entrepreneurial competencies and performance of informal micro enterprises in Malaysia. Findings from the study confirmed networking competencies has a significant negative effect on the performance of informal microenterprises owned and managed by women microentrepreneurs. In a separated study Ambinari and Kholid (2022) determined the factors affecting the enterprise performance of Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) among generations Y (millennial) and Z (centennial) entrepreneurs during the Covid 19 pressure under the theory of

Resource-Based View. The data analysis findings indicate that networking positively affect micro and small enterprise performance positively.

In addition, Al Mamun, Faizal and Muniady (2019) examined the role of entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, competencies and performance of micro-enterprises in Kelantan, Malaysia. The study concluded networking competencies has significant effect on enterprise performance. Similarly, Sajilan and Tehseen (2019) studied the relationship between network competence and firm performance among Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs of the wholesale businesses. The results revealed positive significant influence relationship between network competence and firm performances.

More importantly, Yayuk, Siswoyo and Zainal (2019) investigated the effect of self-learning, competence and entrepreneurship orientation on micro business performance in the Special Province of Yogyakarta. Findings indicated that risk taking competence do not affect the performance of micro-enterprises. However, Ivy and Nur (2021) examined the effect of innovation, risk taking, and proactiveness towards business performance. The results of study revealed that risk-taking has a significant positive effect on business performance. In the same vein, Simanjuntak and Sarjono (2019) studied the effect of competence, motivation, and environment on business performance of women entrepreneurs running small and medium enterprises in Jakarta. The results of the study indicated that there is low influence of risk-taking competence (0.288) on business performance.

As a result, it is abundantly obvious from the theoretical framework and literature assessment of earlier research that very few studies have addressed the issue of entrepreneurial abilities (risk-taking, invention, and networking) in connection to performance. This study aims to explore this gap and create research questions.

Ho₁: Innovation competency has no significant impact on SME performance.

Ho₂: Networking competency has no significant impact on SME performance

Ho₃: Risk-taking competency has no significant impact on SME performance

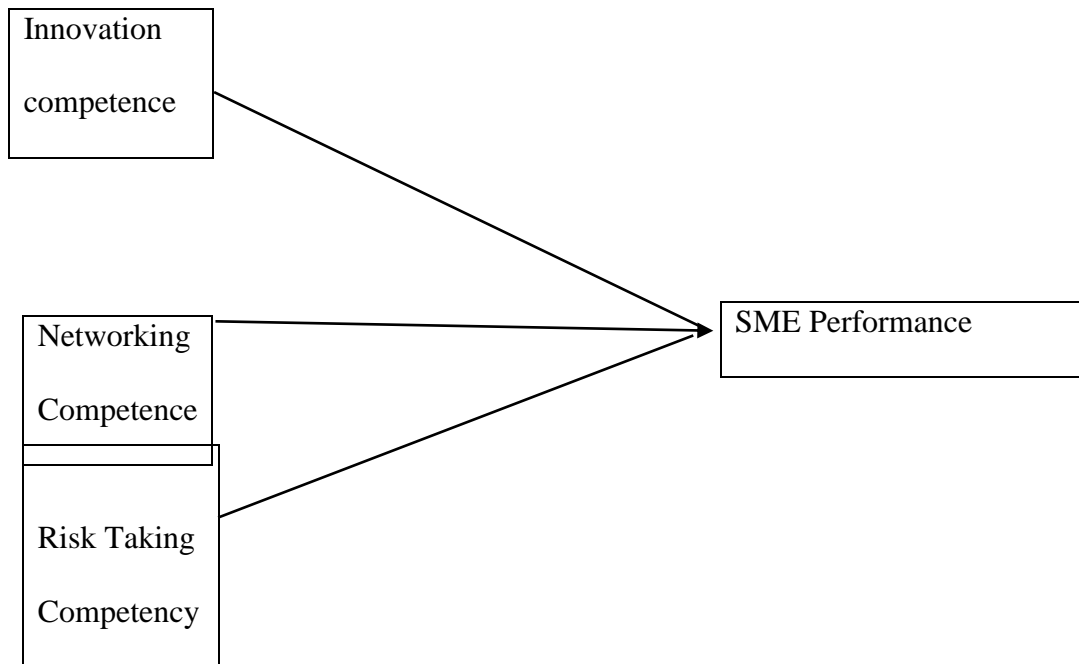


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework (**images must be in good quality**)

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a survey research design which is cross-sectional in nature. This type of research design was adopted because it enables the collection of data from respondents at once to meet the research objectives and the information about the independent, dependent and moderating variable represent what is going on at only one point in time. Data for this study was collected using structured questionnaire. This cut across owners of SMEs in Yobe State and principal officers of the firm assign by managers. The population of the study include 386 registered SMEs according to Yobe State Small and Medium Scale Credit Board. The study used Yamane's (1967) formula to determine the minimum sample size, which was 196. To account for non-response bias, the sample size was expanded by 30% to 255. (Israel,2013). Furthermore, this study uses primary data; the questionnaire was self-administered and the study employed the aid of research assistants to distribute the questionnaires due to insecurity in certain parts of the state. The questionnaire was structured as section A and B. Section A contain information on demographic distribution of respondents while section B contain information on variables of the study. 5-point Likert scale method was used where 1 represents "strongly disagree" while 5 represents "strongly agree" was also employed in the questionnaire. The measures of all variables were adopted from the existing studies. Six questions was adapted from the study of Man and Lau (2001) to measure innovation competency, seven questions was adapted from the study of Ritter, Wilkson and Johson (2002) to measure networking competency, four questions were adapted from the work of Man and Lau (2001), Eight questions was adapted from the study of Spillan and Parnell, (2006) to measure SME Performance. The

relationship between the variables was tested using partial least square structural equation model (PLS-SEM) PLS 4.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Model of measurement

To choose the measurement model, the validity and reliability of the model are evaluated using the PLS-SEM path modelling measurement. Table 1 illustrates how the route model, or relationship between the independent variables (IC, NC, and RTC) and the dependent variable (SMEP), represents the convergent validity and reliability of the study structure.

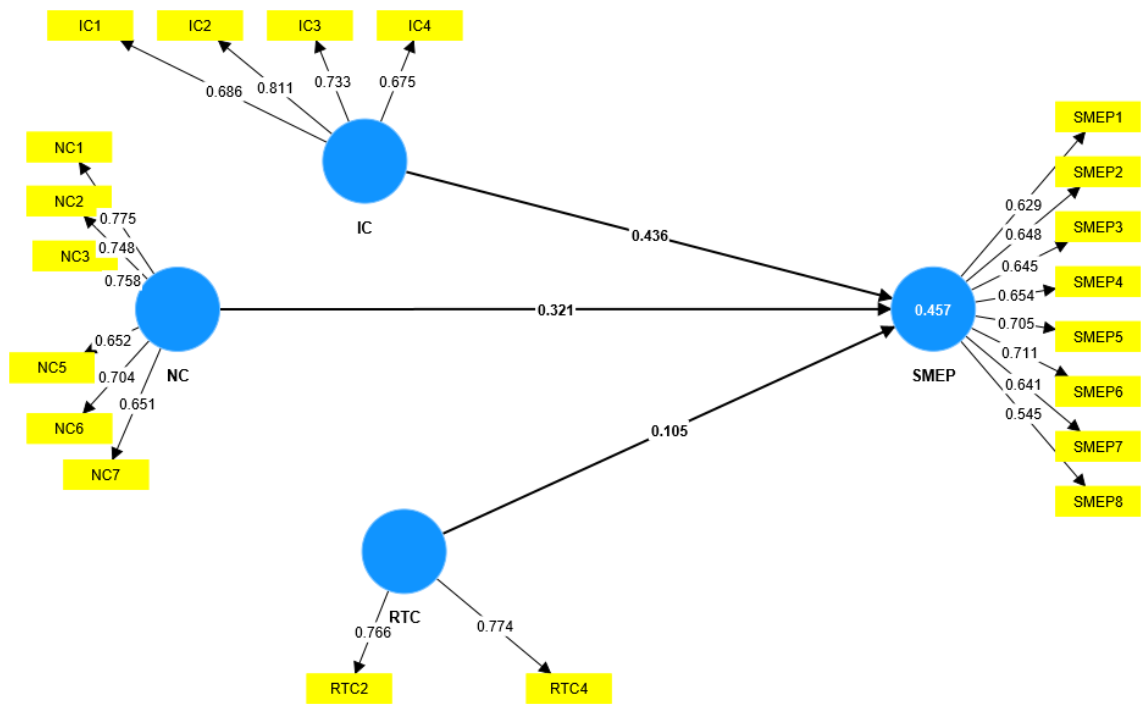


Figure 1

Table 1. Discriminant Validity Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Construct	IC	NC	RTC	SMEP
IC				
NC	0.536			
RTC	0.427	0.514		
SMEP	0.783	0.641	0.545	

Table 1 show the discriminant validity result using HTMT; all items load below the 0.85 minimal criterion. When HTMT < 0.85, discriminant validity for conceptually related constructs can be investigated, according to Richer, Ringle, and Marko (2018). Therefore, table 4.24 achieves discriminant validity.

Structural Model Analysis

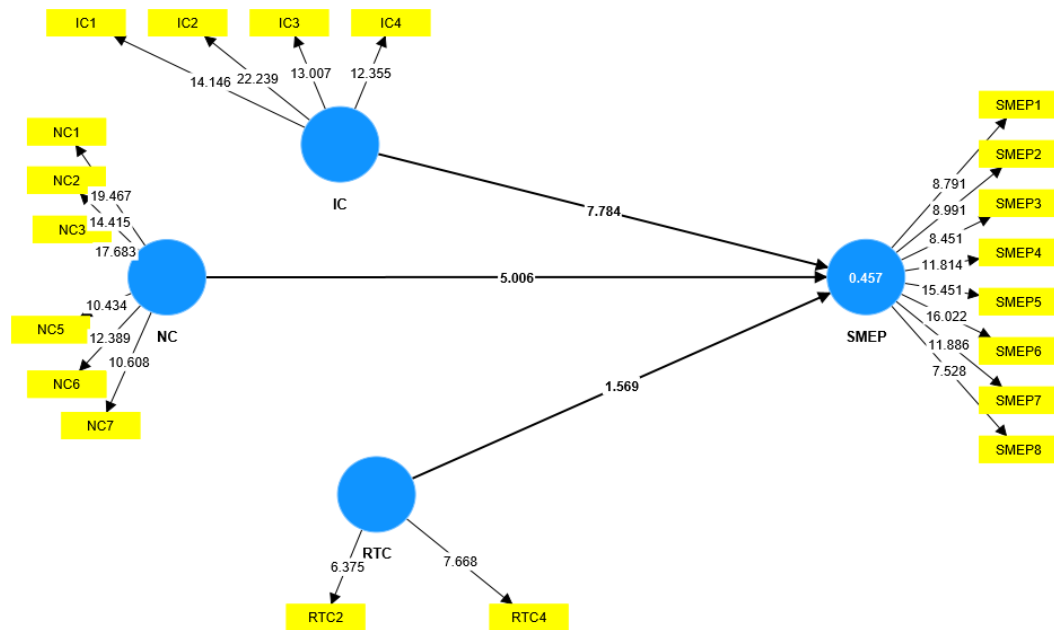


Figure 2 displays the bootstrapping findings of the construct's proposed association, demonstrating a strong and positive link.

Table 2 Test of Hypothesis

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P value	Decision
IC > SMEP	0.436	0.434	0.055	7.864	0.00	Rejected
NC > SMEP	0.436	0.324	0.063	5.134	0.00	Rejected
RTC > SMEP	0.436	0.114	0.066	1.602	0.109	Fail to Reject
R Square	0.45					

Table 2. reflect the outcome of the study's conjectured relationship. The aforementioned table shows that innovative competency significantly affects SMEs' performance (M=0.434, SD=0.055, p=0.00). Thus, the Ho1 was experimentally refuted in this investigation.

Similarly, networking competency has a substantial influence on SMEs' performance, according to the results of the empirical investigation (M=0.436, SD=0.063, p=0.00). Ho2 was therefore rejected. Furthermore, the study's structural model analysis reveals that risk-taking competency has a negligible effect on SME performance (M=0.114, SD=0.066, p= 0.109). Adjudicated R-squared represents 45% of performance improvements. This indicates that 45% of the variations in the performance of the SMEs in Yobe State may be accounted for by innovation, networking, and risk-taking skills.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SMEs in Nigeria are exhibiting lesser performance compared to SMEs in the developed and developing countries according to reports. The low performance in the country has led to the rise in both poverty and unemployment rate. This is attributed to the fact that the SMEs are being faced with challenges relating to lack of entrepreneurial competencies. Because of this, this study, which uses data from a sample of the state's registered small and medium-sized enterprises, addresses a knowledge gap by demonstrating the impact of innovation, networking, and risk-taking abilities on SME success. Enterprise performance is greatly impacted by networking and innovation capability. This supports the findings of Ambinari and Kholid (2022). Risk taking is insignificant to performance, this is in line with the study of Yayuk, Siswoyo and Zainal (2019).

Hence, this study recommends that entrepreneur should develop positive relationship or interact positively in order to widen the scope of their networks so as to enhance their enterprise performance, this can be achieved through frequent attendance of training, exhibition, hubs, local and international tradefair, conference among many others. The study also recommend that entrepreneurs should encourage innovative thinking and innovative ideas within and outside their entrepreneurial settings. This will enable the enterprise to improve their product, processes, market and technology to cope with dynamic changes in the environment. The report also exhorts stakeholders and policy makers to involve present and potential business owners in training and development programs in order to better prepare them with the greatest entrepreneurial skills. The research had several shortcomings as well. For example, it was only able to distribute questionnaires in five main local government districts since it was unable to reach many isolated towns and villages. This was seen as the study's shortcoming

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future researchers are encouraged by the study to broaden its scope and investigate the impact of additional dimensions of entrepreneurial abilities on the performance of enterprises.

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