MODERATING EFFECT OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT ON ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION AND PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN NORTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial orientation are widely acceptable means of resolving challenges of SMEs in Nigeria as they prepare individuals for the establishment and operations of SMEs. This study empirically examined the role of government support on the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and SMEs performance in northwestern Nigeria. The study is based on primary data collected from six hundred and eighty-six owner managers using structured questionnaire. The data was analysed using the technique of structural equation modelling and PLS version 3 was used for the analysis. The finding of this study revealed that innovativeness, pro-activeness and risk-taking propensity significantly impact on performance of SMEs in Northwestern Nigeria and government support does not significantly moderate the relation between entrepreneurial orientation and SMEs performance in northwestern Nigeria. The study concluded that provision of adequate training on entrepreneurial orientation will promote SMEs performance in northwestern Nigeria and the nature of government support need to be revisited to enhance SMEs operations. The study recommended that government should provide adequate entrepreneurial orientation programmes to entrepreneurs to boast their performance and device other means of providing support to increase the operational performance of SMEs.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Orientation, Innovativeness, pro-activeness, risk taking, SMEs Performance

Introduction

An increasing attention among researchers and policy makers around the world has been on the performance and contributions of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). This is because SMEs play an important role in terms of poverty reduction and job creation in many countries (Salisu 2021). SMEs are the major engines that drive economic growth and development through job creation, employment, tax provision and contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of many countries (OECD, 2016). Also, they are regarded as the main source of employment, accounting for about 70 percent of jobs on average, and are the main factors in creating value, creating an average of 50 percent to 60 percent of value added (OECD, 2016). According to the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics, (2017), SMEs account for 90 percent of all businesses, contribute to more than 50 percent of tax revenue, over 80 percent of urban employment and contribute to about 60 percent of Chinese GDP. Similarly, South African Ministry of Trade and

Industry (2017) reported that 91 percent of the formal businesses are SMEs, they account for 60 percent of employment and contribute to 52 percent to 57 percent of their GDP.

However, in Nigeria, compared to other countries of the world, the performance and contribution of SMEs in employment creation and contribution to the GDP are generally poor. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and SMEDAN survey (2017), the total number SMEs in Nigeria are 7,381, accounting for only 8.89 percent of the country`s GDP which is very low. Manufacturers Association of Nigeria [MAN] (2023) also reported that about 80% of SMES fail in their fifth anniversary due to many factors, and only 5 percent to 10 percent of enterprises can survive and mature (SMEDAN, 2017). To add weight to the above arguments, the World Economic Forum Survey (2019) ranked Nigeria as the 116th compared to South African as the 60th and Morocco as the 75th out of the 140th countries in the Global Competitiveness Index.

In order to reverse the negative trend of the poor performance of SMEs, successive governments have made several efforts by launching various initiatives and programmes which were designed to specifically solve the problems of poor SME performance in Nigeria. However, despite the intervention programmes and policies by the government, SMEs are still underperforming (SMEDAN, 2021). Thus, given the potential of SMEs as the engine that reduces unemployment in society and adds to the growth and development of the nation, there are underlying issues that make them fail within the first five years of operation. This high failure rate is usually recorded due to many factors among which is lack of entrepreneurial orientation. Originally, Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) concept was introduced by Miller (1983) that illustrates EO as entrepreneurial firm that engages in innovation, risky venture, and proactiveness so that their competitors are beaten. Based on this definition, EO is recognized by three components of innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking.

The first dimension is innovativeness which is the entrepreneurial decision to engage in new technology, idea, product, services and experiment so that an existing product is modified or replaced, (Kumarpeli & Semasinghe 2015). They also found that innovation will create success, and increase gaining of a business in a community. Risk-taking dimension entails the ability to take action or decisions in order to move forward, even before knowing the results. Risk taking is acknowledged by Theresa and Hidaya (2021) as the needed ingredient for a firm to grow. Akingbade and Famodun (2024) added that SMEs risk-taking is the ability of the people in a firm to make a bold and well-calculated decisions when entering existing or new markets. It has to do investing resources to ventures with uncertain outcomes and a willingness to invest in business ideas that other SMEs may decide not to due to fear. Risk is identified as an important indicator of EO when assessing the degree of survival among SMEs (Akingbade & Famodun, 2024).

The proactiveness dimension means looking forward and seeking opportunities (Akingbade & Famosun, 2024). It means a firm launching novel products that are not produced or taught of by the rivals in the industry. This gives the proactive SME first mover advantage and increase its level of survival. This further implies that proactive firms are first to recognize opportunity and are aware and responsive to market signals ahead of competitors (Zaato, Ismail, Uthamaputhran & Owusu-Ansah, 2020).

Extant literatures have investigated the nexus between EO and SME performance. However, the findings were inconclusive. For instance, positive relationship between EO and SME performance has been established by, Aminu (2016); Brownhilder and Johan (2017); Amin, (2015); Baker, Mahmood and Ismail, (2015); Civelek, Rahman and Kozubikowa (2016); Civelek, Rahman and Kozubikowa, (2016); Maroofi, (2017); Li et al. (2009); Zhang et al. (2012); Amin (2015); Asad et al. (2016); Wolff et al. (2015); Sidek et al. (2019) among others. However, other studies (Oktavio et al., 2019; Vega-Vázquez et al., 2016; Anwar and Shah, 2021; Fairoz, Hirobumi and Tanaka, 2010; Rauchi, Wilkhund, Lumpkin and Freese, (2009) among others, have established negative relationship between EO and performance. Based on these inconsistent findings, this study considers the introduction of a moderating variable (Baron & Kenny, 1983). Specifically,

government support is introduced as a moderating variable to strengthen the relationship between the dimensions of EO and SMEs performance.

Government support is seen as the programmes or interventions developed by the government to facilitate and stimulate success of business activities of SMEs (Shamsuddin & Ali, 2015). In essence, the government promote the SME sector through different ways among which are tax reliefs, grants, loans, social support, and financial support. Hence, these government support programmes are viewed as important tools for enhancing the performance of SMEs (Adegbuyi & Ibidunni, 2018). Studies in the literature have established that government support is significant in enhancing SMEs performance (Tende, 2014; Eniola & Entebang, 2015; Hadiyati, 2015; Shariff, Peou, & Ali, 2010). This study therefore based on Resource Based View (RBV), theorize that, government support would strengthen the relationship between EO and SMEs performance. It therefore means, the effect of EO on SME performance is contingent upon government support. The model posits that SMEs who have EO and receive government support will be more performing than SMEs that do not receive government support.

The objectives of the current study are therefore to determine the effect of EO on SMEs performance as well as the moderating effect of government support on the relationship between EO and SMEs performance. To achieve the study`s objectives, this paper is divided into five sections. Section one is introduction, section two covers literature review, section three covers the methodology, section four covers discussion of findings and finally, section five covers conclusion and recommendation.

2. Literature Review

SME Performance

SME performance can be described as the success recorded by an organization or firm in its daily business activities. In the opinion of Long Kweh (2004), The performance of an SME refers to its capacity to produce specific outcomes in the course of normal business operations. Equally, Sandberg (2003), viewed the performance of SME from organizational goals particularly with respect to survival, growth, creating of employment and alleviation of poverty. Thus, SME performance describes the outcomes of a firm`s series of actions or activities (Don, 2006). Therefore, SME performance is considered to be the outcomes of many activities which constitutes; efficiency, effectiveness, productivity and growth (Mandy, 2009). So, it's important to remember that small and medium-sized business owners need to have a good understanding of how well they are doing in terms of making both their employees and customers happy. Therefore, this study described SME performance as how well a small or medium-sized business uses its resources to achieve its goals and objectives.

Entrepreneurial Orientation

Entrepreneurial orientation according to Covin and Slevin (1989) is seen as the overall competitive orientation of a firm. According to Miller (1983), an entrepreneurial firm is a firm that engages in product and market innovation, undertaking somewhat risky business, as well as been proactive against its competitors. Hence, based on these understanding, EO is viewed as a multidimensional variable comprising proactiveness, innovativeness, and risk taking, (Miller, 1983).

Proactiveness dimension is associated with seeking first mover advantage and efforts that are forward looking that shapes the environment of the business by the introduction of new products or services ahead of rival firms in the industry (Rauch et al, 2009). It also includes initiative efforts and applying existing advantages in shaping the business environment and responding to competitive challenges (Wang *et al*., 2001). Hence, a firm will always be the first

to come up with proactive moves in terms of its products and beat other competitors (Miller, 1983).

The second dimension is innovativeness which refers to the effort by a firm in finding new opportunities and new solutions (Wang et al, 2001). Kumarpeli and Semansinghe (2015) see innovativeness as as the decision of the entrepreneur to engage in new technology, idea, product, services and experiment in order to modify or replace the existing one. This involves an experimentation and creativity that results in new goods and services or improving technological processes (Aminu, 2015). According to Wang *et al*. (2001), innovation can be in the form of technological innovativeness, product-market innovativeness and administrative innovativeness.

The third dimension is risk-taking which is concerned with bold actions that lead to committing resources to venture into uncertain market environments (Rauch *et al*., 2009). Such risk-taking according to Mohammad (2015) could be in the form of risk preference, risk perception, and risk propensity. Risk-taking involves activities such as highly borrowing as well as a high percentage of resources commitments into uncertain projects and unknown markets (Lyon *et al*., 2000). In the opinion of Aminu (2015), when such risky investment is succeeded, it fetches a high return. Essentially, Miller (1983) opined that firms that have managers that are bold in taking business related risk are more likely to achieve and sustain competitive advantage than non-entrepreneurial firms that are risk-averse (fear to take risk).

Empirical Review

Several efforts have been made to explore the nexus between EO and SME performance in different contexts. For instance, Rahaman, Luna and Ping (2021) examined the effect of the dimensions of EO on SMEs performance in Bangladesh. Data for the study was collected from 180 SME owner managers. The study found that EO has a positive significant effect on SME performance. In another effort, Adrie *et al.* (2019), studied forty-nine new established hotels in Surabaya city. The study revealed that EO positively and significantly affected performance. Equally, Sorayah *et al.* (2017), examined the relationship between EO dimensions on business performance of one hundred and twenty-eight women entrepreneurs. The results show that only risk-taking has significant relation to performance of women business, while innovativeness and proactiveness did not. Innocent, Paul and Amaka (2018), investigated the effect of EO dimensions on SMEs performance among three hundred and forty-eight SMEs. They stated that EO dimensions have a positive but negligible effect on SME performance. Similarly, Aminu (2016), studied how innovativeness, risk-taking and pro-activeness affect financial performance of 125 small businesses in Kano State Nigeria. Findings show that that each of the dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation has a positive significant effect on financial performance.

The Moderating Role of Government Support

Consequent upon the rate of failure of SMEs especially in the Nigerian context, government has continually provided supports to SMEs so that the negative trend of SMEs failure is reversed. According to Desai (2010), the support of government is in terms of provision of encouraging business environment, incentives, and institutional support. Past studies by Eniola and Entebang (2015), as well as Hadiyati (2015) among others have established that government support has a positive significant effect on SMEs performance. Hence, it implies that SMEs who receive government support will perform better than SMEs that do not receive government support. Thus, the performance of SMEs will vary depending on the support they receive from the government. According to the moderating model, government support will strengthen the positive relationship between the dimensions of EO and SMEs performance.

Statement of Hypotheses

Based on the empirical review, the following hypotheses are developed:

$H0_1$: Entrepreneurial Orientation has no significant effect on SME performance in Northwestern Nigeria

$H0_2$: Government support does not significantly moderate the relationship between Entrepreneurial Orientation and SME performance in Northwestern Nigeria

Underpinning Theory

This study is underpinned by Resource Based View (Barney, 1991). The theory in essence explains the relationship between the dimensions of EO (independent variables), government support (moderator) and SME Performance (Dependent Variable). The theory was first originated from the work of Penrose (1959) and later modified by Barney (1991). According to the RBV theory, firm performance is based on the application of valuable tangible and intangible resources (Baney, 1991; Penrose, 1959). According to this theory, firms operating within the same industry with homogeneous resources will achieve no sustained competitive advantage. Barney (1991) added that, the main source of sustained competitive advantage of a firm ooze from its possession of heterogeneous and immobile valuable resources, rareness, inimitable and non-substitutable (VRIN). The theory further assumes that, differences in firm performance within an industry are as a result of specific resources that cannot be easily imitated by rival firms. Hence, a firm that identify and possess internal strategic resources will have the ability to create and maintain a competitive advantage and improve performance (Barney, 1991).

According to RBV, the resources of the firm are classified into tangible (physical, technological, human and financial) and intangible (knowledge, goodwill and employee`s skills) which are essential in providing quality products to the customers (Barney, 1991). EO and government support are classified as an intangible resource that a firm can use to get competitive advantage and superior performance. This study given this theoretical support is built on RBV theory to investigate the effect of the dimensions of EO on SME performance as well as the moderating role of government support on the relationship. This study theorized that EO and government support are intangible resources which rival firms cannot imitate. It therefore implies, the possession of these resources would help the firm gets competitive advantage which will in turn lead to improved performance.

3. Research Methodology

The present study utilized quantitative research design because the aim of the study is hypothesis testing or causal research. In addition, simple random sampling was used to collect the data from the respondents. The population of the study comprises of the owner managers of SMEs in northwestern Nigeria. The northwestern Nigeria was chosen because it is one of the areas were high insecurity has bedevil the economic landscape of the area leading to small business displacement. The total number of registered SMEs in this zone was 11,731 (SMEDAN, 2023). Based on Krejcie and Morgan table, the sample size is 372. In order to mitigate non-response rate, 100% was added (Hair etal, 2014) making the sample 744 which were distributed. 712 were retrieved of which twenty six were deem unusable, finally 686 questionnaires were used for analysis.

Measurement of Variables

Entrepreneurial orientation was measured using 3 items (innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking Propensity) adapted from Miller, covin and slevin (1989). Items are rated on a five-point scale ranging from always=5 to never=1. Finally, SMEs performance was measured using six items adapted from scale. The items were scored using a five-point Likert scale ranging from `1` "strongly disagree" to `5` "strongly agree."

4. Results and Discussion

The psychometric properties of the scales used in this study were assessed using individual item reliability, internal consistency reliability and discriminant validity. Firstly, the individual item reliability was assessed by the examination of the outer loadings of each construct`s measure (Hair et al, 2017). The rule of thumb has it that items with loading between 0.40-0.70 should be retained (Hair et al, 2017). Hence, all items in this model load greater than 0.4, and therefore none of the items was deleted because the AVE and Composite reliability have been achieved in the model. This is depicted in the figure 2 below:

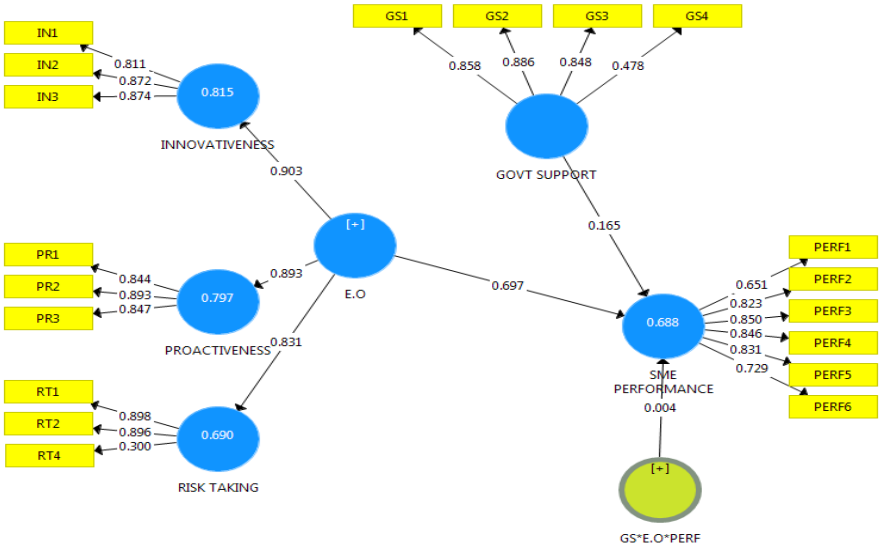

Figure 1: Measurement Model

As can be seen from Figure 1 above, the loadings of the respective constructs meet the threshold of individual item reliability. Secondly, this study employs composite reliability to assess the internal consistency of the constructs. Hair et al (2019) recommended that internal consistency reliability of 0.60 and above is significant. As can be seen in table 1, the internal consistency reliability is adequate because the CR ranges from 0.711-0.909 which is beyond the threshold. Thirdly, this study employed AVE to measure the convergent validity of the constructs. The recommended value of the AVE should be 0.50 or higher, (Hair et al, 2017). As can be seen from Table 1 below, the constructs achieved both convergent validity because the values are above the threshold. Lastly, Fornell-Larcker method was employed to assess discriminant validity. The method compares the square root of the AVE values of the latent variable correlations, and the square root of each construct`s AVE should be greater than its highest correlation with any other construct (Hair et al, 2017). As indicated in Table 2, all the reflective measurement constructs have discriminant validity because the square root of their AVEs are above their correlation with any other construct.

Table 1: Measurement Model: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Innovativeness	0.905	0.657
Proactiveness	0.908	0.711
Risking taking propensity	0.711	0.566
Government Support	0.860	0.617
SME Performance	0.909	0.627

Table 2: Measurement Model: Discriminant Validity (Fornell and Larcker)

	GS	INNO	PRO	RISK TAKING	PERF
GOVT SUPPORT	0.786				
INNOVATIVENESS	0.731	0.810			
PROACTIVENESS	0.735	0.799	0.843		
RISK TAKING	0.642	0.729	0.669	0.753	
SME PERFORMANCE	0.707	0.793	0.756	0.667	0.792

Result of the Structural Model

This is to find the predictive abilities and the interrelationships between the latent constructs (Hair et al, 2014). This study`s structural model consists of main effects where the direct relationships between entrepreneurial orientation and SMEs performance were investigated. Similarly, the interaction effect of the moderator (government support) was analyzed.

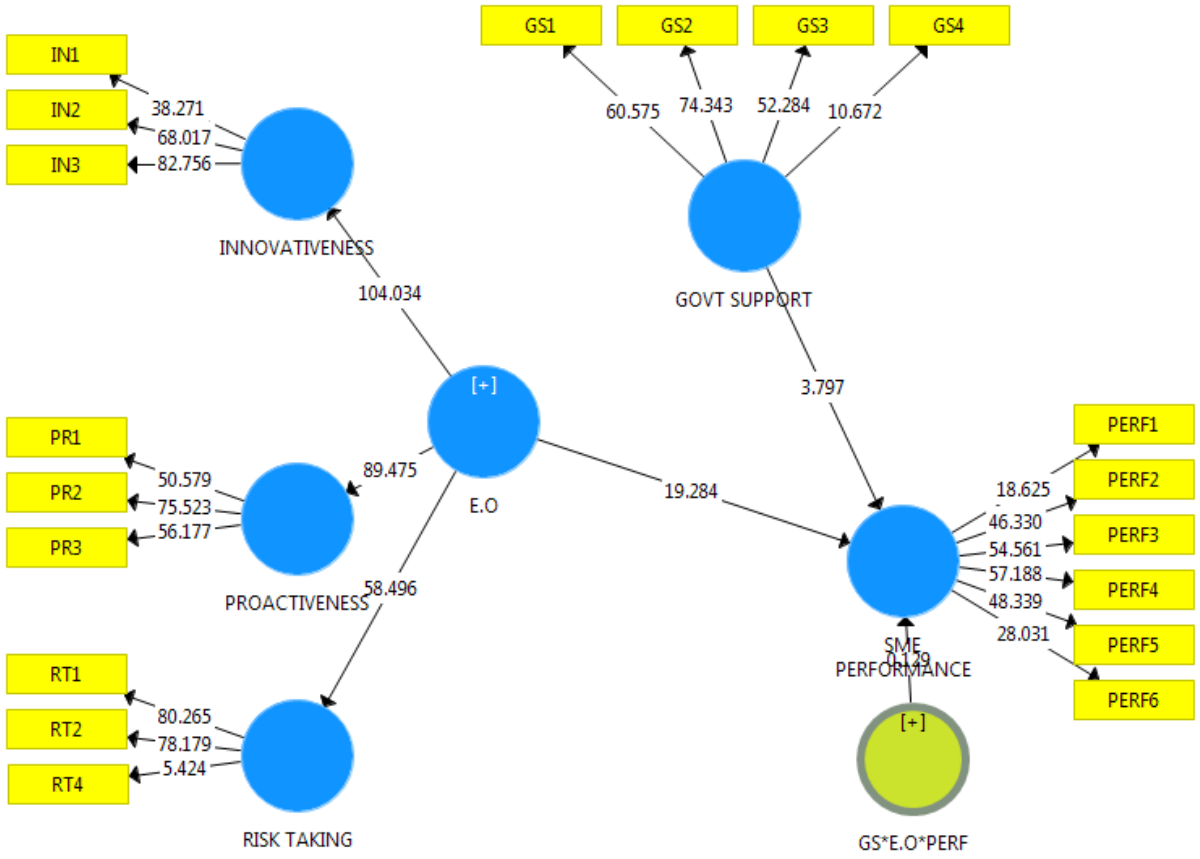

Figure 2: PLS Algorithm for Direct and Indirect Relationship

Table 3: Hypotheses test for direct and Moderating Relationship

Hyp	R/ship	B. Value	SD	T Sta.	P values	Decision
$H0_1$	EO-->PERF	0.697	0.036	19.284	0.000	Reject
$H0_2$	GS*EO-->PERF	0.004	0.029	0.129	0.897	Accept

As can be seen in the Figure 3 and Table 3, hypothesis one which stated that entrepreneurial orientation does not have significant impact on SME Performance was rejected (β=0.697,

T=19.284, P<0.000). While the second hypothesis which stated that government support does not significantly moderate the relationship between EO and SMEs Performance was accepted (β= 0.004, T=0.129, P<0.897) at 5% level of significance.

Co-efficient of Determination: R^2

The coefficient of determination (R^2 value) was examined with a view to evaluating the amount of variance explained by the exogeneous latent variables on the endogenous latent variables.

Table 4: Coefficient of Determination

Construct	R^2 value
SMEs Performance	0.688

The R^2 value of 0.688 indicates that about 69% variation in the SMEs Performance is accounted for by entrepreneurial orientation.

Discussion and Implications of Findings

The first research objective sought to investigate the direct relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and SMEs Performance. The PLS-SEM path model result reveals that entrepreneurial orientation significantly affects SMEs Performance in north western Nigeria. The implication is that higher level of entrepreneurial orientation results in higher performance by owner managers in SMEs operations. This positive relationship is consistent with RBV theory which holds that a firm's inherent diverse resources create inimitable competency that determines continuous success and ensures sustained growth (Barney, 1991). This is also supported by Morgan et al. (2009), who expressed that proper articulation of internal resources and their systematic utilization are vital for competitive advantage and sustained growth of the firm

One explanation for the positive and significant relationship is that entrepreneurial orientation is reflected in the execution processes of organizations and organizational culture as a vital element for achieving higher performance through differentiation, developing better alternatives before competitors, supporting adaptation to environmental changes and market trends, weakening competitors' competitiveness, and responding to future actions rapidly (Semrau, Ambos & Kraus, 2016).

The second objective of this study examined the moderating role of government support on the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and SMEs performance. The interaction term shows that government support does not moderate the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and SMEs performance. The implication of this finding is that the support provided to entrepreneurs by government to encourage the development of orientation was not found to be effective in the model. This might be the main reason for the failure and collapse of most SMEs in Nigeria within the first five years of establishment. The finding is contrary to previous studies such as Rahaman, Luna and Ping (2021), as well as Adrie *et al.* (2019), among others whom established that government support has a positive significant effect on SMEs performance through orientation

Conclusion and Recommendation

The current study shows the effect of entrepreneurial orientation on SMEs performance but shows no moderating role of government support on the relationship. Findings of the study underscores the need to maximize the development of entrepreneurial orientation among SMEs owner managers to maximize the performance of the firms. Additionally, the absence of government support moderation on the relationship is an indication of the fact that entrepreneurial orientation among SMEs owners is a serious problem that needs urgent attention. Based on the study findings, the study recommends that government should provide grass root training centers for entrepreneurial knowledge acquisition to boast orientation of owner managers to improve the performance of the SMEs. Additionally, it is recommended that government should device others means of providing support for entrepreneurial activities as the current system in place does enhances SMEs performance.

Limitations and Suggestion for Further Studies

The absence of the moderating effect of government support on the relationship between EO and SMEs performance suggests the operation of other moderators. Thus, future studies should consider incorporating other moderators to test the relationship

The study is only limited to the SMEs owner managers in north western Nigeria, hence, the findings of the study cannot be generalized. It is therefore suggested that future researches should focus on the entire country.

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