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Entrepreneurial Competence And Success Of Small And Medium Enterprises (Smes) In Anambra State

Nwankwo Alexander Odilichukwu1, B. Chima Onuoha2

1Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt.
2Professor of Management, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt

ABSTRACT: *This study empirically explored the link between entrepreneurial competencies and the success of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Anambra State, Nigeria. The survey research design was adopted, and a sample of 154 respondents was drawn from a population of 250 SME owners and managers using the Taro Yamane formula. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires, of which 130 were validly completed and analyzed using Spearman's rank-order correlation with the aid of SPSS version 25 at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that all four entrepreneurial competencies investigated, strategic, conceptual, opportunity, and learning, had positive and significant relationships with SME success. Specifically, opportunity competency exhibited the strongest relationship, followed by strategic competency, conceptual competency, and learning competency. These results underscore the critical role entrepreneurial competencies play in enhancing SME performance, survival, and growth. The study concludes that SME operators who cultivate these competencies are better positioned to achieve superior outcomes in dynamic business environments. It recommends that SME owners strengthen strategic planning, problem-solving, and continuous learning capacities, while prioritizing market opportunity identification and exploitation. Furthermore, government agencies and financial institutions are encouraged to embed competency-based training into SME development and support programs.*

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Competence, Business Success, opportunity competency strategic competency, conceptual competency, and learning competency

1.0 Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have long been recognized as the backbone of economic growth and development in both developed and developing countries. They contribute significantly to employment generation, poverty alleviation, innovation, and the diversification of national economies. The contributions of SMEs to the economic development of every nation either developed and developing has been widely recognized and acknowledged (Kalpande, Gupta & Dandekar, 2010; Martey et al., 2013; Shastri, Tripathi, & Ali, 2011). The small and medium scale enterprises contributes significantly to the socio-economic development and accounts for the highest number of business activities providing jobs for millions of Nigerians as well as contribution to the GDP of the nation. Therefore, the success of SMEs is of utmost importance not just to the business owners but all stakeholders concerned. Success of small and medium scale enterprises is the overall performance of the company, as demonstrated by the sum of the business, finance, and human resource activities of the company during a specific period of time.

Businesses set goals and objectives that must be accomplished in a specific amount of time. Success gauges how well a company performs in relation to these predetermined goals. The ability of a business to achieve its objectives; such as a high profit margin, high-quality products, a higher market share, and improved financial results at a certain period and by implementing the appropriate plan is referred to as SMEs' success. However, in enhance business success, one of the important factor that has been identified in literature as influencing the success of SMEs is entrepreneurial competence. Entrepreneurial competence refers to the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes that enable entrepreneurs to successfully identify opportunities, mobilize resources, manage risks, and adapt to dynamic business environments.

According to Turner (2022), competence is the capacity to successfully satisfy the complex requirements of a particular situation. It is an integrated component of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. According to Pepple and Enuoh (2020), entrepreneurial competence is the ability to spot opportunities fresh chances and gather the funds and resources needed to seize them. According to Oyedele et al. (2020), entrepreneurial competencies include particular knowledge, motivations, qualities, self-images, social roles, and abilities. According to Hogommat (2023), they cover a variety of competencies, including knowledge, skills, and abilities that go beyond technical, financial, organizational, and legal expertise. The mix of owner-managers' distinguishable traits, abilities, and motivations that are essential to running a firm is known as entrepreneurial competencies (Muhammed, 2016). In a similar vein, Kaur and Bains (2013) described it as the personal traits of an individual who takes on risk in order to make money from a commercial endeavor. The skill an entrepreneur possesses internally to launch and run a profitable business is known as entrepreneurial competence (Oyeku et al., 2020). Research indicates that small and medium-sized businesses led by entrepreneurs with more entrepreneurial skill typically outperform those operated by managers with less skill. According to Van der Laan, Driessen, and Zwart (2010), a capable

manager is a company's most valuable asset. Ogechukwu (2011) posits that SMEs success largely depend on a competent entrepreneur.

To this end, various studies have been carried out on ways to enhance the level of success of SMEs due to their important role in the nation's economic development (Oyeku et al., 2014; Woldesenbet, Ran & Jones, 2012; Zahra, Abdelgawad & Tsang, 2011). However, despite the various attempts by various scholars and researchers, many small and medium scale enterprises are still faced with loads of challenges that threatens the success of the business. It is against this knowledge gap that this study seeks to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial competence and success of SMEs in Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) are essential to job creation, economic expansion, and poverty reduction. In Anambra State, SMEs play a major role in local economic growth by controlling industries including commerce, manufacturing, services, and agro-processing. Nevertheless, despite their promise, a large number of SMEs in the state fail frequently in their initial years, with low competitiveness, inadequate strategic planning, and inadequate management ability being the main causes. Even while SMEs are crucial to the nation's economic growth, the failure of many of them has raised concerns among academics and researchers. According to a research by Oyelaran (2010), Nigeria only contributed 1% of its GDP, but other industrialized nations contributed a larger amount. Evidence indicate that one of the strategies to boost the success of SMEs in is via entrepreneurial competency of the firm owner.

Thus, among other entrepreneur competencies, risk-taking, creativity, opportunity awareness, networking, and leadership raise the degree of business success. Sadly, a lot of business owners lack the necessary entrepreneurial training and abilities to adjust to the ever-changing business landscape. This has occasionally led to poor decision-making, a lack of resources, low productivity, restricted growth, and, most importantly, poor succession planning. Numerous research on how to improve entrepreneurial success utilizing different constructs have been conducted. Agbor et al. (2023) investigated the relationship between entrepreneurial competences and SMEs' success in Calabar City. Obidile and Okoli (2023) investigated the connection between small and medium business managers' entrepreneurial success and the business environment. Entrepreneurial success and capacity were studied by Oyeku et al. (2020). Ndu-Ahiakwo and Wegwu (2023) investigated the impact of entrepreneurial growth methods on the operational performance of SMEs. The issue still exists in spite of these investigations. This study on how entrepreneurial competence impact the success of small and medium-sized businesses in Anambra state is motivated by this knowledge gap.

Aim and Objectives of Study

The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial competence and success of SMEs in Anambra State. The specific objectives are to:

i. examine the relationship between strategic competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.
ii. determine the relationship between conceptual competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.
iii. investigate the relationship between opportunity competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.
iv. ascertain the relationship between learning competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.

Research Hypotheses

Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between strategic competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.
Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between conceptual competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.
Ho_3: There is no significant relationship between opportunity competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.
Ho_4: There is no significant relationship between learning competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.

2.0 Literature Review

Entrepreneurial Competencies

The information, abilities, attitudes, and skills required for a particular work are all included in competencies (Muhammad, 2021). According to Volery, et al. (2019), these competences are flexible and may be acquired by coaching, education, and experience. According to Turner (2022), competence is the capacity to successfully satisfy the complex requirements of a particular situation. It is an integrated component of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Entrepreneurial capability, according to Pepple and Enuoh (2020), is the ability to spot fresh chances and gather the funds and resources needed to seize them. According to Oyedele et al. (2020), entrepreneurial competencies include particular knowledge, motivations, qualities, self-images, social roles, and abilities. According to (Hogommat, 2023), they cover a variety of competencies, including knowledge, skills, and abilities that go beyond technical, financial, organizational, and legal expertise. According to Kirmizi and Kocaoğlu (2022), the resource-based view highlights the importance of enterprise resources in determining the establishment, survival, and expansion of an organization growth and survival.

Ten areas of entrepreneurial competence that have been shown to have a direct or indirect effect on performance were categorized from a behavioral perspective by Man et al. (2002), as cited in Gunartin et al. (2023). These areas include opportunity, relationship, analytical, innovative, operational, human, strategic, commitment, learning, and personal strength competencies. Recognizing the crucial elements of personality, attitude, social roles, and self-image, all of which are shaped by knowledge, skills, and experience, is crucial to comprehending the idea of entrepreneurial competence in a broader sense (Gunartin et al., 2023). In order to attain optimal company performance, entrepreneurs must possess a blend of attitudes, knowledge, and abilities known as entrepreneurial competence. As the main competency for improving social employability, entrepreneurial competence is essential for cultivating the attitudes and behavior skills that underpin economic growth (Bolzani & Luppi, 2021). Chaker and Jarraya (2021) also stress the significance of fostering entrepreneurial skills, arguing that more content is required and that the desire to become an entrepreneur must be encouraged and enhanced by creating an atmosphere that resembles a real-world business scenario. In conclusion, the success criteria that need to be met when operating a firm are described by entrepreneurial competence (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2020). Entrepreneurial competence is a collection of attributes that includes the information, motivations, characteristics, self-perception, and abilities necessary for starting and expanding firms (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2020).

Ferreras-Garcia, et al. (2021) reinforce this approach by arguing that competency-based training is essential for fostering entrepreneurial learning and cultivating entrepreneurship as a discipline. Furthermore, fundamental competency and working involvement are favorably correlated, according to Haruna and Marthandan (2019). In order to improve these competencies, managers and legislators should hold coaching and training sessions. This will ultimately increase employee engagement and promote career development. These kinds of programs might be very helpful for recent grads starting their professions.

Given that knowledge, attitudes, and skills are critical components in enhancing the performance of SMEs, entrepreneurial competence is a critical component in assessing company success (Garavan et al., 2019). Numerous pieces of literature support this viewpoint, arguing that the knowledge, attitudes, abilities, and conduct of entrepreneurs are essential elements of entrepreneurial competence that have a big impact on competitiveness and success (Wirda et al., 2019).

Dimensions of Entrepreneurial Competencies

Strategic Competency

Strategic abilities enable individuals and organizations to adapt to a highly dynamic environment that presents ever-evolving obstacles to achieving their objectives. Lack of these skills makes it more difficult to adjust to these shifting contexts, which increases marginalization. A "how to" approach is only one aspect of strategic capabilities. They are comparable to the chess game. There is much more to winning the game than just following the rules. Due to numerous ambiguities regarding the opposing player's moves, there is no set line of action that can be prearranged. In addition to understanding the game's rules, playing the game requires the capacity to apply pertinent experience, create and modify scenarios on the fly, and more. Creativity, intelligence, and foresight are necessary for strategic thinking. While insight is identifying strategies that give the future life and significance, foresight entails imagining the future and predicting its features before it materializes (Zahra and Nambisan, 2022). Using study, analysis, and foresight to create a plan for the organization's future is known as strategic thinking. Therefore, the ability to think strategically gives the process of developing a strategy a new dimension. (Dionisio, 2019).

Strategic competency has been defined as the innate ability of individuals to accomplish long-term goals (Ahmad et al., 2020) and the ability to establish, evaluate, and support the implementation of advantageous business strategies (Man et al., 2022). Similarly, strategic competence is defined by Man et al. (2022) as the ability to have a vision, create business strategies, and plan how to apply them in an organization. Long-term strategic plans need to be created with the firm's goal in mind, claim Stonehouse and Pemberton (2022). The ability to generate and maintain competitive advantage through distinctive resources, talents, and core competencies is referred to as strategic competences at the firm level (Hitt et al., 2021). Prahalad and Hamel (2019) define strategic competencies as "the collective learning in the organization, especially how to integrate multiple streams of technology and coordinate diverse production skills." These skills allow businesses to surpass rivals and succeed over the long haul.

Conceptual Competency

The ability to comprehend difficult situations and come up with innovative answers is known as conceptual competency. Those who possess these abilities can tackle complex workplace circumstances in a number of ways, which makes them valuable from a management standpoint. Whatever sector your business works in, it will encounter obstacles that need for original and imaginative solutions. Conceptual competencies are the most advantageous to the organization in these circumstances (Ahmad et al, 2020). A conceptual leader is able to process their ideas and turn them into solutions that are actionable. Because they can plan ahead for possible scenarios and how to handle them, people view leaders with conceptual talents as strategic leaders. Developing conceptual skills can help you advance in your career as a manager since at higher levels of management, the capacity to approach an issue creatively and abstractly is highly valued (Morris et al, 2023).

This is a crucial component of the conceptual abilities that effective top managers possess. After successfully persuading supervisors of the strategy and vision, they might go on to describe how each functional department contributes to the process. Top managers, for example, frequently include human resource specialists in strategic workforce development to make sure the business has the talent it needs to execute its plans and objectives. This competence is of great importance to SMEs in terms of improvement in performance, effective planning and controlling and achievement of predetermined plans (Augustine, 2022)

Opportunity Competency

The ability to see and visualize high-potential opportunities, assess their viability, and develop them through methodical action is referred to as opportunity competency (Man, 2022). Opportunity competences, according to Teece (2019), are the capacity to recognize, grasp, and change company possibilities. This includes spotting new trends, utilizing innovation, and taking measured risks to profit from market dynamics (Hitt et al., 2021). Opportunity skills are the capacity to identify, evaluate, and seize lucrative business chances at the individual level. This includes spotting possible holes in the market and coming up with creative solutions (Shane & Venkataraman, 2020). In order to promote innovation and SME growth, Ardichvili et al. (20203) stress that these competences entail not just identifying opportunities but also taking calculated steps to take advantage of them. Entrepreneurs and businesses may innovate, adapt, and prosper in ever-changing market environments thanks to opportunity competencies, which are diverse and include both organizational and individual abilities to recognize, generate, and seize new possibilities.

The ability of an entrepreneur to recognize a variety of market opportunities through a variety of tools, techniques, and strategies is known as opportunity competency (Shin et al., 2021). Opportunity competency can be characterized as the ability to identify products and services that consumers want, identify unmet consumer needs, recognize real possibilities, and provide the best possible value to consumers (Bird, 2019). According to Omsa et al. (2017), what sets entrepreneurs apart is their ability to see opportunities in the face of difficulties. Tehseen and Ramayah (2019) define opportunity competence as an entrepreneur's ability to recognize, cultivate, and assess real market opportunities.

Learning Competency

Entrepreneurs that possess learning competency are able to learn in a variety of ways, stay current in their profession, study proactively, and then put their newly acquired knowledge and abilities to use in real-world situations (Man, 2022). Since new information is produced and shared quickly in the modern social era, entrepreneurs need to be able to learn new skills in order to adapt to the demands of a changing environment (Deakins & Freel, 2019). Because it enables entrepreneurs to create knowledge and lower risks and uncertainty, learning is essential to the entrepreneurial process (Ward, 2024). According to a study by Stokes & Blackburn (2022) on business owners' experiences with business failure, three-quarters of the respondents reported having better personal management abilities as a result of their firm closure.

Learning competency is characterized by proactive acquisition of practical skills, learning from a variety of sources and methods, remaining current, and ultimately applying the knowledge gained (Sacramento & Teixeira, 2019). Learning competency is necessary for entrepreneurs to become proficient in their surroundings, according to Park et al. (2019). Learning competency, according to Mancinelli and Mazzanti (2019), is the most important competency of the entrepreneurial process since it generates knowledge for entrepreneurs, which reduces possible risks and uncertainties and enhances firm performance.

Success of SMEs

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are vital in driving economic growth in developing nations. SMEs cover a broad spectrum of business kinds and are usually differentiated from larger firms by their assets, sales value, and workforce size. Law No. 20 of 2008 in Nigeria defines SMEs as businesses that have a total sales value of up to 2.5 billion naira and starting total assets of less than 200 million naira (excluding land and buildings). SMEs still have a lot of difficulties when it comes to competing globally, though, since they need to improve their skills to stay competitive (Cahyadi, 2019). The government has launched a number of initiatives to boost SMEs' competitiveness in the global market and to encourage and support them. The government intends to boost SMEs' success and support the nation's economic expansion by making the most of their use. Notwithstanding their substantial economic contributions, SMEs continue to encounter a number of internal obstacles, including their limited export capacity (SMEs account for only 15.65% of all exports) and their low e-commerce adoption rate (24% of all SMEs as of right now).

Given these difficult conditions, improving entrepreneurial competency is essential to SMEs' ability to compete successfully in the global market, even in the face of significant challenges like their lack of experience in international product promotion, which is the main barrier to market expansion (Gunartin et al., 2023). Additionally, SMEs frequently lack market knowledge, which makes it difficult for them to learn about possible markets and hinders their attempts to expand internationally (Cahyadi, 2019). Furthermore, inadequate access to capital is another significant obstacle that hinders SMEs success. Many SMEs do not have the right strategies, skills and competencies needed to sustain business let alone fend off tough competition from competitors (Chong, et al. 2022).

Generally, success is the ultimate goal of every commercial endeavor that can be used to gauge performance (Nguyen, 2019; Rutherford & Oswald, 2020). SME success is the overall performance of the company, as demonstrated by the sum of the business, finance, and human resource activities of the company during a specific period of time. Businesses set goals and objectives that must be accomplished in a specific amount of time. Success gauges how well a company performs in relation to these predetermined goals. Therefore, the ability of a business to achieve its objectives; such as a high profit margin, high-quality products, a higher market share, and improved financial results at a certain period and by implementing the appropriate plan is referred to as SMEs' success.

Theoretical Framework: Human Capital Theory

The modern Human Capital Theory is most closely associated with Gary S. Becker (and earlier contributions by Schultz and Mincer). Becker framed human capital as an economic investment: education and training raise workers' productivity and earnings. This theoretical lineage is the backbone for using human capital to explain entrepreneurial performance. Human capital is the stock of knowledge, skills, experience, health, and abilities that individuals (owners, managers, employees) bring to a firm. In SMEs this includes formal education, on-the-job skills, managerial experience, networks, and tacit know-how, all of which shape entrepreneurs' competencies and therefore firm outcomes (Becker, 1964). The theory assumes that Investments in education, training and experience increase an individual's productive capacity. Applied to SMEs, entrepreneur/employee investments improve firm-level performance. It also assumes that Human-capital investments produce measurable returns (higher revenue, better survival, growth), although measurement can be noisy and Human capital interacts with other resources (technology, financial capital, networks); human capital alone is necessary but not always sufficient (Marvel et. al., 2016).

Critics argue HCT focuses too narrowly on individuals' attributes while underplaying structural factors (market institutions, gender norms, access to finance) that shape SME outcomes. They also argued that reverse causality (successful entrepreneurs acquire more training/income) and selection (more able people both obtain more human capital and start "better" firms) complicate causal claims (Unger et. al., 2011).

Human capital theory is very important to this study as it helps SMEs to invest deliberately in the human capital that builds entrepreneurial competencies, practical managerial training, experience-sharing, digital skills, and targeted upskilling (financial management, marketing, product development). These competencies improve opportunity recognition, execution, and ability to scale. Also, human-capital programs with access to finance, mentorship, and digital infrastructure for policy makers will help human capital multiplies its effect when combined with other supports (Hossain et al., 2024).

Empirical Review

Frywaruwa et al. (2021) examined entrepreneurial competencies and business performance among Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) engaged in Palembang woven fabrics, as well as the influence of entrepreneurial competence on business performance. The study adopted a quantitative research design with a population of 90 MSME owners and woven fabric artisans in the Tuan Kentang area of Palembang. Using random sampling, 50 respondents were selected. Data were gathered through a structured, closed-ended questionnaire and analyzed using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS). The findings revealed three key points: first, entrepreneurial competence in the Palembang woven fabric sector was generally high; second, business performance in the sector was rated very high; and third, entrepreneurial competencies exerted a positive and significant impact on the business performance of these enterprises.

Agbor et al. (2023) explored the influence of entrepreneurial competencies on the performance of SMEs in Calabar metropolis, Cross River State. Data were obtained from SME owners and management staff through structured Likert-scale questionnaires. A sample of 80 respondents was analyzed using regression analysis. The results indicated positive relationships between strategic competencies (STC) ($\beta1 = 0.21$), conceptual competencies (CPC) ($\beta2 = 0.18$), and relationship competencies (RTC) ($\beta3 = 0.75$) with SME performance in the area. The study concluded that entrepreneurial competencies have a significant positive impact on the performance of SMEs in Cross River State. This is attributed to the role of entrepreneurial competencies in enhancing business innovativeness and providing a competitive edge. The researchers further emphasized that SMEs in Calabar metropolis can achieve improved business performance when entrepreneurs actively develop these competencies.

Emele (2024) examined the impact of entrepreneurial competencies on the performance of SMEs in Delta State, Nigeria. The study specifically aimed to assess the effects of marketing competency, time management competency, and decision-making competency on SME performance. Relevant literature was reviewed within the contexts of the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical frameworks, with the study anchored on Competence Theory. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, targeting SMEs in Delta State. The population consisted of 5,394 SMEs, from which a sample size of 1,036 employees was determined using a statistical formula. The research instrument was validated through face and content validity, while its reliability was confirmed using the test-retest method and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Data were analyzed using simple percentages for research questions, while hypotheses were tested

with Pearson Correlation and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple regression analysis. Findings revealed that marketing competency, time management competency, and decision-making competency each had significant positive effects on the performance of SMEs in Delta State, Nigeria.

3.0 Methodology

The research design used to carry out this study is the survey research design. The target population consisted of 250 managers and owners of small and medium enterprises in Anambra State. The Taro Yamane's formula was used to obtain the sample size of 154. The Simple random sampling technique was adopted to draw the number of respondents. The nature of the data is quantitative. Self-administered questionnaires was used for this study. Out of the 154 questionnaire distributed for this study, 130 of them were correctly filled and returned, hence was used for the analysis. The collected data was analysed using the Spearman's rank order correlation analysis technique which studies the relationship between variables with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software, version 25 to test the research hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The study examines the relationship between entrepreneurial competence and success of SMEs in Anambra state. In order to determine the existent of relationship between the study variables, the study utilized the Spearman's rank order correlation analysis technique.

The decision rule is:

$p < 0.05$ significant level = reject the null hypotheses

$p > 0.05$ significant level = and accept the null hypotheses where.

The hypotheses were tested in the null form.

Table 1: Strategic Competency and SMEs Success

Correlations

			Strategic Competency	Firm Success
Spearman's rho	Strategic Competency	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.651**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	130	130
	Firm Success	Correlation Coefficient	.651**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	130	130

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

Source: SPSS version 25.0 output extracts

Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between strategic competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.

The result of the analysis in Table 1 shows a significant level $p < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$), $r = 0.651$ between strategic competency and SMEs success. This means that there is a moderate significant relationship between strategic competency and SMEs success in Anambra State. The null hypothesis is rejected, and we restate that there is a moderate significant relationship between strategic competency and SMEs success in Anambra State.

Table 2: Conceptual Competency and SMEs Success

Correlations

			Conceptual Competency	Business Success
Spearman's rho	Conceptual Competency	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.639**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	130	130
	Business Success	Correlation Coefficient	.639**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	130	130

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

Source: SPSS version 25.0 output extracts

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between conceptual competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.
The result of the analysis in Table 2 shows a significant level p< 0.05 (0.000< 0.05), r = 0.639 between conceptual competency and success of SMEs. This means that there is a moderate significant relationship between conceptual competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state. The null hypothesis is rejected, and we restate that there is a moderate significant relationship between conceptual competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.

Table 3: Opportunity Competency and SMEs Success

Correlations

			Opportunity Competency	Business Success
Spearman's rho	Opportunity Competency	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.781**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	130	130
	Business Success	Correlation Coefficient	.781**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	130	130

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

Source: SPSS version 25.0 output extracts

Ho_3: There is no significant relationship between opportunity competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.
The result of the analysis in Table 3 shows a significant level p< 0.05 (0.000< 0.05), r = 0.781 between opportunity competency and success of SMEs. This means that there is a strong significant relationship between opportunity competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state. The null hypothesis is rejected, and we restate that there is a strong significant relationship between opportunity competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.

Table 4: Learning Competency and SMEs Success

Correlations

			Learning Competency	Business Success
Spearman's rho	Learning Competency	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.616**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	130	130
	Business Success	Correlation Coefficient	.616**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	130	130

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

Source: SPSS version 25.0 output extracts

Ho_4: There is no significant relationship between learning competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.
The result of the analysis in Table 4 shows a significant level p< 0.05 (0.000< 0.05), r = 0.616 between learning competency and success of SMEs. This means that there is a moderate significant relationship between learning competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state. The null hypothesis is rejected, and we restate that there is a moderate significant relationship between learning competency and success of SMEs in Anambra state.

Discussion of Findings

Strategic competency and SME success
The result of the study shows a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between strategic competency and SME success (Spearman's $\rho = .651$, $p < .01$). Strategically competent owners, those who articulate a long-term vision, align resources, and adapt plans, tend to report superior performance outcomes. This finding converges with Agbor et al. (2023), who observed a positive effect of strategic competencies on SME performance. Furthermore, the result aligns with Emele (2024), where decision-making competence, conceptually close to strategic foresight, significantly predicted performance.

Conceptual competency and SME Success
Conceptual competency also exhibits a moderate, positive, and significant association with SME success ($\rho = .639$, $p < .01$). This competency, encompassing problem-solving, systems thinking, and cognitive flexibility, appears to enable entrepreneurs to frame complex competitive issues and select viable responses. The result corroborates Agbor et al. (2023), who found a positive link

between conceptual competence and performance. Frywaruwa et al. (2021) further support this pattern by demonstrating that composite entrepreneurial competence significantly raises performance.

Opportunity competency and SME Success

Opportunity competency records the strongest association with SME success in this study ($\rho = .781$, $p < .01$), indicating a robust linkage between recognizing, evaluating, and exploiting market opportunities and the realization of superior business outcomes. This result indicates how the capacity to take opportunities connects entrepreneurial cognition to market value creation. The finding resonates with Agbor et al. (2023), whose largest coefficient was for relationship competencies, a domain that often undergirds opportunity identification through social capital, networks, and market intelligence. It also aligns with Emele (2024), where marketing competency, an applied expression of opportunity recognition and exploitation significantly improved performance.

Learning competency and SME success

Learning competency shows a moderate, positive, and significant relationship with SME success ($\rho = .616$, $p < .01$). Entrepreneurs who continuously acquire and apply new knowledge appear better able to refine operations, update strategies, and adapt to environmental shifts. This aligns with Emele (2024), where the effects of time management and decision-making implicitly rely on learning cycles (planning, execution, feedback, adjustment). Similarly, Frywaruwa et al. (2021) underscore the performance benefits of aggregated entrepreneurial competencies, within which learning capacity is foundational.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and the success of SMEs in Anambra State. Specifically, the study investigated the roles of strategic, conceptual, opportunity, and learning competencies. The results revealed that all four competencies demonstrated positive and significant relationships with SME success, though at varying strengths. Opportunity competency emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by strategic, conceptual, and learning competencies. Strategically competent SME owners were found to articulate long-term visions and align resources more effectively, while those with strong conceptual competencies were better at problem-solving and managing complex situations. Entrepreneurs who possessed opportunity competencies were most capable of recognizing and exploiting market opportunities, while learning competence ensured continuous adaptation and innovation. Overall, the evidence suggests that entrepreneurial competencies are central to SME survival and growth. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

i. SME owners in Anambra State should be encouraged to strengthen their strategic planning abilities by setting clear long-term goals, aligning resources with vision, and continuously adapting strategies to changing market conditions.
ii. Given the significant role of conceptual competency, SME operators should be supported to develop problem-solving and systems-thinking skills. This can be achieved through entrepreneurial mentorship programs and structured decision-making simulations that expose entrepreneurs to complex business challenges and possible response strategies.
iii. Since opportunity competency showed the strongest effect on SME success, priority should be placed on market opportunity identification and exploitation**.** SMEs should be trained on market research, customer analysis, and product development, while also being encouraged to leverage digital technologies and social networks for opportunity scanning.
iv. SMEs owners should adopt a continuous learning culture, where knowledge acquisition and adaptation are embedded in daily business practices. Owners and managers should be encouraged to engage in short professional courses, online learning, and peer-learning networks that expose them to emerging trends in business management.
v. Finally, government agencies and financial institutions should integrate competency-based training programs into their SME support frameworks. For instance, loan disbursement schemes can be tied to entrepreneurs' participation in structured training on strategic, conceptual, opportunity, and learning competencies.

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