
GOVERNMENT SUPPORT POLICIES AND THE GROWTH OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN BENUE STATE.

AGA, Philip Agwaza (PhD)

Department of Banking and Finance, Benue State Polytechnic, Ugbokolo

ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of government support policies on the growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State-Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined the influence of government tax relief and ascertains the influence of government training; on the growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design and questionnaire was utilized for data collection. From the population of 1593 registered small and medium enterprises, a sample of 400 were obtained on application of Taro Yamane formula, which formed respondents for the study. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while regression analysis was employed as tool to test the hypotheses using t-statistics and p-values from the regression. Findings showed that government tax relief had significant and positive effect ($t= 5.77, = b = 0.812, P=0.011 < 0.05$) and government training had significant and positive effect on growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria. The study then concluded that, the government support policies dimensions have significant and positive influence on growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State. The results show that government support policies (government tax relief and government training) are viewed as government response and contribution towards facilitating small and medium enterprises to boost economic activities; by giving them some discount or sometimes rebate in tax, assistance in technological backup and infrastructure, as well as initial financial assistance and alongside training, so as to enhance growth (competitiveness, market share, sales growth and profitability). The study then recommends, amongst others, that management of small and medium enterprises should develop themselves and their employees through trainings provided by government as it will assist them to be able to facilitate innovativeness and swift response to customer needs, this will help to increase their market share and competitiveness.

Keywords: Small Enterprises, Medium Enterprises, Government Support-Policies, Market Share

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

In most parts of the world, exceptional initiatives for the promotion of small and medium enterprises have been formulated and consequently implemented. These initiatives which are applicable in both developed and developing countries are primarily designed for the reduction of youth unemployment and the promotion of wealth among the citizens. Many of such initiatives strive to accomplish this important objective through the introduction of relevant training, education and other complementary measures. Additional objectives of such initiatives include promotion of self employment; transformation and development of the rural areas; the need to minimize the national dependence on foreign enterprise and imported goods; the need to diversify the economy; the need to proffer help to the minorities and subsequently establish an enterprise culture; thereby promoting the growth and wellbeing of the populace (Olaoret *et al.*, 2020; Etale and Light, 2021; Godfrey *et al.*, 2022).

The small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are acknowledged globally as powerful element for socio-economic transformation of any nation; as the sector is positioned strategically to create over 80 percent of employment, increase per capita income, raw material supply, expand export inflow and capacity exploitation through the key industrial sectors; such as manufacturing, building and construction, mining and quarrying, solid minerals, agriculture, etc. and consequently has great link with the overall business activities in the nation (Kolawole *et al.*, 2018; Obananya, 2022). SMEs serve as a catalyst to entrepreneurship, enhanced employment opportunities and stable economic development (Akerejola *et al.*, 2019; Olaore *et al.*, 2020). In Nigeria, government initiatives and ways to grow and sustain firms have been mapped to enhance small and medium enterprise entrepreneurial development (Onyedikachi *et al.*, 2022)

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have been recognized as a driver of economic growth and development. According to Etuk *et al.* (2014), the Federal Government of Nigeria and indeed many developing countries over the years have emphasized the importance of small and medium scale (SMEs) in the development of their economies. SMEs are now recognized worldwide as key source of dynamism, innovations and flexibility in advance industrialized countries as well as in emerging and developing economies (Edoho, 2016; Mamman *et al.*, 2018; Olaore *et al.*, 2020). Interest on SMEs has equally been hinged on their potentiality to contribute to creation of jobs, reduction in income disparity, production of goods and services in the economy, as well as providing a fertile ground for skill development and acquisition, serve as a mechanism for backward integration and a vehicle for technological innovation and development especially in modifying and perfecting emerging technological breakthroughs (Folorunsho *et al.*, 2015). How has these government support policies influenced or otherwise on the growth of small and medium enterprises, will be addressed in this study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian government has exhibited great interest in the facilitation of the development of small and medium enterprises', which it has always been recognized as being essential in the quest to minimize poverty and unemployment in the country. Consequently, the country has established a number of specialized institutions, whose primary objective is to take charge of policy instruments and micro credit, necessary for enhancing the development of small and

medium enterprises. Examples of such institutions include: National Economic and Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND), Nigeria Agricultural Co-operative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB), and the Microfinance Institutions (MFIs). Furthermore, the government also introduced some policy oriented institutions that are tasked with the provision of technical and financial support for small and medium enterprises'. Some of these include: Small and Medium Enterprise Equity Investment Scheme (SMEEIS), National Association of Small Scale Industries (NASSI), Entrepreneurship Development Policy (EDP) and Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (SMEDA).

In spite of these numerous interventionist programs, there are yet abysmal growth in the SMEs sector with observations of shut down in enterprises within the first five years in Nigeria and Benue State in particular. Those that have survived over five years would be seen as struggling with either complains of tax, infrastructure deficit, lack of capital financing and or inadequacy in their up to date training in their business outlay. Then one begins to wonder if these support policies are really appreciated by the SMEs owners or that their impact are not been felt. These particular questions this study seeks to answer by empirical investigation.

Consequently, this study seeks to examine the influence of government support policies on the growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the influence of government support policies on the growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State. The specific objectives are to;

- (i) determine the influence of government tax relief on growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State Nigeria.
- (ii) ascertain the influence of government training on growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State, Nigeria.

1.4 Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses stated in the null form shall be tested in this study.

Ho₁: Government tax relief has no significant influence on growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State.

Ho₂: Government training has no significant influence on growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.1 Concept Government Support Policies

Government policies according to Tende (2014) are policies designed to moderate the relationship between the entrepreneurship and the economic development of small and medium enterprises development through wealth creation and job creation. Government support agencies are institutions that aim at regulating and improving the conditions of SME's and entrepreneurs in terms of supportive, implementation and funding policies by the government (Bouazza *et al.*, 2015).Based on this definition, government support agencies as it relates to small and medium enterprises practice is targeted at encouraging small and medium enterprises by making a favorable environment for them and for the operators to

grow (Garba, 2020). This, it does through enactment of guidelines that will regulate business activities generally for the reason that it is the bedrock of nation's path to industrialization.

2.1.2 Dimensions of Government Support Policies

Several dimensions have been put forward as to what constitute government policies, however, the following are carefully reviewed as has been used by several studies (Akawu *et al.*, 2016; Makinde, 2019; Garba, 2020; Obananya, 2022).

(i) Government Tax Relief

Taxes are compulsory levies by government on personal income, business profits, interest, dividends and commissions. Taxes may also be an incentive or a disincentive to invest in savings irrespective of whether the tax is direct or indirect (Okolo *et al.*, 2016). Various reasons why governments implement tax policies are to finance a budget deficit, enhance long run growth, or counter other influences in the economy (Usman, 2014). The government tax relief policy has been widely recognized as one factor that can affect the growth of every business.

(ii) Government Training

Training and capacity building has been proved to be essentially important in any business process (Gundal, 2014). It has been observed that a process of creating self-awareness and the development of individual capacity for creative and innovative thinking, decision making and action implementation to exploit various entrepreneurial/business opportunities is the focus of government training and capacity building (Teixeira and Pato, 2013).

2.1.3 Concept of Growth of Enterprises

Growth may be defined as increase in size, number of employees, asset, capital, sales and profit of an organization (Bouazza *et al.*, 2015). The measurement of business organization's growth is very important to the owners, managers, employees and creditors (Idoko *et al.*, 2013). In business, the term growth is used to refer to various things such as increase in the total sales volume per annum, an increase in the production capacity, increase in employment, an increase in competition, an increase in the use of raw material and power (Janet and Ngugi, 2014).

2.1.4 Measures of Enterprise Growth

According to Reijonen and Komppula (2007), the distribution of growth measures includes employment growth, sales growth, profitability growth, market share growth and competitiveness. The measures used to measure the growth of enterprises in this study are competitiveness and market share.

(i) Competitiveness

Competitiveness is seen as a state in which organizations address dynamism in the external environment and continue to provide satisfactory products/services to customers which are better than the products offered by other players in the industry (Li and Liu 2014; Kaur and Metha, 2016). To Berdine (2008) a company's competitive advantage is defined as a condition which enables a firm to operate in a more efficient or otherwise higher quality manner than its competitors, and which results in benefits accruing.

(ii) Market Share

Armstrong and Greene (2007) posited that market share is the specific percentage of total industry sales of a particular product achieved by a single firm in a given period of time. Market share is closely monitored for signs of change in the competitive landscape and it

frequently drives strategic or tactical action. According to Armstrong and Greene (2007), market share is a key indicator of market competitiveness, meaning how well a firm is doing against its competitors.

2.1.5 Small and Medium Enterprises

National Council of Industries at its 13th meeting in July, 2001 at Markurdi, Benue State, defines SMEs as an industry with a total capital employed of over N50 million but not more than N200 million, including working capital but excluding cost of land, and or a labour size of 101 – 300 workers (Safiriyu and Njogo, 2012).

2.1.6 Government Tax Relief and Firm Growth

The government taxation policy has been widely recognized as one factor that can affect the growth of every business. For instance, the imposition of high taxes on specific imported products will ultimately encourage local businesses to produce more of such goods. But if the taxation on raw materials required for local production is high, then the local entrepreneurs may be discouraged to commence or continue production (Okolo *et al.*, 2016). Any increase on corporation tax will have the same impact as rising production cost. In order to cover such costs, business owners may be forced to increase the price of their finished products. Other taxes that can have the same effects include: value added tax (VAT) and environmental taxes. Even though VATs are specifically for the final consumers, the business may incur considerable costs when administering the VAT system (Onugu, 2015). Hence, tax relief creates potentials for small and medium enterprises to thrive as it has potentials of cutting cost and accumulating wealth for the enterprises towards expanding production (Garba, 2020).

2.1. Government Training and Firm Growth

Capacity development is also an area where some efforts have been made by government (Onugu, 2015; Alabi *et al.*, 2019). These efforts are often embedded within the funding agencies and have not been given the emphasis it deserves. For instance, NDE is primarily established to develop individuals to set up SMEs and continuously improve their skills in these areas. Ajayi (2016) identified some policy support initiatives by government and argued that SMEs themselves have to be aligned more closely to the economic environment. Despite the often well intentioned government policy initiative, a good understanding of the impact of developing economic trends whether fiscal or monetary will help SMEs position themselves appropriately to deal with the uncertainties of the environment. The author's argument on the relationship between knowledge of the business environment and success of SME is relevant to this research.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Business Growth Theory

The theory of business growth was postulated by Penrose (1959). Penrose (1959) asserts that firms are a bundle of internal and external resources that help a firm to grow and to realize a competitive advantage. She further explains that firm size is incidental to the growth process, whereas firm growth is determined by the effective and innovative managerial resources within the firm. She further explained that the availability of top managerial and technical talent serves as an engine to a firm's growth. Penrose also suggested that ignorance of these factors results in failure and loss of competitive advantage.

The theory of business growth implies that the rate of growth of a firm is independent of its initial size. By implication it would mean that large firms are preferable in context of private

sector development given that they create more employment than small firms. However, small firms learn over time, which helps them improve their performance as they accumulate market knowledge. This also implies that as a new small firm starts and develops, it moves through some growth stages. The stages of growth are identified as; existence, survival, success, take off and resource maturity. In each stage of development as different set of factors is critical to the firm's survival and success.

Government support policies, in the light of business growth theory, are acknowledged as a valuable organizational resource, which can give business organizations competitive edges over rivals in the marketplace. Thus, business growth theory contributes significantly to government support policies as it leads to durability hence growth. Increasing pace of technological change is shortening the useful life-spans of most resources if they are not subject to continual analysis and improvement.

2.3 Empirical Review

Obananya (2022) examined the effect of government policy on the growth of small and medium enterprises in Anambra State. The findings were that government credit policy, government tax policy and government licensing policy have significant positive effect on the growth of small and medium enterprises in Onitsha North Local Government area of Anambra State.

Onyedikachi *et al.* (2022) examined the impact of government policies and small scale enterprise development activities on economic growth, evidence from Nigeria. The result reflects that small scale enterprises progress, expansion and promotion are significant factors or elements that can impact positively on small scale enterprises.

Garba (2020) examined the effect of government policies on the Growth of Micro-Enterprises in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State, Nigeria. Findings of the study revealed that taxation, licensing, training and capital financing all have a positive significant effect on the growth of micro-enterprises in Makurdi metropolis, Benue State.

Nwosu (2020) examined the effect of government fiscal and monetary policy framework; challenges for SMEs and entrepreneurship in Nigeria's developing economy. Findings revealed that the challenges of inadequate infrastructure, poor access to finance, prevalence of multiple regulatory agencies, incidence of multiple taxation, etc. can be attributed to poor and inconsistent fiscal and monetary policy development initiatives by government.

Alabi *et al.* (2019) evaluates the impact of government policies on business growth of small and medium enterprises that operates in six states that made up the South-west geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The result of this research shows that there is a significant relationship between government policy and business growth of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in South Western Nigeria.

Makinde (2019) study examined the extent at which government policies ameliorate negative effects of environmental factors affecting SMEs productivity in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State. The study discovered that there are various government policies such as government intervention fund through Bank of Industry, incorporating entrepreneurship education into formal education, banned on importation of locally made goods, among others, put in place to alleviate negative effect of environmental factors affecting SMEs productivity in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State.

Akawu *et al.* (2018) examined the impact of government supports on the development of SMEs in Nasarawa State using Keffi Local Government as case study. Findings from the study revealed that government capacity building programmes has significantly impacted on the development of SMEs in the study area. In addition, provision of financial support by government has a significant and positive influence on the development of SMEs in Keffi Local Area and the results also revealed that there is a significant relationship between provision of infrastructural support programs by government and the development of SMEs in the study area.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the survey research design. The relevant data were gathered in order to establish the effects of the independent on the dependent variables.

The population gotten from the records of SMEDAN and BECCIMA lists gave a total of 1593 registered small and medium enterprises for the period under review. This comprises of those in the hospitality (339), printing/publishing (126), beauty parlor (123), agro allied (315), education/financial services (189), furniture and dress making (159), trading (279), mining (63). Thus the respondents are the owners/managers of these small and medium enterprises.

However, the researcher used the Taro Yamane formula, in determining the suitable sample size for this study, upon which 400 were gotten as sample size for this study.

The random sampling was used, whereby each element (SME) in the population had equal chances of occurring or being selected. First, the target population was defined; secondly the sample frame was selected; the simple random sampling was utilized where the 400 SMEs were selected; and data were collected from these 400 SMEs owners/managers.

The data for the study were collected through questionnaire administration. Structured questionnaire was designed to collect responses from the participants. The questionnaire is divided into two sections (Section A and section B). The first section is based on personal data of the respondents while the second section contains questions on the study variables using five-point Likert-scale which constitutes strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree.

The questionnaire was subjected to reliability and validity tests in the course of the study. The experience gained from the pilot study shall be used to modify' the original plan for the study proper where necessary, while ensuring that the research instruments measured exactly what they were designed for.

The researcher made use of the content and construct validity for this study. Face validity was used for content validity test while factor analysis (test retest method) was used for construct validity test.

Test retest method was used whereby 30 copies of questionnaire were administered in the first instance, then two weeks later, another 30 copies of the questionnaire were administered to small and medium enterprises owners in Tarka local government area. The result of the pilot survey is presented.

The model to be employed for this study is multiple regressions which involves the explanatory variable (growth) and two dimensions of the independent variable. Therefore the model specifying the relationship between the variables is:

$$GR = f(GSP) = (TAX, TRA) \quad (3)$$

Where

GR = Growth

GSP = Government Support Policies

TAX = Government Tax Relief

TRA= Government Training

The regression model, thus is given as

$$SFB = x + \beta_1 TAX + \beta_2 TRA + e \quad (4)$$

Where

x = Intercept of the regression

$\beta_1 - \beta_2$ = parameter estimates

e = error term

Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis in order to determine the influence of government support policies (government tax relief, government training and government) on the growth of SMEs.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of four hundred (400) questionnaires were distributed to respondents (owners/managers) of the selected small and medium enterprises chosen for this study. Out of the four hundred (400) questionnaires distributed, three hundred and seventy eight (378) were correctly filled and returned, representing 94.5 %,

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Respondents	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	229	60.6
	Female	149	39.4
	Total	378	100.0
Age (years)	21-30	85	22.5
	31-40	111	29.4
	41-50	109	28.8
	51 and above	73	19.3
	Total	378	100.0
Highest Educational Qualification	Below. SSCE	09	2.4
	SSCE	69	18.3
	OND/NCE	112	29.6
	HND/BSC	154	40.7
	Post Graduate	34	9.0
Total	378	100.0	
Marital Status	Single	48	12.7
	Married	271	71.7
	Widowed/Separated	59	15.6
	Total	378	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Regression Analysis

The model used to test the hypotheses designed for this study, explores the influence of government support policies on growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State.

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adj.R Square	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin Watson
1	.884 ^a	.781	.777	0.9112	2.011

a: Predictors (constant), Govt Tax Relief, Govt Training, Govt Infrastructures, Govt Capital Financing.

b. Dependent variable: Growth

Source: Researchers Computation Using SPSS printout (Version 25.0), 2023

Table 3 Regression Coefficient Result

Model	Beta	T	Sig
1 (Constant)	1.9822	15.01	.000
Tax Relief	.812	5.77	.011
Training	.833	7.13	.004

Dependent variable: Growth

Source: SPSS regression print out (version 25.0 for windows output), 2023.

Table 4 ANOVA^b for the overall significance of the model

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	182.400	4	45.600	21.836	.002 ^e
Residual	409.927	373	1.009		
Total	592.327	377			

a. Predictors: (constant); Tax Relief, Training.

Dependent variable: Growth

In the model, government tax relief and government training; were used to predict growth of small and medium enterprises. The F-statistics which is used to examine the overall significance of regression model showed that the result is significant, as indicated by a value of the F-statistic, 21.836 and it is significant at the 5.0 percent level; thus it is reasonably fit. The coefficient of determination (R-square), indicates that the model predicts that 78.1 % change in growth was jointly due to government tax relief and government training, while 21.9 % unaccounted variations was captured by the white noise error term. It showed that government tax relief and government training had significant influence on growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

To determine influence of government tax relief on growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State

The beta value for government tax relief was 0.812. The beta value apparently indicated that the predictor variable of government tax relief had significant/positive influence on growth of small and medium enterprises (t -computed $5.77 > t$ -critical 1.960 , $p=.011 < .05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The findings of this investigation agrees with Obananya *et al.* (2022), Onyedikachi *et al.* (2022), Garba (2020), Nwosu (2020), Makinde (2019), amongst others; who all avers that the resources smaller companies direct towards tax compliance are resources that could otherwise be used for reinvestments, facilitating future growth. Hence, the belief that taxes and a complex tax system put disproportionate pressure on smaller businesses. The government over the years enacting tax relief for SMEs and other businesses has effectively helped small and medium enterprises to accumulate savings for expanding their businesses and helping them to compete favorably and gain market share. Therefore this study concludes that there is a positive/significant influence of government tax relief on growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State.

To ascertain the influence of government training on growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State.

The beta value for government training was 0.812. The beta value apparently indicated that the predictor variable of government training had a positive effect on growth (t -computed $7.13 > t$ -critical 1.960 , $p=0.004 < .05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. This finding is consistent with that of Obananya *et al.* (2022), Onyedikachi *et al.* (2022), Garba (2020), Alabi *et al.*, (2019), Makinde (2019), amongst others; whom all affirm that when organizations operating in a competitive environment have to be aligned more closely to the environment. Through capacity development to be able to assess needs and meet needs, as it will help SMEs position themselves appropriately to deal with the uncertainties of the environment. The argument on the relationship between knowledge of the business environment and success of SME is relevant to this research. While policy enactment affects the business environment, the ability of the entrepreneur to react proactively to these policy changes is critical, and training is key towards these. SMEs should understand the external business environment, appreciate the impact on their business activities, identify threats and opportunities while at the same time updating their knowledge, understanding and skills to meet the ever-changing business environment. Therefore, this study concludes that government training has significant/positive influence on growth of small and medium enterprises in Benue State.

5.0 CONCLUSION

From the findings of the current study and the literature reviewed, the study concludes that; the government support policies dimensions or variables have significant and positive influence on growth of small and medium enterprises in Makurdi, Benue State. The results show that government support policies (government tax relief and government training) are viewed as government response and contribution towards facilitating small and medium enterprises to boost economic activities; by giving them some discount or sometimes rebate in tax, assistance in technological backup and training, so as to enhance growth (competitiveness and market share). Hence, when government support policies are imbibed by small and medium enterprises, it has potentials of enhancing growth for the enterprise.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The management of small and medium enterprises should facilitate and imbibe as policy a continuous advantage of tax relief to improve on their business outlay by reinvesting the excess monies that are saved from tax payments as this will further enhance their growth.
2. Management of small and medium enterprises should develop themselves and their employees through trainings provided by government as it will assist them to be able to facilitate innovativeness and swift response to customer needs, this will help them increase their sales and profitability.

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