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STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND RESILIENCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMEs) IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between strategic partnership and resilience of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Rivers State with dimensions of resilience such as adaptive capability and organizational learning. The much pressing problem that was solved through this research was the inability of SMEs to come together to pursue the same strategic objective which enhances collective knowledge, expertise, foster unity and have the same access to the same resources in order to outperform their rivals. In solving this problem, the research involved the statement of two hypotheses and two research questions. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted. Data was collected from 60 managers and owners through the distribution of structured copies of questionnaire. The Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze the data collected. Findings revealed that strategic partnership positively impacts adaptive capability and organizational learning, thus, enhancing firms' abilities to respond to changes in the business environment and foster continuous improvement and innovation for competitive advantage over rivals. The research therefore, concluded that strategic partnership in terms of resource sharing and collaborative management significantly enhances resilience of SMEs in turbulent business environment. The study further recommended that firms should be strategic in their use of partnerships, ensuring that these moves align with their long-term objectives to remain sustainable. Also, SMEs should seek out partnerships that complement their strengths which will offer new opportunities for competitive advantage and growth.

Keywords:

Adaptive capability, collaborative management, organizational learning, organizational resilience, resource sharing

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Introduction

Background to the Study

In the past, small and medium-sized enterprises were optimistic about expansion, and it was typical to witness them forgo immediate financial gain in favor of quick expansion. However, the Covid-19 epidemic and the lockdown that followed had a significant impact on the survival of several small and medium-sized firms because of their poor resilience, which made it difficult for them to withstand the challenging business climate. In order to survive any unforeseen turbulence that may develop in the business environment, whether it be natural or man-made, it is crucial for firms, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, to operate with resilience.According to Osita-Ejikeme and Amah (2022), an organization's capacity to endure in a volatile environment depends on how resilient it is, which encompasses both its internal and external environments. Additionally, they pointed out that a major reason why companies have survived for so long is because of their exceptional resilience in the face of a constantly shifting business environment.

According to Eketu (2015), organizational resilience refers to the intentional, conscious planning and efforts of business owners or organizational leaders to guarantee that there is a meaningful flow between an organization's functions and the disruptions that occur in the environment in which the business operates (internal or external).

Organizational resilience, according to Duchek (2019), is a defensive strategy used by organizations to withstand adversity in the face of the uncertainties that challenge business operations and make sure that the organizations have the resources necessary to overcome such adversities when they arise. According to Mama and Onuoha (2020), organizational resilience is the ability of an organization to maintain a positive attitude in the face of hardship, dissatisfaction, and disaster in order to maintain that organization's efficacy. Firm resilience, according to Rexhepi and Modenesi (2016), is an organization's ability to manage a crisis and respond to unforeseen disruptions in company operations.They also emphasized that only resilient corporations acquire competitive advantage over rival enterprises through the strengthening of its internal systems as well as the response to external changes.

Annarelli, Battistella and Nonino (2020) sees organizational resilience as the strength and capability of an organization to survive disruptions and unanticipated changes depending on the extent of its strategic awareness and collaboration in terms of internal and external capacities. According to Leo (2020), resilience is the capacity of a system to adapt to change and reorganize while retaining essentially the same purpose, structure, identity, and feedback. According to Karr (2017), organizational resilience encourages companies to focus on the entire health and performance of their firm rather than just risk management.He went on to say that a company needs to not only endure for a long time but also thrive during its existence in order to be considered resilient. Given how crucial organizational resilience is to an organization's survival, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises, it is crucial to remember that one of the things that can affect an organization's or business's resilience is the growth strategies that the company uses. This is due to the fact that businesses, regardless of their size, must develop in order to survive.

Businesses that want to expand must constantly adapt and improve in order to achieve steady development, according to Durmaz and Ilhan (2015), who also pointed out that company growth is essential for companies to thrive in emerging sectors. Accordingly, company growth is the technique that companies use to guarantee a consistent rise in their overall performance level in terms of output, sales volume, profit, and assets (Wanjiru & George, 2015). Companies use growth strategies to try to attain their sales and profit rate (Yükselen, 2013). A business plan impacts how well a company performs in its sector and helps it become more competitive (Wheelen & Hunger, 2012). Numerous research on strategies to improve firm resilience utilizing different dimensions have been conducted since organizational resilience is crucial to a company's ability to survive. The impact of entrepreneurial resilience on the operations of small and medium-sized businesses in Asaba, Delta State, was investigated by Emueje, Olannye, and Olanye (2020). A research on the corporate resilience and strategic flexibility of manufacturing companies in South-South Nigeria was conducted by Osita-Ejikeme and Amah (2022). This study aims to close the information gap on strategic partnerships and the resilience of SMEs in Nigeria, which has been the subject of several studies.

Statement of the Research Problem

It is impossible to overstate the significance of small and medium-sized enterprises to the economy of any country. This is due to the fact that they make substantial contributions to the gross domestic product of both developed and developing countries worldwide. According to Eniola (2020), small and medium-sized businesses are crucial to the country's economic growth, particularly when it comes to creating jobs. However, the COVID-19 epidemic has presented a number of obstacles for companies worldwide, and Nigeria specifically, making it hard for small and medium-sized enterprises to survive and prosper in the turbulent economic climate.More than 41.6% of SMEs closed globally as a result of the Covid-19 epidemic (Bartik et al., 2020), which led to a sharp rise in unemployment rates, forced homestays, and decreased productivity. Both large and small firms were affected by this crisis, but small enterprises with less resources, funding, and networks were more negatively impacted, and their viability as a business was in jeopardy (Raian et al., 2022). An urgent demand for improved business survival has arisen as a result of this situation. Firm resilience, according to Aldianto et al. (2021), is the capacity, attitudes, and skills to continue operating a firm sustainably following a disaster. There is enough evidence that the unpredictability and unfavorable business climate in emerging nations like Nigeria contribute to the high percentage of company failures in these areas.

According to Sherazi et al. (2013), 40 percent of small and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries fail during the first two years of operation. This is explained by the small and medium-sized enterprises' lack of resiliency. Nonetheless, strategic partnership plans that are focused on the expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises are one strategy to strengthen or increase company resilience. In order to assist them weather any commercial turmoil, it is crucial that SMEs' owners form strategic partnerships. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between strategic partnerships resilience position of SMEs in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

AimThe aim of this study was to examine the relationship between strategic partnership and organizational resilience of SMEs in in Rivers State

Objectives of the Study. The specific objectives of the study are to:

i. Examine the relationship between strategic partnership and adaptive capability of SMEs in Rivers State.

ii. Examine the relationship between strategic partnership and organizational learning of SMEs in Rivers State.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheseswere stated in the null form and served as tentative answers to the research purpose.

Ho1 There is no significant relationship between strategic partnership and adaptive capability of SMEs in Rivers State.

Ho2 There is no significant relationship between strategic partnership and organizational learning of SMEs in Rivers State.

2.0 Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Adaptive Capability

According to Bharma et al. (2011), adaptive capacity resilience is about adjusting to the new post-disruption environment and reacting to issues as they arise, for example, by using creative thinking and experience-based learning. Unlike planned resilience, adaptive capacity resilience does not aim to predetermine the reaction, but it may still need some pre-crisis activity (e.g., fostering a culture where employees feel empowered to think and act imaginatively). In a situation of profound uncertainty when dangers that were previously unknown or unconsidered are present, established strategies to manage the "known" risks typically become inadequate. Being flexible when something does happen is a crucial component of organizational resilience because nothing can be predicted.According to the research, there are three skills that are especially pertinent when discussing adaptive resilience. Flexibility is the first pillar of resilience (Sheffi, 2005). It entails, for instance, being adaptable in how the firm organizes and runs its operations, as well as interacting with new clientele and conforming to new laws. Second, it is believed that organizational learning is a crucial part of adaptive resilience. In order to be resilient, one must possess "a generalized capacity to investigate, to learn, and to act, without knowing in advance what situation or event one will be called to act upon," according to Wildavsky (1988).

In order to prevent small failures from persisting and developing into a large incident, experimentation is a crucial component of effective organizational learning and adaptation (Linnenluecke, 2017). This implies that individuals need to experiment with other methods, think about new goods and services, or take use of various company procedures and sales avenues. The capacity of a company to recognize and seize new market opportunities is known as adaptive capability (Wang & Ahmed, 2007). According to Staber and Sydow (2002), adaptive capacity encompasses more than just re-engineering the market demand and making use of the company's resources. It also involves finding and harnessing existing resources and taking advantage of the market requirement.According to a review of previous studies, adaptive capacity can quickly and efficiently reorganize, coordinate, recombine, and distribute resources in response to changes in the market (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004).

According to Walker et al. (2002), adaptive capacity is a component of resilience that encompasses learning, adaptability to try and embrace new approaches, and the creation of generalized solutions to wide ranges of problems. The ability or propensity of a person or group to respond in response to changing circumstances and to retain an exploratory attitude toward novel events as they arise is known as adaptive capacity. Two methods are used in this context to address adaptive capacity: organizational and socio-environmental (McManus, 2007).The foundation of an organization's capacity to exhibit resilient traits is its capacity for adaptation. The goal of adaptation, according to Amah and Baridam (2012), is to gain an edge over less adaptable rivals. This implies that competitiveness and adaptive capacity are related. Because they recognize the connections between an organization's resilience and its long-term success, Dalziell and McManus (2004) define adaptive capacity as the engagement and involvement of organizational staff in order to make them responsible, accountable, and engaged with developing the organization's resilience through their work.

Collaborative Management

In the context of strategic business partnerships, collaborative management is a management style that prioritizes collaboration, shared decision-making, and resource sharing among business partners in order to accomplish common objectives. When companies establish joint ventures, alliances, or strategic partnerships, this method is essential because it maximizes the advantages of collaboration. According to Powell, Koput, Smith-Doerr, and Owen-Smith (1999), collaborative management enables staff and management to see the valuable distinctions and learn how to behave in various contexts. According to Sanagha and Aronson (2009), collaborative management fosters awareness of potential conflicts between units and the cooperating workforce, resulting in a win-win situation.This is further supported by the fact that collaborative management often permits "goal congruence," which allows for critical thinking and team brainstorming while providing a variety of perspectives for reaching appropriate answers. Similarly, collaborative management tends to encourage self-analysis, problem-solving, a broader perspective, and the creation of space for learning, according to Thomson, Perry, and Miller (2007). Inferentially, collaborative management facilitates the development of individuals' abilities, accelerates problem-solving, boosts proficiency, and enhances job satisfaction, job enthusiasm, and employee retention. When basic control methods are insufficient, collaborative management involves applying collective intelligence to achieve desired results across organizational borders (Achebelema&Achebelema, 2021).

Organizational Learning

The online dictionary defines organizational learning as an ongoing, organization-wide process that improves the group's capacity to accept, understand, and react to both internal and external change. Systematic integration and group interpretation of new information are necessary for organizational learning, which entails taking risks as a kind of experimentation and results in collaborative action. Within organizational theory, the field of organizational learning examines theories and models on how an organization learns and adapts (Oparanma&Elezie, 2019). According to organizational development (OD), an adaptable organization is one that can recognize and adjust to changes in signals from its internal and external environments.

According to Oparanma and Elezie (2019), learning is the process of gaining new information or changing preexisting knowledge, behaviors, skills, beliefs, or preferences. It may also entail combining several forms of information. The idea of organizational learning is multifaceted and may take place at the individual, group, and institutional levels. Four psychological processes - insight, interpretation, integration, and institutionalization— connect the process (Crossan, Lane &White, 1999). The goal of feed forward learning is to use personal intuition to proactively anticipate changes in the environment. Individual intuition is incorporated into group learning and then into institutional learning. Feedback shows the effects of organizationally embedded learning on both people and groups (Crossan &Bedraw, 2003).By connecting the three levels of individual, group, and institutional learning and demonstrating the connection to strategy renewal, the organizational learning framework offers significant insights. It acknowledges that the four psychological processes of intuition, interpretation, integration, and institutionalization are all connected to the multilayered process of learning. Four interconnected processes—instinct, integration, interpretation, and institutionalization—define organizational learning. People have a significant role in the organizational learning process. But according to Levitt and March (1988), organizational learning is more complex than the sum of the knowledge of its constituents.

Organizational Resilience

Resilience has begun to occupy center stage in regulatory and supervisory conversation and studies since the organization's financial crisis (Dowell-Jones & Ross, 2016). This concept, which has a diverse background, focuses on the dynamic ability of a complex, adaptive, flexible, dynamic nonlinear system to self-repair in response to stress or transition to a new stable equilibrium. Resilience is a system's capacity to adapt to change and reorganize while retaining essentially the same identity, structure, function, and feedback (Leo, 2020). In the business sector, resilience is seen as a strategy for crisis management and business continuity, as well as a way to deal with potential risks that an organization may face, such as cyberattacks, natural disasters, and other threats (Kelebetse, Tangirala, Sethate, &Kuruba, 2019). However, businesses all over the world have been strategic in adjusting to their environment and restructuring and reorganizing activities in order to reach predetermined goals and objectives via business resilience (Leo, 2020).

Firm resilience, according to Kelebetse et al. (2019), is the ability of an organization to swiftly adapt to shocks while carrying on with regular company operations and safeguarding personnel, property, and overall brand equity. Verifying that an organization can still accomplish its primary goals in the face of adversity, both before and after, is the essence of resilience. The notions of awareness, detection, communication, reaction (and, if feasible, avoidance), recuperation, and the ability and desire to adjust to changing circumstances are all suggested by resilience (McAslan, 2010). A resilient organization should be able to "bounce back" from a disruption, maintain its core functions throughout the disruption, and absorb stressors or disruptions through resistance or adaptation (Practical Action 2010). Resilience necessitates both creativity and innovation since it involves more than just improving. It also involves change. (Cartwright & Maguire 2008).

According to Martin (2012), resilience is the ability of a system to recover from a shock while retaining its identity, configuration, and purpose; the ability of a scheme to anticipate and respond to business shocks by undergoing operational and structural adaptation; and the ability of a scheme to return to a pre-established state following a surprise.Since they deal with two scenarios—moving to equilibrium or reverting to an original equilibrium—the primary binary explanations represent equal viewpoints. According to Madni (2007), resilience is the capacity to foresee a disturbance, to withstand it by adjusting, and to recover by returning as much as possible to the pre-perturbation condition. According to McManus et al. (2008), there are several ideas that come from definitions of organizational resilience, such as environmental knowledge, preparedness level, anticipating disruptions, adaptability, and recovery capability. How prepared an organization may be is reflected in its capacity to absorb shock or build resilience in the face of environmental perturbations.According to Alastir (2010), managers of resilient businesses should be aware of changes that might endanger their people, facilities, activities, services, and supply chains, as well as comprehend the environment in which their firms function at the board level. According to him, managers must track important issues and trends that could affect the organization's goals as well as the opinions and values of external stakeholders. They also need to comprehend the increasingly complex cultural, political, legal, regulatory, economic, technological, natural, and competitive environment in which they operate.

Resource Sharing

The technique of utilizing underused resources and social capital for novel and creative methods to accomplish desired results is known as resource sharing (Akani, Ogan, Ehio, & Ude, 2023). In strategic partnerships, resource sharing entails cooperating companies combining their diverse assets, capabilities, and experience in order to accomplish common goals. By using one another's capabilities and lowering individual expenses, this partnership may improve operational efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness.

Types of Resources Shared

- **Tangible Resources**: Physical assets such as equipment, infrastructure, or raw materials that can be jointly utilized for production, research, or service delivery.
- **Intangible Resources**: Intellectual property, patents, expertise, brand equity, and organizational know-how that are critical for driving innovation or entering new markets.
- **Financial Resources**: Shared investment for research and development, infrastructure development, or new market entry.
- **Human Resources**: Joint teams or shared workforce, where expertise and talent from both partners collaborate on projects or operations.
- **Technological Resources**: Sharing proprietary technology, software, or digital platforms that support product development or operational improvement.

Benefits of Resource Sharing

- **Cost Reduction**: Sharing resources leads to economies of scale, reducing operational and production costs for both partners.
- **Innovation and Growth**: Access to new technologies and expertise can accelerate innovation and lead to new product or service development.
- **Risk Mitigation**: Risks, such as market uncertainties or investment failures, are spread between partners, reducing the burden on individual companies.
- **Market Access**: Partnering with a company that has a presence in a new market or industry enables faster and more efficient market entry.
- **Efficiency**: Combining complementary resources improves overall operational efficiency, allowing firms to optimize their use of assets.

Challenges in Resource Sharing

- **Alignment of Objectives**: The success of resource sharing depends on both partners having aligned goals and a clear understanding of mutual benefits.
- **Resource Ownership and Control**: Clear agreements need to be established regarding the ownership and control of shared resources to avoid conflicts.
- **Trust and Transparency**: Effective resource sharing requires a high level of trust and open communication between partners to ensure cooperation and avoid opportunistic behavior.
- **Integration of Systems and Processes**: Sharing resources may require the integration of different organizational systems, processes, and cultures, which can be challenging.
- **Intellectual Property Concerns**: When intangible resources like proprietary technology or patents are shared, there can be concerns about IP protection and misuse.

2.1 Strategic Partnerships

Agreements for strategic partnerships are created to achieve shared objectives (Isoraite, 2009). It happens when two or more companies band together to pursue same strategic objective (Dinçer, 2007). In other words, strategic partnerships are labor unions that arise when two or more separate enterprises wish to enhance their collective knowledge, expertise, and equity (Sudarsanam, 2003). These partnerships enable companies to outperform their rivals in global marketplaces and reduce dangers (Öncer, 2012). Companies in strategic alliances foster unity since they have access to the same resources and expertise (Karakılıç, 2009). Additionally, companies help one another with marketing and technology (Aydıntan, 2003).Strategic alliances enable organizations to participate more actively in worldwide markets with complementary partners, obtain a competitive edge, and expand by enhancing product quality and cutting costs (Karakılıç, 2009).

A strategic partnership is a corporate arrangement that benefits both parties and helps the firms involved expand and cut expenses. Companies with strategic alliances work together to accomplish shared strategic objectives and maintain a competitive edge over time (Emami, Welsh, Davari & Rezazadeh, 2022). Scholars have recently focused on how businesses are forging alliances and the successes, difficulties, and obstacles they encounter when doing so. Strategic alliances are especially crucial for SMEs because of their limited financial resources.The Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) of the United Nations acknowledge the need of establishing and enhancing partnerships among organizations (Herab, Al-Ghamdi, Alzahrani, Elhindi, Muddassir, & Kassem, 2022). This acknowledges the need for partnerships between businesses that share resources including information, finance, and experience (Almarri, 2024).

Theoretical Review

Greiner's Growth Model

Larry E. Greiner created the Greiner's Growth Model in 1972. The model outlines the many stages that each company organization goes through as it expands. There were five phases in this original model, but a sixth phase was introduced in a 1998 update. Each phase, according to the author, consists of an evolutionary epoch that is distinguished by protracted intervals of steady growth. A revolutionary era that describes significant organizational problems follows this. The evolution phase ultimately culminates in revolution, and this crisis must be resolved for the company to proceed (Tam & Gray, 2016). According to Quinn and Cameron (1983), Greiner's model progresses from phases that emphasize entrepreneurship and innovation to formalization, followed by flexibility and adaptation.

Growth occurs via inventiveness in the initial phase. The company is still in its infancy and is distinguished by its novel goods and untapped markets. According to Greiner (1972), the organization's focus is on developing a market as well as a product. Since there aren't many employees, communication is casual and frequent. A leadership crisis develops as the organization goes on. It becomes essential to have a more capable management with the requisite expertise. Growth occurs through direction in the second phase. According to Greiner (1972), the organization implements work standards, budgets, and incentives throughout the evolution stage. A functional organizational structure is established in order to segregate the marketing and production operations.An autonomy crisis at the conclusion of the phase necessitates the introduction of new, delegation-based structures. Jasinka (2018) asserts that delegating enhances organizational flexibility during the third phase of growth. Middle-level managers are more receptive to prospects for new goods and markets now that they have outsourced part of their responsibilities. Top-level communication is quite professional and typically occurs via letter, phone, or quick in-person meetings. The feeling of top management losing control is a result of the organization's size and diversity. As a result, a crisis of control arises, and cooperation is the only option.

Coordination and monitoring help the organization flourish in the fourth phase.The red tape crisis marks the conclusion of this period, during which cooperation must be sought in order to advance. Accepting growth via cooperation ushers in the fifth phase. According to Greiner's (1972) theory, phase five evolution revolves around a more adaptable and behavioral approach to management. This approach is typified by the use of team-based incentive schemes instead of individual ones, the integration of teams from different functions for task-group activities, and the training of managers in behavioral skills to improve teamwork and conflict resolution. An internal growth problem marks the end of this period. The organization has to look for and form outside partnerships in order to keep expanding. Growth through extra-organizational solutions, such as networks, outsourcing, mergers, and other workable solutions involving other organizations, is the sixth and last step in the model.Because it describes the many stages and crises that each firm will encounter as it expands from its founding to a larger organization, this model is pertinent to our research.

Empirical Review

The impact of market expansion tactics on the operations of small and medium-sized businesses in Benue State, Nigeria, was investigated by Asenge and Asue (2020). The study especially looked at how small and medium-sized businesses in Benue State, Nigeria, performed in relation to their strategies for product creation, market penetration, and providing excellent customer service. The study employed a survey research design, and the tool for gathering data was a questionnaire. 281 SMEs in Makurdi city, chosen from a variety of industries including as retail/wholesale, services, agribusiness, and manufacturing, make up the study's population. Regression analysis was used to test hypotheses, while mean and standard deviation were employed to show and analyze data.The study's conclusions showed that the success of small and medium-sized businesses in Benue State, Nigeria, is significantly impacted by their strategies for product creation and market penetration. The study also showed that the success of small and medium-sized businesses in Benue State, Nigeria, is significantly impacted by superior customer service strategies. Among other things, the report said that Benue State SMEs' owners should always employ tactics that would meet market demands in order to draw in more clients and contend with rivals.

The impact of entrepreneurial resilience on the operations of small and medium-sized businesses in Asaba, Delta State, was investigated by Emueje, Olannye, and Olanye (2020). The study design approach used was a cross-sectional survey. The stratified random sampling approach was used in the investigation. There were only 201 responders in the sample. The research tool used in the study was a structured questionnaire. The data was analyzed using multiple regression analysis and descriptive statistics. The results decisively demonstrated that proactivity, strategic variety, and resourcefulness had a significant positive correlation with organizational success. According to the study's findings, organizational performance is positively impacted by entrepreneurial resilience.According to the study's findings, resourcefulness has the biggest positive impact on an organization's success. Therefore, the study suggested that the failure rate of small and medium-sized businesses may be decreased if businesses comprehend the nature of the relationship among the aspects of entrepreneurial resilience.

A research on how strategic agility might lessen the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on small and medium-sized businesses was conducted by Emejale, Agbasi, and Nosike (2020). They decided to use a survey study design. There were 1500 people in the study's population, and 306 company owners were selected using the Krejcie and Morgan algorithm. Questionnaires were used to gather data, and the basic regression approach was used for analysis. The findings of the study revealed that policy of strategic foresight will help companies to be conversant with happenings in their external environment so as to be prepared for any crisis or adversity.

Machuki (2012) concentrated on the connection between the success of companies in Kenya's banking sector and the organic development techniques they adopt. He took into account tactics like product development, market expansion, and innovation. He discovered that internal growth plans and bank performance were significantly correlated. Additionally, the study discovered that the association between growth strategies and bank performance was somewhat mediated by the strategy implementation circumstances required for each strategy to be executed. However, the current study focused on the performance of SMEs in Thika Sub-County and covered market penetration and diversification methods.

3.0 Research Methodology

Research designthe cross sectional survey design was utilized in this study.

Population for the studythe target population for the study comprised of all small and medium scale businesses in Rivers state. The accessible population in this study are 60 owners of SMEs in Rivers State. In selecting the population for the study, the researcher focused on the business owners. Therefore, the selected owners from the SMEs under review are the sample representatives for this study. The justification for these selections is because they partake in decision making, and have good knowledge of the operations and resilience as well as the strategic decisions of the organization as a whole, hence their selection.

Sampling techniquethe statistical technique adopted in selecting the sample for this study is the purposive sampling technique. A purposive sample is a non-probability sample that is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study.For the purpose of this study, the sample was not drawn from the entire population because the population of the study which is sixty (60) was deemed manageable.

Data collection method. The primary and secondary data was used in this research work. The primary data was obtained using a structured questionnaire, while the secondary data was obtained through available text books, journal articles, internet.

Validity of research instrument The face and content validity was used to establish the content validity of the instrument. The instrument was subjected to an assessment by experts in the field of management.

Reliability of research instrument the reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 with the aid of SPSS version 23.

Data analysis techniquethe data for this study was analyzed by using Spearmans Rank Order Correlation Coefficient, which is a non-parametric statistical test.

Results and Discussion

Bivariate Analysis

In this section, data results for the analysis and tests for the hypotheses were presented. The bivariate relationship was tested in this section using the Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient statistical tool at a 95% confidence interval. The decision rule was set at a critical region of $p > 0.05$ for acceptance of the null hypothesis and $p < 0.05$ for rejection of the null hypothesis.

Table 1: Strategic Partnershipand Adaptive capability

Correlations

			Strategic Partnership	Adaptive Capacity
Spearman's rho	Strategic Partnership	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.621**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	60	60
	Adaptive Capacity	Correlation Coefficient	.621**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	60	60

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

Hypothesis one: There is no significant relationship between Strategic Partnership and Adaptive capability.

Data in table 1 revealed that there is a significant relationship between strategic partnership and Adaptive capability ($p = .000$ and rho = 0.621) hence we find that strategic partnership is associated with Adaptive capability and the association is positive. This means that, an increase in strategic partnership will lead to an increase in Adaptive capability and vice versa. Based on the decision rule of $p < 0.05$ for null rejection; we therefore reject the null hypothesis and restate that there is a significant relationship between strategic partnership and Adaptive capability of SMEs in Rivers State.Table 2:Strategic Partnership and Organizational learning

Correlations

			Strategic Partnership	Organizational Learning
Spearman's rho	Strategic Partnership	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.420**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.007
		N	60	60
	Organizational Learning	Correlation Coefficient	.420**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.
		N	60	60

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

Hypothesis two: There is no significant relationship between strategic partnership and Organizational learning.

Data in table 2 revealed that there is a significant relationship between strategic partnership and organizational learning ($p = .007$ and $rho = 0.420$) hence we find that strategic partnership is associated with organizational learning and the association is positive. This means that, an increase in strategic partnership leads to an increase in organizational learning and vice versa. Based on the decision rule of $p < 0.05$ for null rejection, we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate that there is a significant relationship between strategic partnership and organizational learning.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the above findings, the study realized

Hypothesis one: There is no significant relationship between strategic partnership and adaptive capability of small and medium scale manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

Data in table 1 revealed that there is a significant relationship between strategic partnership and adaptive capability ($p = .008$ and $rho = 0.621$). The Spearman correlation coefficient revealed that strategic partnership correlates with adaptive capability at .621. This showed that there is a moderate positive relationship between strategic partnership and adaptive capability. Thus, strategic partnership subsequently boosts adaptive capabilityand vice versa. This finding is in agreement with that ofSimşek& Celik, 2008) that enterprises can expand independently using their existing equity, just as they can by utilizing the national or international resources of other enterprises that are already in operation. In addition, SMEsshould rapidly and effectively reconfigure, coordinate, recombine, and allocate resources to address market fluctuations (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004)

Hypothesis two: There is no significant relationship between strategic partnership and organizational learning of small and medium scale manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

Data in table 2 revealed that there is a significant relationship between strategic partnership and organizational learning ($p = .008$ and $rho = 0.420$). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that for every increase or change in strategic partnership, organizational learningis influenced in either ways. This means that organizational learningis affected by changes in strategic partnership. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Öncer (2012) who pointed that businesses prefer strategic partnership development for a number of reasons which includes increasing profit margins, cutting costs, adding value, utilizing scale economies, and transferring knowledge and technology.

Conclusion

The study revealed that there is a significant relationship between strategic partnership and resilience of SMEsin Rivers State. More importantly,, strategic partnership has positive and significant relationship with the dimensions of resilience i.e. adaptive capacity and organizational learning.This suggests that SMEs involved in strategic partnership are better equipped to adapt to changes and challenges in their environment. The study further found that strategic partnership haspositive relationship with organizational learning, demonstrating that firms growing internally are likely to foster a learning environment that promotes continuous improvement and innovation. Therefore, SMEs should endeavor to enhance their resilience by strategically focusing on partnership that enhances their operations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made to enhance the resilience of small and medium scale manufacturing firms in Rivers State:

1. SMEs in Rivers State should adapt strategic partnership to enhance the fostering of a culture where employees will feel empowered to think and act imaginatively in situations where changes which were previously unknown manifests in the present time, and in addition, establish the strategies to manage the risks involved.
2. SMEs firms should engage in organizational learning in order to gain new information or change already existing knowledge, behaviours, skills for the enhancement of personal intuition to proactively anticipate changes in the environment.

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