

## DIFFERENTIAL EFFECT OF EDUCATION LEVELS AND BUSINESS EXPERIENCE ON INNOVATIVE CULTURE OF MICRO, SMALL, AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES' OWNERS

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### Abstract

This study examined the differential effect of education level and business experience on the innovative culture of micro, small and medium-scale enterprises (MSMEs) owners in South-West Nigeria. Two hypotheses were formulated and knowledge-based view theory was used. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The sample comprised one thousand, three hundred and eighty-two (1382). Data were collected using instruments titled "Education, Experience level and innovative Culture Questionnaire ( $r = 0.68$ ). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results showed a significant difference in the innovative culture of MSME Owners' based on level of education, and no significant difference existed in the innovative culture of MSME Owners based on level of experience. Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that government should ensure that the policy to build an entrepreneurial spirit of all students, irrespective of their level, should be well supervised. The policy will give the economy a vibrant youth equipped with innovative practices to boost the economy. The government can help enforce training, seminars, and refreshers courses for MSMEs Owners; this will go a long way in motivating the innovators to keep injecting new ideas into their respective organizations.

### Keywords

Education Levels, Business Experience, Innovative Culture, Covid-19 Pandemic, and MSMEs

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of Micro, Small, and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMEs) to a nation's economy and growth cannot be overemphasized. However, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic greatly influenced the success and performance of Micro, Small, and Medium-scale Enterprises (MSMEs) businesses in developed and developing countries. The introduction of border closure, lockdown, and social distancing in 2020 forced many MSMEs owners to lay off some workers and close their businesses. Even the existing ones, despite the competitive nature of their business, had to introduce innovative practices (create new ideas) that will keep them going to reduce the economic damages that threaten their survival (Bularafa & Adamu, 2021; Blustein et al., 2020; Fernandes, 2020; Hamilton, 2020 & O'Connor et al., 2020). This shows that the advent of this pandemic has accelerated the use of innovative practices or solutions, resulting in a changing innovation landscape (Ebersberger & Kuckertz, 2021; Galanakis et al., 2021).

Innovation is defined as the creation of new thoughts, procedures, and products. In general, innovation aims to solve the problems related to the business (Ceyda & Vahap, 2017). Omodafe and Nwaizugbo (2017) also describe innovation as the creation, progress, and accomplishment of a new product, process, or service to improve competence, success, or competitive advantage. According to Ceyda and Vahap (2017), the primary purposes of innovation are to continue existence for firms, to be a leader in the market, and to increase profit. For MSMEs owners to be successful even in the face of the changing environment created by the COVID-19 pandemic, they must make innovative practices their daily lifestyle in order to sustain their financial performance, create value and achieve a competitive advantage (Bagherzadeh et al., 2020; Iglesias et al., 2020).

Innovation is a critical issue that SME owners can not do without because it enhances companies' rapid growth and profit margins (Bukki, Oguntimehin, & Adeyemi, 2019). To make an innovation culture means that SMEs Owners consistently make their operational and managerial attitude, beliefs, approach, commitment, etc., towards innovation which will give them a strategic advantage (Calik, Calisir & Cetinguc, 2017). An innovative culture is a sum of a self-sustaining pattern of behaviour, thinking, and decision that determines how firms see and conduct innovation. According to Kasper (2008), the conceptual framework for innovation incorporates five fundamental stages, they are:

- Setting the conditions required to support innovation
- Identifying the problem or opportunity about what to innovate
- Generating ideas to solve the problem or capture the opportunity
- Experimenting and piloting those ideas to test how well they work in practice
- Sharing the innovations with a broader set of stakeholders

According to the stages of Kasper's model, it means that the innovative potential of any business owner resides in their knowledge, skills, and abilities, which are products of their levels of education and business experience.

As variables in this study, level of education and business experience are influential deciding factors of the extent of SMEs owners' innovative culture. The level of education of business owners is a crucial source of firm innovative efforts because acquired education is attributed to cognitive ability, capacity for information processing, tolerance for ambiguity, and propensity or receptivity to innovation. As education provides individuals with the right skills throughout the planned formative years, it also enlightens individuals about opportunities and the different perspectives on how to explore the opportunities.

Past researchers (Yan Yong-hai, 2010; Radas & Bozic, 2009) supported this assertion when they found that levels of education significantly influence innovation, research, and development. The works of Pradeep, Visvanathan, and Ricardo (2013) revealed that a positive relationship existed between the level of education of business owners and their respective business abilities to increase business growth. The findings of Mwanja (2015) and Faloye (2015) also buttress it that the academic educational background of owners/managers acted as a significant variable influencing the performance of entrepreneurial ventures when comparing a company's products regularly with those of its competitors, extent of foreign collaboration/Number of external partners, prior experience of owner-manager, and availability of patent and copyright. According to Ali (2019), the acquired education/training programme also played a tremendous role in the work experiences of MSMEs Owners/Managers.

MSMEs Owners / Managers' work experience plays a significant role in their firms' productivity, "especially when the owner has a high educational level" (Nyaboke & Willy, 2016 in Nassiuma, Masinde, Chebii & Sergon, 2021). Experience is the knowledge gained by an individual during work or repeated actions. In contrast, business experience is the "way meaning unfolds in the mind of the business owners to define their action in reality" (Akinbinu, Chiloane-Phetla & Ngwakwe, 2020). Work experiences can also be acquired from a previous business and applied to new business settings (Haber and Reichel, 2007 in Chachar, 2013). It also assists firms' owners in acquiring business knowledge that helps to "overcome the fear of innovation failure, and be more confident when innovating" (Li & Zheng, 2014) and moulding "an associated network for entrepreneurship" (Uddin, Mohammad & Hammami, 2016).

The study of Van, Fotouhi, Carraher, and Khojasteh (2021) also buttresses that work experience is one of the most critical factors affecting innovation in any firm. The study of Emami et al. (2019) also buttressed it that differences in the experiences of business entrepreneurs do affect their decisions concerning the business. Experience often influences business owners' "planning quality" (Chwolka & Raith, 2012). Although much research had been conducted on the difference in the level of education and experience in firms' innovative behaviour, but there is still a paucity of research on how differences in the level of education and experience foster MSMEs owners' innovative culture after the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, mainly, in the south-western part of Nigeria.

### **1.1 Purpose of the Study**

The study's specific objectives are to determine the differential effect of education level and business experience on the innovative culture of micro, small and medium-scale enterprises (MSMEs) owners in South-West Nigeria.

### **1.2 Statement of the Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses are formulated to guide the study.

1. There is no significant difference in the innovative culture of SME owners in South-West Nigeria based on the level of education.
2. There is no significant difference in the innovative culture of SME owners in South-West Nigeria based on years of experience.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

#### **Knowledge-Based View Theory (KBV)**

The major proponents of the knowledge-based view of the firm (KBV) are Conner (1991) and Grant (1996). This theory sees knowledge as a significant resource in any firm. The main categories of KBV are tacit knowledge (knowing how) and explicit knowledge (knowing about facts and theories). These two categories are the products of education and experience. This theory is relevant because the principal assumption of KBV is that innovation is a function of the firm's ability to manage, maintain, and create knowledge. As knowledge is created (either through the education received or through experience), it has the potential to contribute to the firm's value by enhancing its capability to respond to new and unusual situations. (Leal-Rodríguez, Leal-Millán, Roldán-Salgueiro & Ortega-Gutiérrez, 2013).

### **2.2 Conceptual Framework**

#### **Concept of Innovation**

Innovation is defined as the creation of new thoughts, procedures and products. In general, innovation aims to solve the problems related to the business (Ceyda & Vahap, 2017). Innovation, as a system, emphasises interactions between involved agents and the knowledge these interactions produce. Innovation is seen as a process that tackles the characteristics of how innovation happens and inborn abilities to complete the required activities (Moreno Rojas & García Carrillo, 2014, as cited in Moreno & Flores, 2016). The main motivations for innovation, according to Ceyda and Vahap (2017), are as follows:

1. To continue existence for firms: Firms mostly produce more than one good or service. It results in the necessity of competing in more than one market. Firms ought to revamp themselves with a specific end goal to keep their competitive advantages
2. To be a leader in the market: Firms can be the pioneer as long as they fulfil the requirements of clients and what they need precisely. They should also implement all of the innovations in the specific market or technology.
3. To increase profit: Profitability demonstrates one of the key performance indicators of an enterprise. Innovations diminish cost and increase effectiveness and performance if they become successful. Innovative projects have a specific cost. These projects increase the profitability of a firm after some time.

According to Aliyu and Julius (2015), innovation activity requires certain levels of professional, innovative culture in a firm where employees are involved with the matter of arrangement detailing and are tested to submit new innovative thoughts. They are as follows.

- The structure and programme of voluntary participation to develop support and assess initiative and creativity,
- Develop organisational culture and positive environment for creative development in the organisation and
- Develop analytic instruments that would empower the appraisal of performance in creativity and innovation:

The essential presumption is that culture is key in empowering organisations to accomplish speed and adaptability in innovation. It is proposed that satisfactory culture infuses new thoughts

into the association, expands the ability to see new thoughts and fortifies creativity and the capacity to spot new opportunities that favour organisational innovation (Leal-Rodríguez, Leal-Millán, Roldán-Salgueiro and OrtegaGutiérrez, 2013).

### **Concept of Innovative Culture**

Innovative culture can be characterised as a multi-dimensional context that incorporates the expectation to be creative, the foundation to support innovation, operational level behaviours necessary to influence a market and value orientation, and the environment to implement innovation (Dobni, 2008 as cited in Strychalska-Rudzewicz, 2014). An innovative culture is a way of thinking and behaving that creates, develops and establishes values and attitudes within a firm, which may in turn raise, accept and support ideas and changes involving an improvement in the functioning and efficiency of the firm, even though such changes may mean a contention with ordinary and conventional behaviour.

Rao and Weintraub (2013), as cited by Lakiza (2018), believed that an innovative organisation's culture depends on six interrelated building blocks. Three of the six blocks are more tangible and simple to measure: resources, procedures and achievement. These frequently appeal to administrators expecting to revive their firm's innovative capabilities. The other three blocks are qualities, behaviour and climate. They are more human-focused and intangible and, in this manner, more hard to quantify. These blocks are regularly disregarded as directors tend to be less positive about exploring through these human viewpoints. SMEs must keep up innovative practices on a continuous premise if they want to catch a portion of any market at some random point inside the present profoundly focused condition.

According to Losane (2013), innovation culture includes five main stages, they are Strategy or setting main conditions required to support innovation; Focus on or identify the problem or opportunity in which you want to innovate; Generating ideas to solve problems or support opportunities; Experimenting and piloting new ideas; and Sharing the innovation. Midgley (2010), as cited by Obiri, Iwara, Kalu, Ezebor and Alabi (2018), also highlighted key activities that must be overseen well in building an effective culture of innovation. These exercises are:

- Chartering creativity and innovation within an enterprise: This is aimed at directing creative and innovative activities to important aspects of an organisation.
- Appointing, developing and supporting the qualified team: For creativity and innovation to become successful, effective and efficient project teams are required. They ought to comprehend customer needs, plan arrangements, propose systems, produce thoughts and conceptualise.
- Co-creating innovation with consumers: Preceding propelling an innovation, different perspectives and assessments are required, and buyers make an essential rational perspective. Innovation without any eventual benefits for consumers does not increase profits for SMEs.
- Restructuring the organisation to accomplish the innovation: For innovations to emerge, organisations need to review and make changes to employee training techniques, working practices, and the overall organisational culture.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. It allows the researcher to collect data without manipulating any of the variables of interest in the study. The target population comprised 26,744 business owners/managers of registered small and medium-scale enterprises in the Six states. A sample of 1,382 business owners/managers that were selected using a random sampling method was used for the study.

The instrument used for this study was titled ‘Education, Experience level and Innovative Culture Questionnaire (EELICSOQ). It measures SMEs Owners' education, experience level, and innovative culture in southwest Nigeria. The questionnaire is divided into two (2) sections (i.e., A and B). Section A requests for the SMEs Owners' profiles on educational level and experience level, while Section B contains 20 items designed to measure respondents' innovative culture. The items were adopted from Abdi and Ali's (2013) scale on innovativeness. Each item in this section is rated on a five-point Likert scale. These items were developed from prior research and tested for reliability, which yielded Cronbach Alpha values of more than 0.7 (Abdi & Ali, 2013). In revalidating the items in this section to suit the local use, a test-retest reliability technique of two-week intervals was applied to thirty (30) business owners and yielded a coefficient of 0.68.

The researcher, with three trained research assistants, visited the SMEs Owners or Managers for their support and permission to collect data needed within twelve (12) weeks. The statistical analysis used for analysing the hypotheses of this study was Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to indicate the level of difference at a 0.05% significance level.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference in the innovative culture of SME owners in South-West, Nigeria, based on level of education.

Table 1: Analysis of SMEs Owners' Innovative Culture based on Level of Education

|                | Sum of Squares | df   | Mean Square | F     | Sig. | p      |
|----------------|----------------|------|-------------|-------|------|--------|
| Between Groups | 3903.198       | 5    | 780.640     | 5.661 | .000 | p<0.05 |
| Within Groups  | 189754.203     | 1376 | 137.903     |       |      |        |
| Total          | 193657.402     | 1381 |             |       |      |        |

\* Significant at the 0.05 level

The result in Table 1 showed an ANOVA test on the innovative culture of SME owners in South-West, Nigeria, based on their level of education. The F-value of 5.661 obtained in the test is significant at a 0.05 level of significance. It implies a significant difference in the innovative culture of SME owners in South-West Nigeria based on the level of education. The null hypothesis was rejected. To further determine the extent of the difference between groups, a post hoc comparison was carried out. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparisons of the SMEs Owners' innovative culture based on level of education

| SMEs Owners' Profile                    | Mean Difference | Std. Error | Sig  |
|---|-----------------|------------|------|
| Primary School* Senior Secondary School | .03805          | 2.00035    | .985 |
| Primary School* ND/NCE                  | -3.27763        | 1.96234    | .095 |
| Primary School* HND/First Degree        | -4.31474*       | 1.92357    | .025 |



|   |           |         |      |
|---|-----------|---------|------|
| Primary School* Masters                   | -1.71915  | 2.06253 | .405 |
| Primary School* Ph.D                      | -1.51912  | 2.73926 | .579 |
| Senior Secondary School *ND/NCE           | -3.31568* | .97829  | .001 |
| Senior Secondary School *HND/First Degree | -4.35280* | .89800  | .000 |
| Senior Secondary School *Masters          | -1.75720  | 1.16631 | .132 |
| Senior Secondary School *Ph.D             | -1.55717  | 2.14704 | .468 |
| ND/NCE * HND/First Degree                 | -1.03711  | .80981  | .201 |
| ND/NCE *Masters                           | 1.55848   | 1.09985 | .157 |
| ND/NCE *Ph.D                              | 1.75851   | 2.11168 | .405 |
| HND/First Degree*Masters                  | 2.59559*  | 1.02909 | .012 |
| HND/First Degree*Ph.D                     | 2.79563   | 2.07570 | .178 |
| Masters *Ph.D                             | .20003    | 2.20509 | .928 |

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

From Table 2, multiple comparisons of the mean values of four groups show a significant mean difference. The groups are Primary School and HND/First Degree (4.314), Senior Secondary School and ND/NCE (3.315), Senior Secondary School and HND/First Degree (4.352), and HND/First Degree and Masters (2.595). The other differences were not significant at the 0.05 level. The total of these results is that the rating of SMEs Owners' innovative culture with Primary school certificate, Senior Secondary School and ND/NCE were significantly different from those with HND/First Degree and Master. It implies that the highly educated SMEs Owners have better innovative culture than the low or non-educated ones.

The result aligns with Talebi and Tajeddin's (2020) assertion, who said that the “degree of functional knowledge is related to the level and relevance of formal training .” This study's result agrees with the findings of Yong-hai (2010), Pradeep, Visvanathan, and Ricardo (2013), who found that level of education of business owners significantly influences innovation, research, and development. It also supported the findings of Mwanja (2015) and Faloye (2015). They revealed that the academic educational background of owners/managers acted as a significant variable influencing the performance of entrepreneurial ventures if the company's products are regularly compared with its competitors, extent of foreign collaboration / Number of external partners, prior experience of owner-manager, and availability of patent and copyright. The reasons for this could be because the knowledge received from being educated do assist to build an innovative mindset of people and this invariably will have bearing on their business thinking/perception, business behaviour and skills needed for a successful business (Ismail & Naqshbandi, 2022).

**Hypothesis two:** There is no significant difference in the innovative culture of SME owners in South-West, Nigeria, based on experience level.

Table 3: Analysis of SMEs Owners’ Innovative Culture based on Level of Experience

|                | Sum of Squares | df   | Mean Square | F     | Sig. | p      |
|----------------|----------------|------|-------------|-------|------|--------|
| Between Groups | 769.553        | 4    | 192.388     | 1.373 | .241 | p>0.05 |
| Within Groups  | 192887.849     | 1377 | 140.078     |       |      |        |
| Total          | 193657.402     | 1381 |             |       |      |        |

\* Not Significant at the 0.05 level

Table 3 presents the result of the ANOVA test on the innovative culture of SME owners in South-West, Nigeria, based on their experience level. The F-value of 1.373 obtained in the test is not significant at a 0.05 level of significance. It implies that there was no significant difference in the innovative culture of SME owners in South-West, Nigeria, based on experience level. The null hypothesis is retained, which means that their innovative culture was not affected by the levels of experience possessed by the owners of the SMEs in southwest Nigeria. This result contradicted the findings of Van, Fotouhi, Carraher & Khojasteh (2021), who revealed that experience was one of the most critical factors affecting the innovation of any firm. This result revealed that irrespective of the academic degrees possessed by business owners, experience level helps to implant the needed boost, technical assistance and propensity for business innovation. According to Virglerova, Dobes, Kramolis and Kotaskova (2017), business owners with a higher level of experience and education are more aware of the challenges of business innovation than those with a lower level of education

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evidence in this study revealed that SMEs Owners' innovative culture differs when associated with the educational level. At the same time, no significant difference existed in their innovative culture based on work experience. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that government should ensure that the policy to build an entrepreneurial spirit of all students, irrespective of their level, should be well supervised. Introducing the policy will give the economy a vibrant youth equipped with innovative practices that will boost the economy. The government can help enforce training and seminars for SMEs Owners; this will go a long way in motivating the innovators to keep injecting new ideas into their respective organizations.

Business owners are advised to undergo training and retraining regularly, form a networking system of collaborations, and undertake and attend seminars, conferences, and workshops on the management of MSME's acquisition of modern skills in technology, accountability, and information in improving their activities. The researcher suggests the following areas for further studies: Future research could use a broader sample of SMEs; this would help to reveal its condition in a difference sector *and* whether it will generate a similar outcome. In addition, the geographical location of the sample should cover a wider geographical distribution. A broader geographic sampling would provide a better reflection of the national profile.

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