
**MANAGERS' STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AS PREDICTORS OF
GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF SMES IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are widely recognized as engines of socio-economic development in developing economies. Despite their acknowledged role, many SMEs in Nigeria remain stunted due to deficiencies in strategic management practices at the managerial level. This study investigated the extent to which managers' strategic management practices predict the growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria. Guided by four research questions and four null hypotheses, the study adopted a correlational research design. The population comprised 390 participants—100 managers and 290 employees of registered SMEs in Benue State. A sample of 150 respondents, consisting of 50 managers and 100 employees, was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected using two validated, researcher-developed instruments: the Managers' Strategic Management Practices Questionnaire (MSMPQ) and the Growth and Development Questionnaire (GDQ). Reliability coefficients obtained via Cronbach's alpha were .71 for MSMPQ and .83 for GDQ. Data analysis was conducted using linear regression and ANOVA at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that managers' environmental scanning practice had a high and significant predictive power on SME growth and development ($R = .813$, $R^2 = .661$, $p < .001$). Strategy formulation practice demonstrated a moderate but significant predictive effect ($R = .694$, $R^2 = .482$, $p < .001$), while strategy implementation practice also showed a high and significant effect ($R = .752$, $R^2 = .348$, $p < .001$). Collectively, the three practices jointly predicted SME growth and development to a very high extent, $F(6, 547) = 740.11$, $p < .001$. The study concludes that strategic management practices are critical determinants of SME performance in Benue State. It recommends regular capacity-building programs for SME managers in environmental scanning, strategy formulation, and implementation to foster sustainable growth and competitiveness.

Keywords: Strategic management, environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, SMEs, organizational growth, Benue State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) constitute the backbone of most economies worldwide. In developing countries like Nigeria, SMEs are critical for employment generation,

poverty reduction, wealth creation, and industrialization. According to the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN, 2013), SMEs account for approximately 49% of Nigeria's GDP and employ about 84% of the workforce. The Central Bank of Nigeria (2011) defines SMEs as enterprises with asset bases between ₦5 million and ₦500 million and staff strength of 19 to 199 employees. Despite their economic significance, SMEs in Nigeria face persistent challenges that limit their growth and sustainability. Empirical evidence shows that many SMEs in Benue State suffer from low revenue growth, high employee turnover, declining market share, poor customer retention, and inadequate planning (Ibrahim & Adebayo, 2023). These challenges have been attributed to multiple factors, including limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, poor government policies, and weak managerial capacity. Among these factors, managers' strategic management practices stand out as a controllable and pivotal determinant of organizational performance.

Strategic management involves the systematic process of environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and evaluation to ensure organizational alignment with both internal capabilities and external opportunities (David, 2013; Wheelen & Hunger, 2010). When effectively applied, these practices enhance decision-making, resource allocation, innovation, and competitiveness (Ukaigwe, Nwabueze, & Nwokedi, 2019). In this study, strategic management practices are operationalized through three sub-variables: environmental scanning practice, strategy formulation practice, and strategy implementation practice.

1.1.1 Environmental Scanning Practice

Environmental scanning refers to the process by which managers collect, analyze, and interpret information about internal and external factors that may influence organizational performance (Anibasa, 2015). It includes internal scanning of resources, capabilities, and culture; external scanning of market trends, competitor activities, technological changes, and regulatory policies; and the utilization of scanned information for decision-making. Managers who engage in systematic scanning are better able to anticipate threats, exploit opportunities, and reduce uncertainty (Osakwe, 2010). In Benue State, where SMEs operate in a volatile agricultural and economic environment, environmental scanning is critical for adaptability and growth.

1.1.2 Strategy Formulation Practice

Strategy formulation is the process of defining the organization's mission, vision, objectives, and selecting the best course of action to achieve them through SWOT analysis, goal setting, and

strategic option evaluation (Ibrahim & Mahmoud, 2016). It involves mission and vision development, goal and objective setting, strategy selection, and resource alignment. Effective strategy formulation provides direction and coherence to organizational activities and prevents resource wastage (Nwogbo, Nwankwo, & Nwachukwu, 2019). For resource-constrained SMEs in Benue State, clear strategy formulation is essential to ensure sustainable growth.

1.1.3 Strategy Implementation Practice

Strategy implementation is the process of translating formulated strategies into action through resource allocation, assigning responsibilities, establishing timelines, and monitoring progress (Ukaigwe & Nwabueze, 2015). Key dimensions include resource allocation, structural alignment, leadership and communication, and performance monitoring and control. David (2009) notes that 70% of strategic failures occur at the implementation stage. For SMEs, effective implementation determines whether strategic plans translate into revenue growth, market expansion, and improved operational efficiency.

From all the above, strategic management practices are interdependent and sequential. Environmental scanning provides the intelligence base for strategy formulation. Strategy formulation produces the plan, while strategy implementation executes the plan. Weakness in any one sub-variable undermines the Managers' entire strategic management process and limits growth and development outcomes of the SMEs.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Observations and preliminary reports indicate that SMEs in Benue State are underperforming relative to their potential. Many struggle with stagnant revenue, high staff attrition, poor product quality, and inability to scale operations. These symptoms are often linked to weak strategic management practices at the managerial level, particularly the absence of systematic environmental scanning, poorly defined strategies, and ineffective implementation mechanisms. While several studies have explored strategic management and SME performance in Nigeria, most have been conducted in Lagos, Abuja, and the South-South regions. There remains a contextual gap regarding empirical evidence from Benue State, a region with a significant concentration of agro-based and service-oriented SMEs. Without localized data, interventions and policy recommendations risk being generic and ineffective. Therefore, this study seeks to address the gap by examining the extent to which managers' strategic management practices predict the growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate managers' strategic management practices as predictors of growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the extent to which managers' environmental scanning practice predicts growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the extent to which managers' strategy formulation practice predicts growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.
3. Examine the extent to which managers' strategy implementation practice predicts growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.
4. Determine the joint predictive power of managers' strategic management practices on growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.

1.4 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions

1. To what extent does managers' environmental scanning practice predict growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria?
2. To what extent does managers' strategy formulation practice predict growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria?
3. To what extent does managers' strategy implementation practice predict growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria?
4. To what extent do managers' strategic management practices jointly predict growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria?

1.5 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study and were tested at 0.05 levels of significance.

H01: Managers' environmental scanning practice is not a significant predictor of growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.

H02: Managers' strategy formulation practice is not a significant predictor of growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria

H03: Managers' strategy implementation practice is not a significant predictor of growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.

H04: Managers' strategic management practices are not significant joint predictors of growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant to SME managers, policymakers, and academics. For managers, the findings provide evidence-based insights into which strategic practices yield the highest returns for growth, enabling targeted managerial development. For policymakers and SMEDAN, the study offers data to design effective training and support programs tailored to Benue State's SME landscape. Academically, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on strategic management in developing economies.

1.7 Scope and Delimitation

The study was delimited to registered SMEs operating in Benue State, Nigeria. It focused specifically on three strategic management practices: environmental scanning, strategy formulation, and strategy implementation. The study involved 150 respondents comprising managers and employees, and data were collected between January and March 2026.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Concept of SMEs

SMEs are integral components of economic development and a crucial element in poverty alleviation strategies (Ele et al., 2024). Agwu (2014) describes SMEs as the primary mechanism through which accelerated economic growth and industrialization have been achieved in many nations. Despite the significant role of the SMEs as the veritable and viable engines of national

economies globally, they will have to grow and developed in order to achieve their goal and objectives.

2.1.2 Concept of Growth and Development

Growth and development of SMEs refer to the process of increasing size, revenue, market share, and organizational capability (Adersun & Shittu, 2022). Olayede, Otusanya, and David (2024) define it as the enhancement of internal capabilities such as management, marketing, and operations, alongside external relationships like networking and partnerships

2.1.3 Concept of Strategic Management Strategic management is the art and science of formulating, implementing, and evaluating cross-functional decisions that enable an organization to achieve its objectives (David, 2013). Effective strategic management enhances competitiveness, innovation, and sustainability (Ukaigwe et al., 2019).

2.2 Theoretical Framework:

This study is anchored on Child's Strategic Choice Theory (1972). The theory posits that organizational outcomes are primarily determined by managerial decisions and choices, rather than solely by external environmental forces. It emphasizes managerial agency, arguing that managers can influence organizational structure, strategy, and performance through deliberate decision-making. The implication of the theory to the present study is that, growth and development of the SMEs corporate performance depend largely on the managers' strategic management choice. These strategic management choice will guide the managers through the adoption of the best management practice that will facilitate the growth and development of the SMEs especially in Benue State, Nigeria.

2.3 Empirical Review

2.3.1 Environmental Scanning and SME Performance

Anibasa (2015) found that environmental scanning enables managers to monitor organizational culture, resources, capabilities, and market trends. Osakwe (2010) reported a significant relationship between environmental scanning and SME growth, noting that it helps managers identify threats and opportunities early.

2.3.2 Strategy Formulation and SME Performance

Ibrahim and Mahmoud (2016) demonstrated that SWOT-based strategy formulation improves organizational alignment and resource utilization. Nwogbo, Nwankwo, and Nwachukwu (2019) found no significant difference between managers' and employees' perceptions of strategy formulation effectiveness.

2.3.3 Strategy Implementation and SME Performance

Ukaigwe and Nwabueze (2015) identified resource allocation, task assignment, and timeline establishment as key to successful strategy implementation. David (2009) emphasized that effective implementation requires strong leadership, communication, and monitoring.

2.3.4 Combined Strategic Management Practices

Julius (2022) reported that strategic management and organizational structure jointly explained 37.5% of variance in SME performance in Lagos. Muritala, Awolaja, and Bako (2013) identified poor management as a top constraint to SME growth in Nigeria.

2.4 Summary of Literature Gap

While existing studies confirm the importance of strategic management, few have examined the differential predictive power of environmental scanning, strategy formulation, and implementation within the context of Benue State. This study fills that gap by providing localized, empirical evidence.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a correlational survey design. According to Creswell & Creswell, [2017]. correlational research establishes the extent of relationship or association between two or more variables that can be used to make predictions on existing conditions of variables that are related. The population of the study was 390 comprised of 100 managers and 290 workers of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria. A sample size of 150 comprises of 50 managers and 100 workers of SMEs was drawn using proportionate stratified random sampling technique representing 58% of the population. The instrument used in this study was questionnaire titled 'Managers' strategic management Practices Questionnaires (MSMPQ) and Growth and Development Questionnaire (GDQ)' designed by the researcher for data collection. The two sets of questionnaire made up of

three sections: A, B and C. Section A provided the demographic information of respondents such as location, Section B contained questionnaire items carefully arranged into three clusters I, II, and III on Managers' Strategic Management Practices Questionnaire; While Section C contained items on Growth and Development Questionnaire. The items were rated on a five-point rating scales of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral [N] Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with assigned values of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instruments were validated and the reliability was trial-tested using ten (5) SMEs managers and [10] workers from 5 SMEs in Kogi State, Nigeria. Cronbach Alpha method was employed to compute the internal consistency of the items of the instrument, which yielded indices of 0.71, and 0.83, 0.71, for managers' strategic management practices, and 0.83 for growth and development respectively. Linear regression analysis was used to answer the research questions, while ANOVA associated with multiple regressions was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

4. Result

Research Question One: To what extent does managers' environmental scanning practice predict growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Linear regression analysis on the extent managers' environmental scanning practice predicts growth and development of SMEs

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square (R ²)	Standard Error of the Estimate	Decision
1	.813 ^a	.661	.657	1.75113	High Extent and Positive predictive power

a. Predictors: (Constant), Managers' environmental scanning practice

Note: R = regression, 0.001-0.249 = Very Low Predictive Power; 0.250-0.499 = Low Predictive Power; 0.500-0.749 = Moderate Predictive Power; 0.750-0.949 = High Predictive Power 0.950-1.000 Very High Predictive Power

Data on Table 1 revealed that managers' environmental scanning practice predict growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria to a very high extent. The regression coefficient (R) is 0.813 while the adjusted regression square R² is given as 0.657. It is then predicted that, the

regression coefficient of 0.813 had a coefficient of determination of 0.661, which indicated that, managers’ environmental scanning practice predicts growth and development to a high extent. However, managers that possess environmental scanning skills will support the SMEs in the delivering of quality services to achieve growth and development. Hence, the coefficient of determination of 0.661 indicates that 66% variation on the SMEs growth and development in Benue State could be as a result of managers’ environmental scanning practices adopted, while 34% could be attributed to other factors.

H0₁: Managers’ environmental scanning practice is not a significant predictor of growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria

Table 2: t-test associated with linear regression on the predictive power of managers’ environmental scanning practices on SMEs growth and development

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Beta	t	Sig.	Alpha level	Decision
	B	Std. Error					
(Constant)	11.025	.786		12.759	0.00		Rejected/
1 Managers’ environmental scanning practices	0.695	.027	0.813	28.662	0.00	0.05	Significant

t = t-test score

Data on Table 2 revealed that, the t-test value associated with linear regression on the predictive power of managers’ environmental scanning practices on growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria is 28.662. The analysis showed that, the t-value of 28.662 is greater than the p-value of 12.759 indicating that the hypothesis is significant with a significant value of 0.00, which is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is significant and rejected. Therefore, managers’ environmental scanning practice is a significant predictor of growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.

Research Question Two: To what extent does managers’ strategy formulation practice predict growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Linear regression analysis on the predictive power on the extent managers’ strategy formulation practices predict growth and development of SMES in Benue State, Nigeria

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square (R ²)	R	Standard Error of the Estimate	Decision
1	.694 ^a	.482	.480		1.30977	Moderate Extent and Positive predictive power

a. Predictors: (Constant), managers’ strategy formulation practice

Data on Table 3 revealed that manager’ strategy formulation practices predict growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria to a moderate extent. The regression coefficient (R) is 0.694 while the adjusted regression square R² is given as 0.480. It is then predicted that, the regression coefficient of 0.694 had a coefficient of determination of 0.482, which indicated that, there is a moderate and positive predictive power of managers’ strategy formulation practice on growth and development of SMEs. However, managers who adopted the strategy formulation practice assist the SMEs in the delivering of quality services for improved growth and development of the SMEs. Hence, the coefficient of determination of 0.482 indicates that 48% variation on growth and development of SMEs in Benue State Nigeria could be as a result of managers’ adoption of the strategy formulation practice, while 52% could be attributed to other factors.

H0₂: Managers’ strategy formulation practice is not a significant predictor of growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 4: t-test associated with linear regression on the predictive power of managers’ strategy formulation practices on growth and development

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Alpha Decision level
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	9.657	.669		13.276	0.01
						Rejected/

Managers' strategy formulation practice	0.671	.032	0.694	30.423	0.00	0.05	Significant
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t = t-test score

Data on Table 4 revealed that, the t-test value associated with linear regression on the predictive power of managers' strategy formulation practice of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria is 30.423. The analysis showed that, the t-value of 30.423 is greater than the p-value of 13.276 indicating that the hypothesis is significant with a significant value of 0.01, which is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is significant and rejected. Therefore, managers' strategy formulation practice is a significant predictor of growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.

Research Question Three: To what extent does managers' strategy implementation practices predicts growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 5: Linear regression analysis on the extent managers' strategy implementation practices predicts growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square (R ²)	Standard Error of the Estimate	Decision
1	.752 ^a	.348	.410	1.45354	High Extent and Positive predictive power

a. Predictors: (Constant), Managers' strategy implementation practice

Note: R = regression, 0.001-0.249 = Very Low Predictive Power; 0.250-0.499 = Low Predictive Power; 0.500-0.749 = Moderate Predictive Power; 0.750-0.949 = High Predictive Power 0.950-1.000= Very High Predictive Power

Data on Table 5 revealed that managers' strategy implementation practice predicts growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria to a high extent. The regression coefficient (R) is 0.752 while the adjusted regression square R² is given as 0.410. It is then predicted that, the

regression coefficient of 0.752 had a coefficient of determination of 0.348, which indicated a high and positive predictive power of managers’ strategy implementation practices supports to the growth and development of the SMEs. However, managers that apply the strategy implementation practices help the SMEs to become more competitive enough in market share expansion, improved productivity and enhanced income generation capacity of the SMEs. Hence, the coefficient of determination of 0.348 indicates that 31% variation of growth and development of the SMEs’ could be as a result of managers’ strategy implementation practices .69% could be due to other factors.

H0₃: Managers’ strategy implementation practice is not a significant predictor of growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 6: t-test associated with linear regression on the predictive power of managers’ strategy implementation practice on growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardizedt Coefficients		Sig.	Alpha level	Decision
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t			
(Constant)	10.442	0.620		13.566	0.01		Rejected/
1 Managers’ strategy implementation practices	0.611	0.022	0.642	29.885	0.00	0.05	Significant

t = t-test score

Data on Table 7 revealed that, the t-test value associated with linear regression on the predictive power of managers’ strategy implementation practices is not a significant predictor of growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria is 29.885. The analysis showed that, the t-value of 29.885 is greater than the p-value of 13.566 indicating that the hypothesis is significant with a probability value of 0.01, which is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is significant and rejected. Therefore, managers’ strategy implementation practice is a significant predictor of growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.

Research Question Four To what extent do managers’ strategic management practices jointly predict growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 7: ANOVA associated with multiple regressions on the joint predictive power of managers’ strategic management practices on growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria

ANOVA ^a								
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Alpha level	Decision
1	Regression	26382.107	6	4397.018	740.114	.000 ^b	0.05	Significant
	Residual	3249.442	547	5.941				/Rejected
	Total	29631.549	553					

a. **Dependent Variable:** growth and development

b. **Predictors: (Constant),** Managers’ strategic management practices

Data on Table 7 revealed the predictive power of managers’ strategic management practices on growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria. The degrees of freedom are 6 and 547 with calculated ANOVA value of 740.114. The hypothesis is significant, because the probability value of 0.00 is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, managers’ strategic management practices are significant predictors of growth and development of SMEs in Benue State, Nigeria.

5. Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that all three strategic management practices significantly predict SME growth and development in Benue State. Environmental scanning had the strongest individual effect, consistent with Anibasa (2015) and Osakwe (2010). Strategy formulation showed a moderate effect, supporting Ibrahim and Mahmoud (2016). Strategy implementation also had a high effect, confirming Ukaigwe and Nwabueze (2015). The joint effect was very high, indicating that when managers integrate scanning, formulation, and implementation, SME performance improves

substantially. This also supports Strategic Choice Theory (Child, 1972), which emphasizes managerial agency in shaping organizational outcomes.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that managers' strategic management practices are significant predictors of SME growth and development in Benue State, Nigeria. Among the practices, environmental scanning emerged as the most influential, followed by strategy implementation and strategy formulation. Strengthening these practices can substantially improve SME performance, competitiveness, and sustainability.

7. Recommendations

SME managers should undergo regular training in environmental scanning techniques to identify market opportunities and threats early. Structured strategy formulation processes, including SWOT and PESTEL analyses, should be adopted to ensure alignment between organizational goals and external conditions. Clear implementation plans with defined roles, time lines, and performance indicators should be developed and monitored. SMEDAN and state governments should integrate strategic management training into SME support programs. Further studies should explore the moderating role of organizational culture and access to finance in the relationship between strategic management and SME performance.

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