2020

Exploring the Strategies for Sustaining Small- to Medium-Scale Enterprises

Kingsley Onochie Umadia
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Kingsley Umadia

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Karina Kasztelnik, Committee Chairperson, Management Faculty
Dr. Paul Frankenhauser, Committee Member, Management Faculty
Dr. Teresa Lao, University Reviewer, Management Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

Exploring the Strategies for Sustaining Small- to Medium-Scale Enterprises

by

Kingsley Umadia

MBA, University of Benin, 1997

BSc, University of Nigeria, 1988

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

August 2020

Abstract

The lack of development and the continued survival of small- to medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) poses a challenge to SME practices in Nigeria. Using sustainability theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that leaders use in sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria. Ten SME leaders from the manufacturing sector, trading services, education, oil and gas service companies, and financial services sector provided comments during the interviews that addressed the research question. Data were analyzed by transcription, coding, categorizing and analysis of participants' responses using member checking. From the themes that emerged from the study, it was noted that agility and doggedness, financial planning, direct marketing and competitive advantage, information and communication technology, innovation, social media marketing and human relationship, effective customer relations, exploring adequate sources of funding, effective staff training and motivation, and servant leadership approach will contribute to sustaining a SME beyond 5 years. The implications to positive social change include SME sustainability, employment for staff, improvement of standard of living for both staff and owners, and company longevity. Other positive social changes from the study are the company's contribution to tax revenue and the improved economy of households and individuals in Lekki and Nigeria.

Exploring the Strategies for Sustaining Small- to Medium-Scale Enterprises

by

Kingsley Umadia

MBA, University of Benin, 1997

BSc, University of Nigeria, 1988

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

August 2020

Dedication

This doctoral dissertation is dedicated to God Almighty for the enablement and my successful completion of this dissertation. I thank my dear wife, Nwamaka and my four children: Kingsley, Naomi, Yvonne, and Joan for the encouragement, love, and support throughout my academic journey. I also wish to thank my parents, Chief and Mrs. Fidelis Umadia, who made me realize the need to embark on the PhD program. I appreciate you all and hope that this will be a motivation for anyone of you who wishes to strive for greater academic achievements.

Acknowledgments

My doctoral journey could not have come to an end without the support, encouragement, and approval of my mentors and faculty members. Notable among them are my doctoral dissertation chair, Professor Dr. Karina Kasztelnik for her leadership and exceptional accommodation throughout the study. Under her mentorship, I gained a lot of knowledge on my chosen topic as well as the form and style of my dissertation. I thank my second committee member, Dr. Paul Frankenhauser for his technical support and incisive criticism of the study. The more he commented, the more I learned. I also wish to thank Dr. Tereesa Lao (my University Research Reviewer) for her detail review and attention to detail which ensured the desired academic standard is maintained all through the study. I had very good support from my lecturers and colleagues at Walden University, especially Dr. Sandy Goldberg who made the academic residencies such an exciting and learning opportunity that cannot be forgotten. May I also use this space to thank my family members, brothers, sisters, and friends who gave all the moral support I needed to complete the program. Thank you all.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) account for 84% of the employer firms, generate half of all private gross domestic product (GDP), and employ 60% of the private sector workforce in Nigeria (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014). Further, SMEs are recognized as veritable means for developing an economy (Das, Rangarajan, & Dutta, 2018). SME activities complement other government efforts, especially in employment generation, poverty eradication, and growth of GDP (Das et al., 2018). The strength of its manufacturing sector measures the strength of an economy, and the strength of the manufacturing sector is directly correlated with the strength of the SME subsector (Manufacturers Association of Nigeria, 2018, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria [SMEDAN], 2015). But sustaining SME business performance over a period beyond 5 years in Nigeria remains a challenge because of the turbulent business landscape, which can be summarized using the managerial acronym VUCA that stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Lee Kaivo-Oja, & Lauraeus, 2018). SMEs in Nigeria have a success rate of 15% in the first 5 years of business operation, and 85% have weak growth or close within 5 years (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014). The consequences of business failure include loss of jobs, demotivation for entrepreneurship, and decline in the general level of productivity.

This research is based in Lekki town, a fast-developing neighborhood in Lagos, the commercial capital of Nigeria. Lagos State is also the fastest-growing state with a population of 24 million people. Lekki is a new town that attracts young people and new businesses in Nigeria (New Towns Development Report, 2018). Previous researchers on

SMEs in Nigeria have dealt with topics such as financing of SMEs, leadership styles of SME owners, level of government support for SMEs, entrepreneurial orientation for SME managers, and a host of other topics (Das et al., 2018; Gray & Jones, 2016; Wahga, Blundel, & Schaefer, 2018). But there are no previous studies on the strategies SME owners in Lekki use to sustain business beyond five years from inception. The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies for sustaining SMEs in Lekki. Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, the problem statement, purpose of study, research questions, and conceptual framework. Other topics in Chapter 1 are the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, the significance of the study, implications for social change, and a summary and transition.

Background of the Study

In Nigeria, SMEs have been defined as businesses with an annual turnover of not more than N100 million and employing not more than 200 people (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014). SMEs play an essential role in the country's economic development as they account for approximately 96% of Nigerian businesses and about 90% of the manufacturing sector in terms of the number of enterprises (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development held that the characteristics of SMEs reflect the country's economic patterns and cultural and social dimensions. These differing patterns influence the definition and criteria of SMEs adopted by different countries. Though some countries use the criteria of the number of employees as their distinctive criteria for defining SMEs, others use the amount invested, sales, and industry type. Since 2001, medium-scale enterprises (MSEs), small-scale enterprises, and micro enterprises have been defined by the different government agencies in Nigeria using different criteria or parameters ranging from total assets to annual turnover and the number of employees (see Table 1).

Table 1

Definition of Small and Medium Enterprises by Nigeria Institutions

Parameters	Total Assets	(N'm)		Annual Turnover	(N'm)		No of Employees		
Nigeria Institution	MSE	SSE	ME	MSE	SSE	ME	MSE	SSE	ME
Fed. Min of Industries	<200	<50	Na	Na	Na	Na	<30	<10	<10
Central Bank	<150	< 1	Na	<150	< 1	Na	<10	<50	Na
NERFUND	Na	<10	Na	Na	Na	Na	Na	Na	Na
NASSI	Na	<10	<1	Na	<40	Na	Na	3.35	Na
NASME	<150	<50	<1	<500	<100	<10	<100	<50	<10
Nigeria Industrial Policy	Na	Na	Na	Na	Na	Na	Na	Na	Na

Note. Source: World Bank (2001) SME Country Mapping
NERFUND = National Economic Reconstruction Fund, NASSI = National Association of Small Scale Industries, NASME = National Association of Small and Medium Enterprises, SSE = small-scale enterprise

The Federal Ministry of Industries defined MSEs as those with less than N200 million in total assets and less than 30 employees. The Central Bank defined MSEs as those enterprises with less than N150m in total assets, less than N150 million in annual turnover, and employing less than 10 people. Additionally, the National Association of Small and Medium Enterprises defined MSEs as enterprises with less than N150 million in total assets, less than N500 million in annual turnover, and less than 100 employees (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014). Regarding small enterprises, The Federal Ministry of Industries defined them as those with less than N50 million in total assets and less than 10 employees. The Central Bank defined small-scale enterprises as those enterprises with less than N1 million in assets, less than N1 million in annual turnover, but employing less than 50 persons. Further, the National Economic Reconstruction Fund defined small-scale enterprises as those with less N10 million in assets, and the National Association of Small-Scale Industries defined them as having less than N40 million in total assets, less than N40 million in turnover, and between three to 35 persons in their employment. The National Association of Small and Medium Enterprises also defined them as having less than N50 million in total assets, less than N100 million in annual turnover, and less than 50 employees (Eniola and Ektebang, 2014). Additionally, the Central Bank of Nigeria once described SMEs as economically independent companies operating with 11 to 200 employees and doing an annual debit turnover of not less than 5 million naira or approximately $16,400 in U.S. dollars but not more than 500 million naira or approximately $1,640,000 in U.S. dollars (Gbandi & Amissah, 2014).

Further, with the introduction of the National Policy on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the issue of what constitutes micro as well as SMEs has been addressed. The most critical elements in determining the categorization are the number of employees and investment in assets (excluding land and buildings). As shown in Table 2, the employment criterion is more fundamental than investment in assets (SMEDAN, 2015).

Table 2

Definition of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises by Number of Employees and Assets

S/N	Size Category	Employment	Assets (₦ Million) Excl. land and buildings)
1	Micro Enterprises	> 10	>10
2	Small Enterprises	10-49	10-100
3	Medium Enterprises	50-199	100-1000

Note. Source: SMEDAN National Policy on MSMEs, 2015

From the table, micro-enterprises are those with less than 10 employees and less than N10 million in assets, excluding land and buildings (SMEDAN, 2015). Small enterprises are enterprises with more than 10 employees but less than 50 employees and an asset base of less than N100 million, excluding land and buildings. Medium enterprises are those with 50 employees and above but less than 200 employees and asset base of N100 million and above but less than N1 billion in assets, excluding land and buildings (SMEDAN, 2015).

SMEs are a veritable means of creating employment and reducing poverty levels (Das et al., 2018). Several reports have shown that in Nigeria, 84% of the working population are employed by SMEs (SMEDAN, 2013). However, SMEs in Nigeria hardly evolve from small business to large corporate or international companies, mainly because they are known to have limited or stunted growth and even die before their fifth anniversary (Oyelaran-Oyebanji, 2014). A few who make it through the fifth year remain a family business for the rest of their existence. This situation limits the overall contribution of SMEs to the economy (Gbandi & Amissah, 2014).

Previous research has indicated potential factors that may affect SME sustainability. For example, Bankole (2007) identified the factors militating against entrepreneurs' ability to flourish and summarized the issues that need to be addressed. Most SME leaders lack knowledge of their market and how to access it Infrastructure is also critical to the success of a business such as power and transportation, and agencies that support and mentor budding entrepreneurs are too few to make the desired impact. The lack of accessibility to finance is also a factor in the performance of SMEs, which may relate to Nigerian entrepreneurs' attitude because they are not willing to dilute ownership interest and their inability to present their business idea in a bankable form. Further, access to information is critical in decision making for the entrepreneur. There is value for perfect information such as market intelligence and opportunities and threats. Finally, Nigerian entrepreneurs lack the right technology and scientific tools to be more efficient and competitive in their chosen business area. They usually deploy obsolete technology and tools in their production process.

Other research has indicated that access to debt finance can increase entrepreneurial orientation and SME performance, and entrepreneurial orientation can increase access to debt finance (Mohammed, Oben'Umar, & Nzelibe, 2016). But SME owners fail across Nigeria due to a lack of entrepreneurial orientation and bad business practices (Oseni, 2017). Another study based in Portharcourt, Nigeria revealed that inadequate financing, lack of managerial skills, and multiple taxations were mainly responsible for SMEs' underperformance (Agwu & Emeti, 2014). The recommendation was that soft loans to SME leaders, public–private partnerships on the provision of infrastructure, adequate government support, capacity building for SME leaders, and establishment of SME funding agencies improve entrepreneurship practices in Nigeria and ensure the sustainability of SME business.

Additionally, a study on the success of SMEs in Nigeria revealed that both internal and external factors are critical success determinants of SMEs in Nigeria (Effiom & Etim, 2018). Marketing practices negatively correlated with SMEs' profitability, whereas policy actions are required to deal with the infrastructure deficit and institutional frameworks operating inefficiently. For instance, microfinance as a form of lending has resulted in increased access to finance for SMEs in Nigeria (Adeola & Evans, 2017). Access to finance enables SMEs to achieve their aspirations, encourage entrepreneurship, and reduce unemployment (Ogbeide, Osaretin, Kojo, & Ifelunini, 2016). By successfully integrating the SMEs into the formal financial sector, the government can monitor and track projects and plans toward achieving the set objective of financial inclusion goal (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2015; Das et al., 2018). Further, the following factors are responsible for technological and organizational innovation in SMEs' performance in Nigeria: (a) government support, (b) comparing company's products regularly with those of its competitors, (c) accessibility to foreign inputs, (d) relevant academic educational background of owner and managers, and (e) prior experience of owner-manager, the extent of investment in the research and development (Das et al., 2018; Faloye, 2015).

The internationalization of SMEs is also a significant factor in ensuring the sustainable profitability and survival of SMEs in Nigeria (Adebayo, Alheety, & Yusoff, 2019). Based on a survey of 279 SME firms in Lagos, a firm's capacity to export is likely to be determined by the owner's ability to influence the manager's level of education and previous exporting experience (Adebayo et al., 2019). There is also a strong positive relationship between institutional environmental factors, networking capability, and entrepreneurial orientation, and the ability of SMEs in the agricultural sector to export (Ajayi, 2016). SMEs' ability to be proactive and manage its networking capabilities to be innovative as well as take calculated risks and the institutional environmental factors all have a direct impact on the export performance of Nigerian SMEs involved in agricultural activities.

Entrepreneurs also need the right environment to thrive, whether it is political, economic, social, and technological (Ofili, 2014). The judicial system, the financial system, the educational system, and general government policies should be regulated to provide entrepreneurship training. Necessary infrastructures such as power, water, security, and transport systems are also necessary to promote entrepreneurship. Once the Nigerian government gets the right policy mix and create the enabling environment for private enterprise to flourish, businesses become more successful. Most business owners ascribe the failure of their business to environmental factors, though they ascribe their success to themselves. Consequently, the external and internal factors need to be addressed (Ofili, 2014).

The closing of SMEs before their fifth anniversary has led to the loss of jobs, discouragement for entrepreneurial efforts, frustrations, and sometimes death. Other social problems, such as an increase in crime, may be associated with some failed businesses in Nigeria (Agwu & Emeti, 2014). If the causes of such business failures are known, the SME owners may deal with the issues comprehensively to avert such failures in the future. Though previous research has dealt with SME performance in Nigeria, none of these studies have dealt with the specific strategies for sustaining the business beyond 5 years of successful operation in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria. The objective of the study was to explore the strategies for sustaining SMEs in Lekki. Different reasons have been presented for the underperformance and eventual death of the SMEs such as lack of succession planning, lack of knowledge on the part of owners of SME, the founder’s or operator’s inability to access finance, lack of financial management skills, unstable economic environment, and multiple taxations, to inadequate necessary infrastructures such as good roads, stable power supply, and security (Meflinda, Mahyarni, Indrayani, & Walandari, 2018). Other reasons noted for the under-performance of the subsector are the poor leadership style of leaders and founders, which is also related to their lack of formal training and business education (Meflinda et al., 2018; SMEDAN, 2013). In this study, the strategies for sustaining SMEs beyond 5 years were explored, which is considered relevant for both scholars and practitioners.

Problem Statement

SMEs play a significant role in Nigeria. Progressive programs such as alleviating poverty and generating employment are critical to the Nigerian economy’s development and the achievement of the government’s millennium development goals (Agwu & Emeti, 2014). However, the lack of development and the continued survival of SMEs poses a challenge to SME practices in Nigeria. The failure rate leads to loss of jobs and financial losses.Though there have been studies on the operation of SMEs, much work has not been done on the strategies for sustaining the business beyond 5 years. The general problem is that SMEs have limited and stunted growth and often fail within 5 years of operation (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014). The specific problem is that the leaders of SMEs in Lekki lack the necessary strategies to grow and sustain their business beyond 5 years of operation (Agwu & Emeti, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that leaders use in sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria. There are 11,663 registered SMEs in Lagos, with about 89 of them registered in the Lekki area (SMEDAN, 2015). The targeted sample for this research included 10 SMEs from industries such as the manufacturing sector, trading services, hospitality industry, education, oil and gas service companies, and financial services in the Lekki area that have survived beyond 5 years. The sample is considered appropriate for this study because the leaders of these enterprises are directly involved in managing the SMEs, and they have managed successfully beyond 5 years (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Research Question

The central research question of this study is as follows: What strategies do leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond 5 years?

Conceptual Framework

In this study, the sustainability theory developed by Brundtland (1987) served as the conceptual framework. Sustainability theory includes concepts of sustainable business, sustainable development, and sustainable transformative business (Brown et al., 2015). The significant tenets of sustainability theory are that managers use their firm's capacity to increase their economic prosperity by realigning their business models to be consistent with how they acquire, create, deliver, support, and improve their business activities (McPhee, 2014). Transformative business sustainability refers to a firm's management's efforts to achieve business sustainability through the adoption of best business practices or total quality management (Wagner & Svensson, 2014). The transformative business sustainability model gives business leaders a feasible framework for (a) making informed business decisions, (b) reducing uncertainty, (c) improving marketplace practices, and (d) addressing specific business goals to enhance business prosperity and sustainability (Teh & Corbitt, 2015). The knowledge of sustainable development concepts and how the characteristics required to achieve sustainability interrelate is vital to the effective implementation of a business strategy for sustaining a business. Effective sustainability development requires a clear vision with strategic direction, time, and long-term focus on the firm's development, survival, and success (Eswarlal & Valessi, 2014).

Sustainability theory was appropriate for this study exploring the strategies owners of SME use in sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos. The conceptual framework was used as a lens in exploring the strategies that SME business owners and managers use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The findings of this study may add to the body of knowledge on small business sustainability by advocating a structured way for small business leaders to integrate sustainability models as a vital component of their strategy for survival.

Nature of the Study

There are three research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The qualitative method was used in this study because it enables the researcher to understand the case under investigation (Yin, 2018). Qualitative methodology refers to where the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired (epistemology) and ideology, meet with research design, research approach, and research method (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The qualitative research method is usually adopted where there are no substantive theories or where existing theories have failed to comprehensively explain a phenomenon or given occurrence, as is the case with this research (Ofili, 2014). It is used where the researcher wants to explore people in their real-world situations and daily experience (Yin, 2017). In contrast, the quantitative method is used when the researcher investigates a relationship and compares variables by examining hypotheses (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Tacq, 2011). The mixed-methods researcher uses quantitative and qualitative data to draw conclusions based on the combined strengths of both sets of data. However, I did not seek to explain a phenomenon using numeric measures. A qualitative method was suitable because the purpose of the study was to explore the strategies that leaders use in sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria. The qualitative research method uses open-ended questions to enable the interviewees to have a wide latitude to express themselves adequately.

The research design for this study is the multiple case study design. The choice of research method is usually determined by choice of research questions and the research phenomenon to be studied (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Case studies are usually bound by time and space and usually involve a case or multiple cases of contemporary real-life events (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this case, the study addressed SMEs in Lekki that have successfully operated for over 5 years. Conversely, phenomenology is used to study the lived experience of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), and ethnography is used by a researcher in studying culture-related issues from the participants (Yin, 2018). Both phenomenology and ethnography were not suitable to address the purpose of this study.

Ten SME business leaders in the Lekki area of Lagos State, Nigeria were interviewed. There was no need to interview more leaders as saturation was reached using the first set of 10 participants. The saturation point is reached when additional interviews do not give new information on the same subject, especially when the response obtained from interviewees becomes repetitive (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Data were collected from a minimum of 10 SME business leaders who have operated for more than 5 years in Lekki.

For interviews, the following procedures were adopted:

- Determine the open-ended research questions to be answered (or select existing research instrument with the proper permission)
- Identify interviewees based on purposeful sampling procedures
- Distinguish type of interview based on mode and interactions
- Collect data using adequate recording procedures

- Design and use an interview protocol to guide interactions
- Refine interview procedures through pilot testing
- Locate a distraction-free place for interviews
- Obtain consent from the interviewee to participate
- As an interviewer, follow proper interview procedures
- Decide transcription logistics

The interviews consisted of open-ended questions about the SME operator's experiences, opinions, perceptions, feelings, and knowledge. Data from the interviews included verbatim quotations with enough context for correct interpretation. Fieldwork descriptions of activities, conversations, organizational processes, interpersonal interactions, and other observable human experiences were also noted. This data collection method was adequate in relating to the shared experiences of the successful SME business leaders (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Data obtained from the interviews were cleaned, grouped, and regrouped based on themes. The information obtained was evaluated, and emergent themes were recognized. Data were obtained from one-on-one interviews, field notes, and document review. Data triangulation was sought to add credibility to the findings. Data triangulation occurs when data or information obtained can be verified with different data sources or research methods (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Definitions

Small- to medium-scale enterprises (SMEs): Formally registered firms with an annual turnover of not more than N100 million and employing not more than 200 people (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014). They are usually privately owned and managed.

Stunted growth: This is a reduced rate of development in a firm or living thing. It is a primary manifestation of a defect in the necessary factors for average growth (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014).

Poverty: Poverty may generally be defined as a lack of access to basic needs such as proper nutrition, housing, water, healthcare, access to productive resources including education, work skills, and tools as well as political and civil rights to participate in decisions concerning their socio-economic conditions (Olatomide, 2012).

System: A collection of parts unified to accomplish an overall objective. The individual parts are so connected that the absence of one part changes the nature of the system. A system contains regularly interacting or interrelating groups of activities (Teece, 2018).

Sustainability: The process of maintaining well-being over a long time. It is the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the future generation's ability to meet theirs. It is usually looked at from three main pillars: economic, environmental, and social (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010).

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts considered to be correct but unverified (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In carrying out the study, some assumptions may have posed some risk to the trustworthiness of the conclusions. A primary assumption was that a sample of 10 business leaders sufficed for a representation of the population of 89 registered SME business leaders in Lekki. The second assumption was that each of the 10 SME business leaders are knowledgeable enough in what they do to provide an in-depth and adequate explanation of what they do in their business. The third assumption was that all the interview questions comprehensively addressed the research gaps and need. The fourth assumption was that the research questions were not leading questions, and the responses received from the business owners were not biased. The fifth assumption was that the qualitative multiple case research methodology was most suited for this study.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study describes the boundaries of the study that the research has chosen to base the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The scope of the study can also be referred to as the inclusion criteria of the study. The scope of the study included 10-15 SMEs leaders from industries ranging from manufacturing, trading services, hospitality, education, oil and gas services, and financial services in the Lekki area of Lagos, Nigeria, who have survived beyond 5 years. To identify these SME leaders in the categories, I planned to involve an expert from the tax office in Lekki that receives annual tax revenues to identify all companies that belong to these categories, though I did not end up contacting them.

Additionally, delimitations are choices made by the researcher that define the parameters and boundaries of the investigation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). They are the limits the researcher imposes to focus on the scope of the study. The study is a qualitative multiple case study to explore the strategies used by some business leaders of SMEs in Lekki to sustain their business beyond 5 years. SMEs that have not lasted up to 5 years were not included in the survey. Only the business leaders were interviewed. In this research, only SMEs that fall within the categorization of SMEs were interviewed. In Nigeria, SMEs have been defined as those with an annual turnover of not more than N100 million and employing not more than 200 people (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014). The businesses that did not meet these criteria are excluded from the study.

A conceptual framework related to this study that was not used is one based on general systems theory as espoused by von Bertalanffy (1968), who held that a system is a collection of parts unified to accomplish an overall objective. The individual parts are so connected that the absence of one part changes the nature of the system. General systems theory states that the relationship between an organization and its environment can be a foremost source of complexity and interdependence. A new firm must deal with those challenges in the environment in which it was founded to survive. From a systems perspective, the elements should be aligned to complement each other properly and linked coherently to a strategic vision if they are to result in profitability and sustainable operations (Teece, 2017).

Limitations

Limitations, challenges, and barriers create shortcomings in a study. They place restrictions and may cause vulnerabilities in the conclusions reached (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). They may influence the outcome of a survey substantially. This study includes some limitations. A field survey’s primary limitation is the sample size of participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The sample size in this study is limited to 10-15, though it could have been increased if it were necessary. Another limitation is the area of coverage. The study was limited to the SMEs in the Lekki area of Lagos State, and SMEs operating outside Lekki and large businesses that operate in Lekki were not considered in this study. Additionally, the business leaders may have had biases by seeing me as a competitor. To minimize or eliminate undue influence, the participants were selected to be more representative and consent was obtained from the participants. I may also have brought bias into the study, and familiarity with the participants may have diluted the seriousness during data collection. The interview protocol was used to mitigate this bias, and the interview rules and regulations were kept. Efforts were made to ensure that the participants were comfortable and confidentiality was expressly stated. This process helped reduce bias in the responses. Different methods and sources of data collection were used to achieve data triangulation, which gave credibility to the survey's information.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it may address an under-researched area on SME success strategies in Lekki. Previous studies on SMEs have dealt more with the business structure and availability of finance (Adeola & Evans, 2017; Ogbeide et al., 2016), whereas this research was focused on the strategies used by some business leaders of SMEs to sustain their business beyond 5 years. The strategies observed could assist the theorists, regulators, and scholar-practitioners in seeking solutions that may change the narrative of SMEs not being sustained past their fifth anniversary. The findings from this study can help understand what strategies work and those that do not work for SMEs. Once SMEs begin to grow and thrive beyond 5 years, there will be an improvement in employment level, general production level, and economic growth, which is considered a significant positive social change.

Significance to Theory and Practice

This research can contribute to the understanding of how SMEs may succeed beyond 5 years of operation in Nigeria generally. Eighty-five percent of SMEs have stunted growth or fail within 5 years, which calls for further investigation and research (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014). The findings from this study may help in curbing business failure. The derived solutions may reduce the social ills caused by the closing of SMEs within 5 years. The strategies employed by the SMEs for continued sustainability beyond 5 years can be a template for both SME business leaders and scholars in Nigeria.

Significance to Theory

One of the most significant impacts of this study is the usefulness to both scholars and practitioners, as the recommendations may lead to better business practices and strategies that would help sustain SMEs beyond 5 years. The study can also improve SMEs’ success rate, as lessons learned may be adopted by existing and would-be practitioners. This study’s findings highlight the success strategies and the circumstances in which they were applied successfully. The government has recognized SMEs as a veritable medium for poverty alleviation. SMEs are also known to provide gainful employment to youths, to the extent that about 84% of Nigeria’s working population is employed by the SMEs (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014). Thus, a positive contribution of this study may be the improvement of people's lives directly and indirectly linked to SMEs.

Significance to Social Change

The potential implications of this research for positive social change include the application of findings from the study to the effective management of SMEs so they remain profitable and relevant beyond 5 years, which may encourage the entrepreneurial drive of the SME owners and keep them employed (Adeola & Evans, 2017). They may grow their business, generate employment for themselves and family members, and employ other people. In doing so, the SMEs may have improved households and individuals' economy, which is a significant contribution to social change. The less privileged who wish to be economically active engage in small scale businesses. Poverty is the lack of access to basic needs such as proper nutrition, housing, water, healthcare, access to productive resources, education, work skills, tools, and political and civil rights to participate in decisions concerning their socio-economic conditions (Olatomide, 2012).

Summary and Transition

Though previous studies have been carried on SMEs, only a few have dealt explicitly with the strategies for successful operations, especially beyond 5 years. Thus, exploring the strategies used by SME business leaders to make them successful and remain in business beyond 5 years remain under-researched. This study addressed the gap by exploring the strategies used by some business leaders of SMEs in Lekki to sustain their business beyond 5 years.

Chapter 1 was an introduction to the research and a foundation for understanding. The research problem, purpose of the study, and research question were stated. The conceptual framework, nature of the study, as well as definitions of specific words were also discussed in this chapter. The assumptions, scope, and delimitations, significance of the study to practice, as well as the significance of the study to theory and the significance of the study to social change were also discussed. Chapter 2 includes a review of the relevant gap in the literature to the study on SME. Chapter 2 also contains the conceptual framework that underpinned the study to explore the strategies that leaders use in sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

SME leaders in Lekki lack the necessary strategies to grow and sustain their business beyond 5 years of operation, and 85% of SMEs close within 5 years since start up (Agwu & Emeti, 2014). Business failure leads to loss of capital, unemployment, and demotivation for entrepreneurial efforts. In Nigeria, about 84% of the working population are employed by SMEs (SMEDAN, 2015). Thus, despite their achievements, the failure of small businesses has undermined their contribution to the Nigerian economy. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that leaders use in sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos.

Though there have been studies on the operation of SMEs, little has been done to understand the strategies for sustaining the business beyond 5 years. Most published articles and work have been done on the impediments and challenges SMEs encounter (Agwu & Emeti, 2014), the inability of SMEs to access finance (Adeola & Evans, 2017), and leadership styles of SMEs managers (Olawale, 2012). Consequently, the strategies for sustaining SMEs beyond 5 years remain under-researched, under-discussed, and unexplored. This chapter contains five sections. In the first section, I discuss the literature search strategy; in the second section, I discuss the conceptual framework, and in the third section, I discuss the literature review. The fourth section includes a comparison of SMEs in Ghana and those in Nigeria, after which I summarize and conclude the chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

Relatively few studies have been conducted on the strategies used by business leaders in Lekki to sustain SMEs beyond 5 years. Because of this, I had to search different databases and academic journals for relevant materials for this research. To do this, I searched for peer-reviewed articles in the Walden University database and other database sources such as Google Scholar, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. I reviewed other sites, such as SAGE Premier, ABI/INFORM, several newspapers, and journals for peer-reviewed articles and papers. I researched peer-reviewed literature published between 2014 and 2020, such as academic journals, texts, dissertations, and published research. Specifically, the three multidisciplinary databases, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Central, and Thoreau Multi-Database were used.

The search for peer-reviewed journals was also carried out on three business and management databases: Academic Source Complete, SAGE Journals, and Emerald Insight. Ten top academic journals that published leadership articles in the last 5 years (2014 to 2019), including the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Journal of Management*, *Organizational Behavior & Human Decision Processes*, *Personnel Psychology*, *American Psychologist*, *Academy of Management Review*, *The Leadership Quarterly*, and *Organization Science and Journal of Applied Psychology*. The keywords in the search included *strategy, small and medium-scale enterprises, sustainability theory, systems theory, business environment, business climate, ease of doing business in Nigeria, infrastructure challenges in Nigeria, and business development challenges. Other search words or phrases are microfinance banks and SMEs, doing business in Nigeria, business success, business failure, survival,* and *growth*.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, I used Brundtland's (1987) sustainability theory as a conceptual framework. The sustainability theory encompasses concepts of sustainable business, sustainable development, and sustainable transformative business (Brown et al., 2015). The significant tenets of sustainability theory are that managers use their firm's capacity to increase their economic prosperity by realigning their business models to be consistent with how they acquire, create, deliver, support, and improve their business activities (McPhee, 2014).

Transformative business sustainability refers to a firm's management's efforts to achieve business sustainability through the adoption of best business practices or total quality management (Wagner & Svensson, 2014). The transformative business sustainability model provides business owners and managers with a feasible framework for (a) making informed business decisions, (b) reducing uncertainty, (c) improving marketplace practices, and (d) addressing specific business goals to enhance business prosperity and sustainability (Teh & Corbitt, 2015). Understanding sustainability development and the interrelation of the characteristics required to achieve sustainability is important to effective business strategy for sustaining a business. Effective sustainability development requires a clear vision with strategic direction, time, and long-term focus on the firm's development, survival, and success (Eswarlal & Valessi, 2014).

Sustainability theory was appropriate for this study exploring the strategies owners of SME use in sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos. The sustainability theory was used as a lens in exploring the strategies that SME business owners and managers use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. The findings of this study may add to the body of knowledge on small business sustainability by advocating a structured way for small business leaders to integrate sustainability models as a vital component of their strategy for survival.

Sustainability Development Theory

As mentioned, sustainability as a development theory by Brundtland (1987) served as a lens to this study. The Brundtland Commission (1987) described sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising future generations' ability to meet their needs. Sustainability theory can be used to judge the distribution of economic goods and services by how well it meets the needs of the least advantaged and future generations' needs (DesJardins, 2016). Brundtland's sustainability theory is a philosophical discussion of ethics; hence, people should not expect to find a subtle treatment of ethics presented but to underpin its ethical foundations (DesJardins, 2016).

Small business leaders and managers need to sustain their businesses by implementing sustainability models within their firms (Biedenbach & Manzhynski, 2016). Sustainable entrepreneurs should work collaboratively towards a distinct goal of profiting ecologically to generate future wealth (Akhtar, Lodhi, & Khan, 2015). Further, business leaders should integrate the unique characteristics of small businesses to existing sustainability models within their scale of operation to be capable of continuing to sustain their businesses over the long-term (Darcy, Hill, McCabe, & McGovern, 2014).

Sustainability strategies include (a) introverted, (b) extroverted, (c) conservative, and (d) visionary (Muller & Pfleger, 2014; Nuryadin, 2016). Introverted strategies that include risk mitigation contain legal and other external standards of a business; extroverted strategies include legitimating approaches focused on businesses' external relationships; conservative strategies center on eco-efficiency of the environment; and visionary strategies (holistic approaches) are focused on sustainability issues within all business activities (Muller & Pfleger, 2014). Small business leaders can use the introverted sustainability strategy to manage business risks and to comply with legal and other external standards (Nuryadin, 2016). Business leaders might also use the extroverted sustainability strategy to manage external relationships among organizations (Nuryadin, 2016). Small business leaders and managers may use the conservative sustainability strategy to focus on co-efficiency and the visionary sustainability strategy to focus on sustainability issues within business activities (Muller & Pfleger, 2014). The visionary sustainability activity model requires firms to acquire, create, deliver, support, and recover activities that help build sustainable value (McPhee, 2014). By implementing visionary sustainability strategies, business leaders can identify the value of current activities, evaluate how the activities may change to reduce negative impacts, create new activities that may improve performance, and recognize activities that may enhance stakeholders' value (McPhee, 2014).

Small business owners and managers may use the sustainability model to enhance their firm's resilience and long-term value by creating a collection of products or services and a combination of people, systems, and ideas that form the firm (Wagner & Svensson, 2014). Some researchers have also posited a paradigm shift by firm owners and managers to filter in more sustainable ways of thinking and behaving (Wagner & Svensson, 2014). For small business sustainability, owners, leaders, and managers require moderate behavioral change adjustments to the process, procedures, and reward systems to maintain their businesses over the long-term (Schwaninger, 2015; Wagner & Svensson, 2014). With a deep commitment to visionary sustainability, small business owners and managers can sustain their businesses through a deep commitment to visionary sustainability culture and developing a framework for sustainability (Schwaninger, 2015).

Literature Review

Business strategy is the pursuit of a clearly defined path systematically identified in advance through carefully chosen sets of activities (Collins, 2016). Business strategy is the instrument of competition in a competitive market (de Santos, de Melo-Melo, Claudino, & Medeiroz, 2017). Small business strategy consists of interrelated activities and ploys for outwitting competitors (Kachouie, Mavondo, & Sands, 2018). This study was conducted to explore strategies for sustaining SMEs in Lekki. For the literature review, the background of SMEs, characteristics of SMEs, the role of SMEs in the economy, the significance of SMEs in Nigeria, the challenges of SMEs in Lekki, and a comparative analysis of SMEs in Nigeria and SMEs in Ghana shall be discussed.

Background of Small and Medium Enterprises

The definition of SME depends on the context, criteria, industry classification, and economic development of the area. Another basis for definition is the country or region of the writer. Additionally, more technical writers may use the revenues, net assets, number of employees, and annual business turnover. The more common definition considers the turnover, net assets, and the number of employees. In Nigeria, SMEs are businesses with an annual turnover of not more than N100 million and employing not more than 200 people (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014).

In addition to broader definitions, the first national policy on SMEs, which was developed by the SMEDAN, was broadcast by the Federal Executive Council in 2007 and revised in 2015 to take care of new developments in the economic and social environment in which the SMEs operate in Nigeria. The policy defined small enterprises as organizations employing 10 to 49 persons with an asset base of 10 to 99 million Naira (excluding land and building). The policy classified medium enterprises as organizations employing 50 to 199 persons with net assets in the range of 50 to 100 million Naira (excluding land and buildings). Additionally, organizations employing less than 10 persons are classified in the policy as micro-enterprises. In Nigeria, the number of persons employed takes precedence over asset base in the classification of SMEs as defined by the policy (SMEDAN, 2015).

SMEs account for 35% of industrial growth in Nigeria and 84% of the working population. They also constitute 94% of the manufacturing sector and 90% of Nigeria’s businesses (SMEDAN, 2015). As of 2002, 98% of all businesses in the manufacturing sector in Nigeria were SMEs, providing 76% of the workforce and 48% of the total output of industries in terms of value-added (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014). But 85% or 17 out of 20 SMEs fail before their fifth anniversary, which makes it difficult for most SMEs in Nigeria to achieve their full potentials (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014). An economy is only as strong as its manufacturing sector, and the manufacturing sector's strength is a function of how well the SMEs are doing, which implies that the success of the Nigerian economy is related to SMEs' success (Eniola, 2014). However, SMEs in Nigeria are still burdened with high unemployment, poverty, disease, and hunger. From the World Bank report, about 95 million people are still living below the poverty line in Nigeria (World Bank Report, 2017).

Because of the importance of SMEs, since Nigeria's independence from the colonial government of Britain in 1960, successive governments at federal, state, and local government levels have expressed their interest in ensuring that the manufacturing sector, with attention to the SMEs, performs well (Ali, 2014). There have been different schemes, multilateral institutions, government agencies, support groups, and economic programs and incentives established to support the activities of the SMEs subsector and to ensure its success. They have embarked on different policy thrusts to develop education, industrialization, and a self-reliant economy. However, the human capital needed for the success of these schemes to succeed is absent because the right mix of knowledge, attitude, and requisite skill-set are not available (Agwu & Emeti, 2014). Consequently, the government has intervened at various levels of governance through various actions, schemes, and incentives to ensure the success of SMEs.

Small and Medium Enterprises Owners and Leadership Style in Nigeria

SMEs are usually set up as family businesses, growing from sole proprietorships to private limited liability companies. They usually grow with a succession plan structured along family lines of seniority. Ownership is predominantly 100% family owned. The management style is usually authoritarian and totalitarian, with little input from employees. Power resides with the founder/owner, who is the head of affairs. This lack of structure and family ownership leads to quick decision-making, but the significant disadvantage of key-man risk abounds (Agwu & Emeti, 2014).

Additionally, SMEs in Nigeria are predominantly involved in manufacturing, sales and distribution, wholesale and retail trade, repairs of motor vehicles and motorcycles, accommodation and food service activities. Other business areas are waste management, transport, storage, construction, information and communication, educational services, art, and recreation services (SMEDAN, 2013). The identified business areas have free entry and free exit and are quite easy to start up. Lagos state has been identified as the most conducive place for doing business in Nigeria. This and other reasons have accounted for the prevalence of SMEs in the state compared to other parts of Nigeria (World Bank Report, 2017).

Financial Management Practices of Small and Medium Enterprises

Most SME business leaders in Nigeria are not financially literate. The absence of sound financial management practices is prevalent in the subsector. Hence, the SMEs are known not to have laid down strategic plans, financial plans, human resources, and general management policy. They also do not have a proper accounting system and an effective risk management system (Agwu & Emeti, 2014). Most SMEs engaged in manufacturing use mostly manual systems or deploy outdated technology in their operations. This makes them produce at a higher cost and lower level of efficiency. The use of outdated technology may also be due to the inability of SME owners to afford new technology and machines (SMEDAN, 2015).

Government Institutions Directed Toward the Growth and Development of Small and Medium Enterprises in Nigeria

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, successive governments have supported the growth of SMEs because of the integral role they play in the economy (Ossai, 2017). SMEs have been recognized as veritable vehicles for sustainable economic development, rapid industrialization, poverty alleviation, and employment generation (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2015). Government support has come in different ways ranging from direct interventions to fiscal policies to foster growth in the subsector. Measures adopted include restructuring the economy to make it private sector-led, market-oriented and technologically driven, maintaining exchange rate stability, reducing maximum lending rate, improving credit delivery to SMEs, encouraging savings, and entrenching accountability in governance. Other measures undertaken are the improvement of power supply, communication, and transportation.

Small and Medium Enterprise Equity Investment Scheme

The federal government, through the Central Bank of Nigeria established the Small and Medium Industries Equity Investment Scheme, which requires all commercial banks in Nigeria to set aside 10% of their profit after tax annually. The sum set aside is meant to be invested in SMEs as the banking industry contributes to the federal government's efforts toward stimulating economic growth, developing local technology, and generating employment. The funding to be provided shall be in the form of equity to qualifying enterprises or loans at single-digit interest rates to reduce the burden of interest and sundry bank charges under a regular bank loan (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2015). Other actions by the federal government to promote SMEs' activities include the promulgation of the Pension Act of 1999, which provides social security to pensioners and additional funds for SMEs (SMEDAN, 2017).

Bank of Industry

The Bank of Industry is the oldest and most significant development finance institution currently operating in Nigeria. Established in 1959 as Investment Company of Nigeria, it was later changed to Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industry, then Nigeria Industrial Development Bank. It was further renamed Nigeria Industrial Development Bank. It was from this institution that the Bank of Industry was reconstituted out of Nigeria Industrial Development Bank, Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industry, and National Economic Reconstruction Fund in 2001, which was established to cater to SMEs (Ossai, 2017).

Nigerian Agricultural Co-operative and Rural Development Bank

This bank is a combination of three development finance institutions viz; Nigeria Agricultural Co-operative Bank, the Peoples Bank, and Family Economic Advancement Program. The purpose of their combination was to cater to the needs of SMEs in Nigeria more adequately. The merged institutions began operations in 2001 with an authorized capital of N1billion (Central Bank of Nigeria Report, 2015). Though the merged institutions were based in rural areas and provided easy access to finance and agricultural inputs to farmers, co-operative societies, and SMEs, they still had a limitation of spread as over 80% of their target customers have no access to their services (Anochie, Ude, & Egbo, 2015).

Microfinance Banks

One of the main objectives of the microfinance bank policy in 2005 is to revitalize the community banks and strengthen them better to serve the poor, less privileged and rural population. In Nigeria today, this objective is yet to be met as the microfinance banks still have an urban bias in their activities (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2005). One factor responsible for the paradoxical state in which Nigeria is naturally rich in oil, but impoverished is that many micro-enterprises and SMEs are denied access to financial institutions (Alaro & Alalubosa, 2019). Microfinance has evolved as a viable instrument to help many unbanked members of society and a veritable tool for fighting poverty and facilitating economic growth in many parts of the world (Alaro & Alalubosa, 2019). The practice of microfinance in Nigeria has been in existence for more than five decades, though the operation has mostly been informal (Tche, 2009). The traditional microfinance practice has two different forms: self-help groups and the rotating savings and credit association (Alaro & Alalubosa, 2019).

Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria

The SMEDAN was established by an enabling Act in 2003 with a mandate to stimulate, monitor, and coordinate the development of micro and SMEs in Nigeria. SMEDAN’s objective is to initiate and articulate policies, programs, support services, and instruments necessary for SMEs’ development. SMEDAN still falls short on impact due to its obscured activities that are not in public glare. There is still a lack of awareness of its activities (Anochie et al., 2015). The goal of SMEDAN includes stimulating, monitoring and coordinating the development of the MSMEs sub-sector; initiating and articulating policy ideas for SME growth and development; and promoting and facilitating development programs (Anochie et al. et al., 2015). The SMEDAN function includes providing support services to accelerate the development and modernization of SME in Nigeria (Anochie et al., 2015).

National Directorate of Employment

The National Directorate of Employment was set up by the National Directorate of Employment Act, Cap 250 of the Federal Republic of Nigerian (previously called Decree No. 34 of 1989). The directorate is responsible for undertaking programs to combat unemployment in Nigeria, especially among youths. Programs such as vocational training, counseling, entrepreneurial training, and enterprise creation. The lack of commitment from the states and successive federal governments have hampered the agency (Ossai, 2017).

Entrepreneurship Development Center

Entrepreneurship Development Centre was aimed at providing the needed institutional support for SME development in Nigeria. Entrepreneurship Development Centers were established in our tertiary institutions, and entrepreneurship studies were made compulsory. The model was set up to create a direct linkage between schools and the industrial sector to provide students with the necessary practical training and experience for students (Ololube, Uriah, & Dudafa, 2014). The functions of the Entrepreneurship Development Centre are to develop entrepreneurship spirit amongst

Nigerians by providing insights into the tools, techniques, and framework for functional areas of business enterprise. Which includes production, marketing, personnel, and finance, to develop skills of trainees to start successfully, manage, diversify and expand business enterprises, and to facilitate easy access to start-up capital to trainees, especially funds from Banks and allied financial institutions (Ololube et al., 2014). Other function includes generating employment opportunities for Nigerians in line with the goal of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS).

Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria

In its latest efforts to encourage entrepreneurship, the federal government set up the YouWin competition in 2013. YouWin is a business competition for youths between the ages of 18 and 45, competing for a national award of N1million to N10 million to execute winning business plans and ideas (Anochie et al., 2015). The introduction of YouWin scheme created opportunities for businesses in Nigeria. However, the program was not sustained by the new administration; a major leadership constraint that causes business failure in Nigeria.

Ease of Doing Business in Nigeria

Inaugurated in 2016, it is a flagship initiative by the federal government of Nigeria, to make it easier for micro, small, and medium enterprises to do business. It is also aimed at making SMEs grow and contribute to economic activity and create employment in line with the millennium goals. As a result of this initiative, Nigeria has moved up 24 places in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index 2018. The reform continues (SMEDAN, 2017). Going by the less than 3% compliance for registration of a business, the government, through the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), encouraged registration compliance for MSMEs with a 50% reduction in cost and complementary simplification of the process. Registration of business with now cost five thousand Naira only.

One Local Government One Product Program

One Local Government One Product Program was refocused in 2016 by SMEDAN to revitalize the rural areas. This initiative was modeled after the One-Village-One-Product movement implemented in Oita Prefecture in Japan (SMEDAN, 2017). The One Local Government One Product Program takes cognizance of the unique product in each locality where they have a comparative advantage. Since commencement in 2017, about 109 projects have been delivered annually, and benefitting organizations and co-operatives have received machinery/financial grants, capacity building, monitoring services, and advisory services (SMEDAN, 2017). Which makes for the ability to use both moveable and immoveable properties and chattels as collateral for loans, thus enabling the SMEs to use their properties such as machinery, generators, motor vehicles, and even gold trinkets, as long as the company is registered to access funds (SMEDAN, 2017).

Development Bank of Nigeria

The Development Bank of Nigeria started operations in 2017 to provide or play a catalytic role in providing funding and risk sharing facilities for SMEs and microfinance banks. Since the commencement of operations, they have promoted and assisted SMEs and encouraged entrepreneurship in Nigeria. The Agri-Business Small and Medium

Enterprises Investment Scheme is an initiative to assist the start-ups, revival of ailing companies, and expand existing companies. Under the initiative commercial banks are required to set aside 5% of their annual profit after tax to support SMEs (SMEDAN, 2017). This is an initiative to provide standardized rating criteria for SMEs with a view to de-risk SMEs for easier access to credits from financial institutions.

N-Power Scheme

N-Power is a Nigerian government’s social investment program, aimed at creating jobs and empowering the youths. This program aims to reduce graduate and youth unemployment and facilitate the transferability of employment, technical, and entrepreneurial skills (SMEDAN, 2017). Trade moni is a loan scheme established for petty traders and artisans. Ultimately, it is aimed at the petty traders who plan and wish to grow from petty trading to SMEs. It allows qualified microenterprises to receive interest-free loans of between N10,000 and N100,000 increasing incrementally as they pay back.

Challenges of Small and Medium Enterprises in Lekki

A survey conducted by the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria in 2004 revealed that only 10% of the industries run by its members are fully operational. This implies that 90% of businesses run by its members are either running below capacity, fledgling, or dead. The main reasons for the lousy performance were the harsh operating conditions, funding issues, and policy somersault (Manufacturers Association of Nigeria, 2004). This low capacity utilization made it challenging to be competitive in the global market. SMEs in Lekki suffer the same fate as SMEs in other parts of Nigeria. Specifically, they face the following challenges.

Key-man factor. Agwu and Emeti (2014) noted that most SMEs are run as sole proprietors or, at best, business with family ownership. The level of dishonesty among individuals makes the business owner not to delegate and does everything by himself. This often leads to the stunted growth of the company. The lack of a successor also results from the high competition in salaries by banks and other excellent government establishments that are present in Lekki environs. Staff high turnover and low retention rates create instability in the daily management of most SME in Lekki (Agwu & Emeti, 2014).

Incessant power outages. Eniola and Ektebang (2014) identified the intermittent power outages as the bane of business in Nigeria. The intermittent power outages lead to a higher operating cost as business owners incur the cost of running their generators and experience breakdown of equipment due to irregular voltage. The cost of a generator creates an additional cost of running SME in Lekki for most businesses that provide services that require comfort and frozen foods (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014). Incessant power outages have led over 40% of SMEs to close their business and relocate to other parts of Nigeria to start their business (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014).

Lack of infrastructure. Oseni (2017) noted that the persistent decay of physical infrastructure is a recurring problem with the Lekki peninsular business. The poor road network, weak security system, and lack of pipe-borne water make every business entity to bring their infrastructure to their place of operation. This increases the cost of doing business in the area and leads to a labor-intensive production method. The bad roads and lack of water have made SME owners provide water for their businesses, increasing the cost of overhead for the business (Oseni, 2017). Poor road network affects customers' patronage, which also contributes to the low survival of business in Lekki area of Lagos, Nigeria (Oseni, 2017). Business leaders in Lekki have complained both jointly and severally about the multiple taxes they are made to pay. Different government agencies would visit offices and harass managers and business leaders of the businesses for taxes in different names; consumption tax, personal income tax, radio tax, parking lot fee, and value-added tax. Worse still is that some of the payments are not formal and are not receipted.

Lack of adequate management skills and entrepreneurial orientation. This is why most SME business owners do not differentiate between their personal accounts and the business account. As a result, they may not know the actual state of their business accounts until an auditor reviews the accounts. The lack of management skills and financial skills cause a lack of planning, little or no documentation of strategy, policies, systems, information technology, accounting system, and financial controls. Olawale (2012) noted in his study that there is a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and access to debt finance and SMEs' performance. The results also show that access to debt finance, to a large extent, mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and the performance of SMEs. Olawale (2012) recommended that continuous training and inclusion of entrepreneurial orientation in the reward system can improve entrepreneurial orientation.

In his research, Ajayi (2016) noted a strong positive relationship between institutional environmental factors, networking capability, entrepreneurial orientation, and the ability of SMEs in the agricultural sector to export. The result of the survey also indicates that SMEs' ability to be proactive, manage their networking capabilities, be more innovative, and take calculated risks and institutional environmental factors all have a direct impact on the export performance of Nigerian SMEs involved in agricultural activities.

Inability to access cheap funds for the business. Mohammed et al. (2016), averred that accessing funds for business from the capital market is limited to the big business owners. Small businesses resort to personal savings, borrowing from friends and relatives, and often get loans from commercial lenders at an exorbitant interest rate. Over time, these loans become difficult to repay and sometimes lead to a foreclosure of the business. Abosede, Hassan, and Oko-Oza (2017) held that there is a direct relationship between business performance and SME finance. In their research, they noted that high-interest rates and limited knowledge on loan qualifications are factors militating against SMEs' ability to access loans. They observed a significant relationship between financial management practice and the performance of SMEs. Hence, they advised that the government should put some flexibility and simplify the process of SMEs' accessing funds from financial institutions. On their part, the government should provide incentives to encourage financial institutions to provide direct loans, guarantees, subsidized interest rates, and other benefits to SMEs (Abosede et al., 2017). There is the issue of the ever-increasing cost of logistics, commuting, transportation, too much vehicular traffic, diesel cost, and security. The challenges would lead to the high cost of doing business, overdependence on imported raw materials, spare parts, supplies, and inability to expand, leading to an absence of economies of scale and likely closure of business before the fifth anniversary.

The Significance of Small and Medium Enterprises

SMEs play a significant role in the economy of Nigeria. The level of significance they play depends mainly on the level of development of the country or region. It has been noted that SMEs in developed countries contribute more to their GDP, employment generation and general well-being than SMEs in developing countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2017). In the same vein, the more SMEs that operate in the formal sector have more access to funding and benefit from government schemes than those in the informal sector. Sadly, most SMEs in emerging economies operate in the informal sector, which makes them encounter difficulties accessing finance (World Bank, 2015).

In terms of the number of people employed and other employment-generation indices, the SMEs with 250 employees or more have also contributed more than SMEs with 100 employees or less. The SMEs employing more than 250 persons, or more are more prevalent in the developed nations than the developing nations. In terms of income bracket, the middle income to high-income earners can be found in SMEs in developed economies. In contrast, low-income earners are more prevalent in the developing economies, which easily explains the lower contributions to GDP growth and employment generation by SMEs in developing nations (Ayyagari et al., 2014). In Europe, 25 million SMEs employed 90 million people and generated about 3.9 trillion Euros. Hence the SMEs accounted for about 67% of employment in Europe. This aligns with 84% of the working population currently employed by SMEs in Nigeria. The sector still needs a lot of improvement and strategic support for stability. Also, there needs to be more research on the strategies for sustaining small to medium scale business in Lekki.

Role of Small and Medium Enterprises in the Economy

SMEs employ about 84% of Nigeria's working population. Because of their significant roles, they have been recognized as the engine of growth of the economy. Because SMEs as a subsector is the highest employer of labor, they are a veritable medium for actualizing the aspirations of the government. The Nigerian government can use them to achieve the millennial goals of employment generation and poverty alleviation (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014).

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency noted that a notable SME in a locality could attract other social benefits besides providing employment directly. Besides direct employment generation, successful SMEs may attract the government's attention to provide basic amenities such as good roads, pipe-borne water supply, and better security for families in that area (SMEDAN, 2015). A successful SME can cause other businesses to spring up in the locality, thereby creating a localization of industries or businesses that are vertically integrated. Suppliers, buyers, service companies, and buyers alike can create employment opportunities due to economic activities. Also, the standard of living of employees, their immediate family members, and dependent relatives can be improved (Manufacturers Association of Nigeria, 2018).

Small and Medium Enterprises in Ghana

SMEs in Ghana are defined by the number of employees and investment in plant and machinery. Small-scale enterprises are enterprises with not more than 9 employees and investments of not more than 10 million Ghanaian Cedis in plant and machinery (excluding land, building, and vehicles). The Ghana Enterprises Development Commission uses an upper limit of 10 million Cedis investment in plant and machinery. Using the number of employees' criterion, a report by the Regional Project on Enterprise Development, Ghana classified firms into micro-enterprises, less than five employees; small enterprises, five to 29 employees; medium enterprises, 30 to 99 employees; and large enterprises, 100 and above (Ayyagari et al., 2014).

SMEs in Ghana mostly engage in retail, trading, and manufacturing. They can be categorized into urban and rural enterprises. Urban enterprises can be further categorized into organized and unorganized businesses. The organized businesses are registered, have paid employees, and have registered offices. The unorganized enterprises are made up of artisans who work from their homes or temporary structures in open spaces, employing relatives, nob-salaried workers or apprentices. Rural enterprises are made of family groups, individual artisans, women engaged in local crops, and food production. They also engage in the production of household needs such as soap production, clothing and tailoring, fabrics, leather, village blacksmiths, ceramics, and bricks. Others engage in wood furniture, agro-processing, timber and mining, bakeries, and other food processing. Women run the majority of SMEs. They operate from their homes, while their male counterparts operate from alternate locations other than their homes.

Contributions of small and medium enterprises in Ghana to economic development. SMEs in Ghana contribute immensely to national economic development considering their share of the Ghana labor force employees. SMEs have been recognized as the engine for development and economic growth. Ghana has also seen the positive impact of SMEs as they generate employment and increase their GDP. On the demand side, the SMEs are essential in income generation and the supply side of both consumer and capital goods. Unlike the multinationals and big corporations, SMEs can adapt quickly to market conditions due to their flexible management and ownership structure (Kayanula & Quartey, 2000). Because of the adoption of the labor-intensive production process, they have a low production cost per unit and low capital costs associated with job creation. They ensure a more equitable distribution of resources because of their ability to employ low-skilled and artisans. SMEs represent 92% of Ghanaian businesses and contribute about 70% of Ghana’s GDP and employ 80% of the working population.

General constraints of small and medium enterprises in Ghana. The constraints of SMEs in Ghana are synonymous with those of other developing countries, including Nigeria. Specifically, SME development in Ghana is hampered by the high level of illiteracy, lack of finance, lack of managerial skill, use of obsolete equipment and technology, lack of infrastructures such as good roads, constant electricity, and insecurity, multiple taxations, regulatory issues, policy inconsistency, and limited access to international markets (Aryeetey et al., 1994). Ghana is yet to have a policy document defining SMEs and what constitutes SMEs, unlike Nigeria. This situation is not unrelated to why there is no subsisting framework for their operation and why most SMEs in the country have not developed beyond a family business. Efforts are being put in place to develop a framework for guidance, operation, and lending by the commercial banks to the SMEs.

Prospects of Small and Medium Enterprises in Nigeria

SMEs in Nigeria still hold a critical place in the Nigerian economy. They account for 84% of employment and attribute 65% to Nigeria GDP as of year ended 2016. Soon, SMEs would perform better and would be more critical to developmental programs as they become more efficient and better run (Ossai, 2017). With the increase in school leavers, tertiary institution graduates, and SME activities have become varied. They create jobs for the school leavers as the small-scale businesses employ them while the others start businesses of their own. In this way, SMEs reduce the unemployment level.

Employment generation. In developed countries, SMEs employ about 70% of the population (87% in the United States of America, 74% in Japan, and 82% in Taiwan and Korea, Germany 73%). Besides generating employment, they also discourage rural-urban drift as they provide gainful employment and occupation in rural areas. In Nigeria, SMEs employ over 84% of its workforce. To be more productive, more attention should be to refocus on encouraging the SMEs by empowering them through government policies and funding by banks (Ossai, 2017).

Wealth creation and poverty reduction. Poverty may generally be defined as a lack of access to basic needs such as good nutrition, housing, water, healthcare, access to productive resources including education, work skills, and tools as well as political and civil rights to participate in decisions concerning their socio-economic conditions

(Olatomide, 2012). It is a state of helplessness. World Bank Report 2017 puts Nigeria's poverty rate at 33.1%. This makes Nigeria's poverty level, one of the highest in the world. As at the end of the second quarter of 2019, Nigeria overtook India in poverty level. Income inequality, religious conflict, ethnic conflict, and political instability account for Nigeria's increased poverty level. SMEs convert idle resources and production (land, labor, capital, and entrepreneurship) to the production of goods and services. This increases the GDP and wealth of a nation (Ojha, 2016). Eniola (2014) also asserted that the reduction of poverty through SME activities might be one of the most effective poverty reduction instruments.

Promotion of Local Entrepreneurship and Indigenous Technology Development

The promotion of micro and small businesses, especially in rural areas, is one significant contribution to economic development. The presence of SMEs in a rural environment could lead to a transformation of the area as they could cause economic, developmental, and social transformation. Natural resources are better utilized as SMEs are involved in the production of goods and services. It is pertinent to mention that most of the multinationals and big corporates once started as SMEs. Examples abound in the growth of companies like Guinness of Dublin, Philip of The Netherlands, and Sony of Japan. With good policies and proper government support, the SMEs can leverage imported technologies, modernize their processes, and grow to become large corporations (Ossai, 2017).

Mitigation of rural-urban drift. With the gainful employment of youths and school leavers in the rural areas, SMEs would stem rural-urban drift, especially in the developing economies. But for the SMEs, the vast resources in the rural areas remain unutilized and lying fallow. The effective utilization of the human, material, and natural resources of the rural areas play a significant role in the development of the economy (Ossai, 2017). SMEs provide the necessary goods and products to the larger companies for onward export to other countries. In most cases, the rural areas provide critical raw material in the production process of the commodity. At the bottom of the export value chain are the individuals, cottage businesses, and small-scale industries that provide the necessary input for the finished product. Drawing from the points, the SME leaders get paid for their goods and services as they turn hitherto idle resources to goods and services. Thus, SME business leaders generate income, redistribute income by paying salaries to employees and taxes to the government. The government uses the tax for running the state and engaging in social projects. In so doing, the gap between the rich and the poor, as well as between the rural and urban dwellers, is bridged (Ossai, 2017). Consequently, the government should continue to seek ways and initiate policies to support SMEs as they have become a veritable means of poverty alleviation and economic development (Eniola, 2014).

Summary and Transition

Chapter 2 examined existing literature on the key concepts relating to the study. These include a definition of what constitutes SME in Nigeria, their critical role, the literature search strategy, and the conceptual framework. The chapter also reviewed the systems theory, application of systems theory, and an exhaustive literature review. In the literature review, the characteristics of SME in Nigeria, government effort in the growth and development of SMEs in Nigeria, and the challenges of SMEs in Lekki were reviewed. The significance of SMEs and the role of SMEs in the economy of Nigeria was also reviewed.

For comparison, SME in Ghana was discussed with reference to the contributions of SMEs to Ghana's economic development. The constraints of SME development in Ghana was noted to be synonymous with the constraints faced in most developing nations, and they include, but not limited, to the high level of illiteracy, the lack of finance, lack of managerial skill, use of obsolete equipment and technology, lack of infrastructure such as good roads, power, and security as well multiple taxation and technology (Arytee, 1994). The issues of policy somersaults and limited access to international markets are also constraining factors to entrepreneurship. Lastly, the prospects of SME in Nigeria were reviewed. It was noted that SMEs remain a veritable means for the development and growth of Nigeria, and the government should continue to seek favorable policies to enhance their activities in Nigeria (Agwu & Emeti, 2014).

With the high mortality rate of SMEs before their fifth anniversary, it is doubtful if the leaders of SMEs understand the strategies to sustain the business for continued growth and development (Abdullahi & Sulaiman, 2015). Therefore, this research has become imperative. For this study, the exploratory multiple case research design has been adopted. A research gap exists in understanding the strategies that leaders use in sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos. In the background of the study, I reviewed past studies on the strategies used to sustain SME in other western parts of the world. Chapter Three contained the research methodology of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that leaders use in sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria. The rate at which small businesses have failed in recent times has necessitated the need for this research (see Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014). Most of the research on SMEs has dealt with their access to finance (Agwu & Emeti, 2014), but in discussing the strategies for sustaining SMEs in Lekki, cognizance must be made of the population and area comprising the Lekki business district. Thus, this research involved studying the successful entrepreneurs in the Lekki area who have run their SME beyond 5 years of sustained profitability. The qualitative multiple case study best suit the study’s research topic and nature.

In this chapter, the approach, research method, and research design were discussed. The research design describes the overall approach that has been used in this study to bridge the conceptual framework with the development of research questions and the specific design of data collection methods and analysis for the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The role of the researcher and the methodology are also explained. The way the researcher eliminated bias shall also be explained. Other areas discussed in the chapter are the participant selection logic, instrumentation, pilot study, as well as procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and data analysis plan. Lastly, the issues of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures of the research that were followed to ensure confidentiality and protection of the study participants shall be discussed. After that is a summary and transition to Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

Research designs describe the researcher's plans for answering the research questions and studying the study phenomena (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016; Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The design can be used to describe the overall structure of the study. The research design is the researcher's strategy to integrate the different components of a study (Yin 2014). The research design is the overall approach that a researcher adopts to bridge theory and concepts with the research questions and the design of data collection methods and analysis for a specific qualitative study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Because the study addressed SMEs in Lekki that have operated for over 5 years successfully, I chose the multiple-case design. Like this study, case studies are usually bound by time and space and usually involve a case or multiple cases of contemporary real-life events (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2009). This design helped answer the research question: What strategies do leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond 5 years?

The quantitative approach was not suited for this study. Quantitative studies focus more on the relationship between variables. The quantitative approach can be superficial and may not be suitable when there is a need for in-depth study to discover certain hidden aspects of human phenomena such as success strategies for SME leaders (see Burkholder et al., 2016; Patton, 2015). Further, in qualitative research, there is a relationship between the researcher's philosophical worldview and the research approach adopted for the study. Constructivist worldview proponents rely on who has been through an experience like the situation under investigation (Patton, 2015). This worldview aligns with the qualitative study approach that emphasizes understanding the meaning the persons ascribe to their experiences on varied social and human problems (Merriam & Tissdell, 2015).

Some methods commonly used in qualitative inquiry are phenomenology, ethnography, narrative research, grounded theory, and case study. The researcher must justify a choice used over the others (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Phenomenology is used to study the lived experience of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). An ethnography design is used by the researcher when studying culture-related issues from the participants (Yin, 2018). From the nature of the study, no other research method captures the essence of this study better than the qualitative multiple-case method. The case study design is the most appropriate for examining such phenomena with specific contexts (Ridder, 2017).

Case studies demand a lot of variation in the literature (Yazan, 2015), unlike phenomenology and grounded theory, which are more structured with more coherent design strategies. The variation may be attributed to each case's peculiarities under review and the circumstances of the investigation (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). This situation gives the researcher the leverage to develop new theories both from within-case analysis and across-case analysis. In exploring the strategies for sustaining SMEs in Lekki, the multiple case study method allowed for a better understanding of the ways used by SME leaders to succeed. In dealing with the cost and schedule difficulties associated with multiple case studies, replication is part of the research design to allow for cross-case examination (Yin, 2017).

In this study, the views of SME leaders who have experienced success in their chosen business within the Lekki area were reviewed through interviews, field notes, and document review. Ten small scale business owners within the Lekki area were interviewed, and saturation was achieved. The saturation point is reached when additional interviews do not give new information on the same subject and responses are repetitive (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is important to the success of the research. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher is an active participant in the research process because he or she is responsible for all forms of data collection, including interviews, researcher reflections, and document reviews (Maxwell, 2013; Kim, 2014). As the main instrument for this research, I took all necessary steps to ensure the data were devoid of bias and prejudice such as ensuring participants’ voluntary participation and confidentiality.

Positionality and social location are also critical determinants of a researcher’s identity, and they are central to understanding the researcher’s role at all stages of the research process. Positionality refers to the researcher’s role and identity related to the setting and context of the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A researcher’s positionality is the total of roles and relationships between the researcher and the participants within as well as with the research topic, setting, environment, and broader context that shape the findings. To understand the researcher's positionality fully, the social location must be fully considered (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In qualitative research, social location is the researcher's gender, race, sexual orientation/identity, social class, culture, and ethnicity. It also includes how the attributes intersect with identity markers such as national origin, language communities, and such like (Henslin, 2013). It is pertinent to mention that each researcher has a set of roles and identities that may shift and sometimes change with time.

As the researcher, I did not have any interest in the business of the participants selected for this study or any personal relationships with them. If I had, as the researcher, I would have reflected on the impact or influence of such a relationship in designing the study and ensure that such relationships do not affect the outcome of the research (Maxwell, 2013). All necessary steps were also taken to avoid conflict of interest and all forms of bias and prejudice.

Further, all efforts must be made by the researcher to ensure that the objectives of the research do not take precedence over ethics and morality (Haines, 2017). I ensured that the research was conducted in full compliance with the Walden University research guidelines and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulations. The protection, confidentiality, and comfort of participants in the study were ensured. In line with the Walden University research protocols, the interviewees were assessed correctly, the likely influences of researcher–participant interaction were mitigated, and the anonymity of the research process was ensured. The informed consent of the study participants was formally obtained, and the participants volunteered to participate on their own (see Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014).

Methodology

Methodology in a qualitative study refers to where ideology and epistemology meet research approach, design, methods, and implementation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This shapes the overall approach to the methods in a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired and constructed. Qualitative research methods are used for studying holistically or reality as seen, experienced, and constructed by individuals in their context (Brysiewicz & Erlingsson, 2013). Qualitative research methods can also be used to incorporate open-ended questions for exploring a subject matter of interest when predetermined answers are not sought (Yin, 2014). The underlying assumption in qualitative research is that knowledge is developed through the specific experiences of people. Hence, studies on these personal experiences should be conducted in the field where the participants live and work (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research is generally based on the methodological pursuit of understanding how people approach, see, view, and experience the world. It also includes how they make meaning of their experience and the specific phenomena with their world (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The chosen methodology should answer the research questions and address the purpose of the research (Stake, 2013). Thus, the methodology for this study was a qualitative, multiple case study design. The multiple case study method may not be appropriate for all research studies, but it is most appropriate for studies that seek to advance the generation of a theory (Stake, 2013). Multiple case studies may provide a more compelling and more robust explanation of a phenomenon than a single case study (Yin, 2014). For this study, Yin's (2017) concept of replication logic, which allows for each case to be used as a unit of analysis, was adopted.

In multiple case studies, a sample size of five to 10 participants is advised to cover the subject matter and depth of investigation of the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2017). Ten leaders of SMEs based in the Lekki area that have operated successfully for over 5 years were included in this study. The choice of 10-15 participants is justified because data saturation was achieved to obtain the richest data possible. Data saturation means (a) no new information materializes from the data collection, (b) when no new coding is indicated, (c) when no new theme is derived from the data, and (d) when the study results can be replicated (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Purposeful sampling was used in selecting the sample, which refers to selecting cases that are rich in information to study. Purposeful sampling was used to generate useful information from the sample instead of relying on chance alone, which random sampling gives (Maxwell, 2013). The 10-15 SMEs cut across the manufacturing sector, trading services, hospitality industry, education, oil and gas service companies, and financial services. Each case selected shall conform to the principle of heterogeneity and snowballing sampling (see Patton, 2015). Heterogeneity of samples refer to achieving maximum variation in the sample, whereas snowballing sampling strategy involves asking participants selected for referrals of other participants who meet the selection criteria (Meriam & Tsidell, 2015). The participants were recruited using the following inclusion criteria: (a) registration as SME business at Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria; (b) business record of more than 5 years; and (c) record of sustainable profit for the 5 years. The permission of the participants was sought using an expression of interest letter.

Upon receipt of confirmation and willingness to participate, the participants were contacted to explain further the entire process for participation, the fact that participation is voluntary, the duty to protect their confidentiality and their right to withdraw if they choose. The purpose and content of the informed consent form were explained, their questions and concerns were addressed, and the consent forms were signed. A copy of the informed consent form was given to each participant, and a convenient time and location to conduct the interviews were agreed. The interviews were conducted, depending on the days and time chosen by the participants, using the interview questions and the interview protocol to guide the engagement with the interviewees. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study—to share their understanding of the strategies that leaders had used in sustaining SMEs in Lekki—and their permission was sought to audiotape the interviews. To ensure clarity, a digital audio recording device with playback capability was used, and journal notes were maintained to record interviewees' feedback.

Data were collected from three sources, including one-on-one interviews with the selected leaders, document review, and field notes. The questions were open-ended in semistructured interview format. Data obtained were triangulated using field notes, a review of the participating SMEs' internal documents, and a semistructured interview. After collecting data, the cross-case synthesis data analysis technique was used for the data analysis. The triangulation of data obtained added to the credibility of the process, the research's trustworthiness, and the robustness of data. This makes the findings credible (Patton, 2014). The corroboration of evidence from multiple sources also lowers the risk of obtaining skewed information from a single source (Denzin, 2012). The use of more than one case study or adoption of multiple case studies and collection of company documents strengthened the research and led to data saturation and data triangulation.

Participant Selection Logic

For this research, 10 SME leaders in the Lekki area were selected by purposeful sampling to achieve good coverage of the business types. Sampling refers to the decision made regarding who and from where the researcher collected data needed to answer the research questions (Maxwell, 2013). Sampling decisions are usually made regarding the individuals chosen to participate in the study, but it is also made regarding groups, places, points, time, and events (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013).

In qualitative research, the unit of analysis is fundamental to the design of the method and approach. The unit of analysis could be an organization, group, or individual (Baskadara, 2014). In a qualitative case study, a case represents a unit of analysis. The case or unit of analysis in this study is an SME that has met all the sample criteria for this study (see Cronin, 2014). The 10 SME leaders had to have run their business successfully for at least 5 years, and the SMEs had to meet all the threshold for SME business as defined by the SMEDAN. The businesses also had to be domiciled in the Lekki area of Lagos State. Any SME that did not meet the criteria were not qualified for this study.

There has not been a consensus on the optimum number of cases for multiple case study design, though some argue that it should not be more than five cases (Merriam, 2009). Others have argued that six to 10 cases are ideal (Yin, 2017). But it can be said that the optimum number of cases depended mainly on the nature of the study and the saturation point of data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In deciding the number of cases and choice of participants, the researcher needs to understand the relationship between the sampling numbers and other sampling elements like events, settings, and processes (Maxwell, 2013). Participant selection must consider the goals of the research questions, the context, and the population at the center of the inquiry.

Purposeful sampling, which is also referred to as purposive sampling, is the primary method of sampling used in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Purposive sampling implies that the participants are purposefully or intentionally chosen for specific reasons to address the research question’s core context and constructs (Patton, 2015). Participants are deliberately chosen to address specific objectives (Maxwell, 2013). The reasons may range from individuals with the required experience or knowledge about the phenomenon to be investigated, live, or work in a place, or some other reason related to the research question. For this research, only the SMEs that have met all the criteria were qualified to participate in the study. With a limited number of participants compared to the population of SMEs, purposeful sampling was most appropriate to get the necessary information needed rather than relying on chance, as in random sampling (Maxwell, 2013).

The research commenced with an intended sample size of 10 after obtaining IRB approval (approval no. 06-05-20-1318143). This size would have increased until the saturation point was achieved in the data collection. The saturation point is where new or additional information is not obtained from additional persons interviewed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). SME leaders who have not operated for up to five years are not qualified and hence not considered for the sample. More prominent companies that are not SMEs were also not be considered for the study. Companies operating outside the Lekki zone shall not be used for the study. In selecting the participants for a study, the researcher must consider whom to include, why they should be included, the goals of the study, the research questions, and the contexts in which the study is made. The researcher should also consider the individuals and groups that are specifically knowledgeable on the given subject of study and the experiences, roles, perspectives, occupations, and relationships that are being explored (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Though there are still arguments against the purposeful sampling technique, it remains the most widely used sampling methodology in qualitative research (Patton, 2015).

In selecting the samples for the multiple-case study, the following were considered. First, that the samples meet the Nigerian SME classification as spelled out by SMEDAN, which include employment of 10-199 persons. Secondly, each case was accessed to provide information on the conceptual framework on which the research is based. Thirdly, the samples selected provided rich information that addressed the research question on the strategies for sustaining SME beyond five years. Lastly, the SMEs chosen for the sample provided access to achieve a productive research relationship with the proprietors of the enterprises (Maxwell, 2013).

Instrumentation

Research instruments are measurement tools developed and used to collect research data. Examples of research instruments are questionnaires, interviews, prompts, and procedures that guide data collection, observation templates, or protocols (See Appendix A). The interviews in qualitative research may be structured or unstructured. The extent to which the research instruments could be structured or unstructured depends on the overall approach that guides the methods and guides the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The primary mode of data collection for this research shall be semi-structured interviews. This is the preferred mode as it ensures a focused and consistent set of questions to be asked with a high level of objectivity across cases as well as allowing for flexibility for the researcher to engage in full exploration and interaction with the participants of the study (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The researcher was the primary data gathering instrument in the semi-structured interview. As the research instrument, the researcher must exercise objectivity, be without bias, exercise sensitivity, and apply the necessary skills and knowledge that helped in putting together a quality data (Rowley, 2012).

The semi-structured interview protocol was guided by the following considerations (a) making sure that the interview questions are in alignment with the problem statement, the purpose of the study, and the research question, and (b) new revelations regarding the success strategies adopted by participating SMEs in the study. Company documents were reviewed to augment information obtained from the interviews and the field notes taken during the data collection process. As the primary instrument for data collection in this study, the researcher must apply the necessary skills, professionalism, objectivity, and eschew bias, to achieve quality information from data obtained (Rowley, 2012). Open-ended questions are essential in data collection as participants are not limited to simple *yes* or *no* responses, and the semi-structured interview process may allow for follow-up questions that gave the interviewees room to provide in-depth meaning to their interview responses (Yin, 2014).

To further enrich the data, I shall seek the opinion of experts for expert validation, as suggested by Ekekwe (2013). The semi-structured interview consisted of prepared open-ended questions that guided the interview systematically and consistently. I included some probing questions to keep the conversation focused and productive to obtain useful data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). An interview protocol that is detailed and well researched is critical to the success of a qualitative research interview. Interview protocols generally include a brief of what the study is all about, the precise wording of the interview inquiry, features of the data collection routine, and a study report guide (Yin 2014).

An interview protocol (Appendix A) should be definite about the date and timing of the interview. There should be an overview description that is clear, inviting, transparent and concise; ensure the interview questions are not leading but open-ended to encourage freedom of expression; include clear and concise follow-up questions that probe for specifics and further examples where necessary; pay attention to the economy of time and quality of responses; avoid overly ambiguous or complex questions that may be actually asking more than one question at a time. Such questions are referred to as double-barreled. Include a final open-ended question that gives room to participants to express any other opinion they deem fit for the exercise (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

An interview protocol is vital in qualitative research as it enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of the research (Yin, 2014). Member checking was used to improve the credibility, accuracy, and verifiability of data collected and analyzed during the research (Harper & Cole, 2012). Data cleaning was achieved by deleting irrelevant, erroneous, inconsistent, and unusable data. The inputs for the analysis shall be cleaned data, notes, and data from the review of enterprise documents and journals. The data analysis was done using computer-assisted software such as Microsoft Word, Excel, and NVivo as recommended for coding, word count analysis, and determination of emerging themes and patterns in a qualitative study (Yin, 2014).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The study involved SMEs that have operated successfully for more than five years in the Lekki area of Lagos State of Nigeria. In selecting the sample, the purposive or purposeful sampling technique was used. As earlier mentioned, purposive sampling implies that the participants are purposefully or intentionally chosen for specific reasons to address the core context and constructs of the research question (Patton, 2015). Participants are deliberately chosen to address specific objectives (Maxwell, 2013). The reasons may range from individuals that have the required experience or knowledge about the phenomenon to be investigated, live, or work in a place or some other reason related to the research question. Purposive sampling is more targeted and would give a better result than random sampling in multiple case studies like this (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

In Nigeria, three sectors account for over 75% of the SME business, namely, manufacturing, retail trading (general commerce), and education (SMEDAN, 2013). In choosing the sample for this study, qualifying SMEs shall be chosen from the three sectors identified above. Three qualified SMEs shall be selected from each of the identified sectors and one qualified SME from the hospitality industry. This brings the total number of samples to 10 SMEs. The privilege of interviewing the leaders in this expertise provided up-to-date data through the interview process, and they gave the needed attention and feedback within a limited timeframe (Patton, 2015).

There are limited sources of reliable statistics and information on SMEs in Nigeria. Using the multiple-case research design helped generate data from the select cases that were fully accessible to the researcher. The selected cases answered the research questions and dealt with the purpose of the research. As expected, the choice of cases was driven by insights into the issue under investigation, then by the representation of any given population (Patton, 2015). Consequently, the selection of participants was carried out using the following sampling strategies, (a) quota sampling strategy and (b) snowball or chain sampling strategy.

In quota sampling, a selected number of cases in each category of cases are selected as participants for the interview. This strategy ensures that the desired categories are included in the study, regardless of other considerations. It is flexible and easy to explain compared to other methods (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As mentioned earlier, the

Snowball or chain sampling strategy refers to when the researcher starts with one or two relevant and full information and asks the participants to introduce others like them. This method created a chain of interviewees based on people who know people that are a good source of information regarding the issue of inquiry (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

At the instance of receiving the institutional research reviewers (IRB) approval, #06-05-20-0318143, the participants were contacted using a letter of expression of interest. The participants were recruited using the inclusion criteria, which include (a) registration as SME business at Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria, (b) business record of more than five years, and (c) record of sustainable profit for the five years. Upon receiving permission from the participants, interviews were scheduled with the founders or chief operating officers of the selected SMEs on the company's premises. The interviewees' offices were preferred as this enabled the direct review of company journals, documents, and magazines, where available and allowed by the interviewee. Using the office of the participants also provided the desired privacy and ambiance for both the researcher and the interviewee. Each interview was recorded with the consent of the interviewee and transcribed. The interviews started and ended on the same day, and there was no need for an extension to a later date (Yin 2017).

Trustworthiness was established using peer review, member checking, debriefing of participants, and data triangulation. Triangulating data from different sources such as semi-structured interviews, field notes, and document reviews can aid in data analysis. The time, date, and location of interviews with participants were coordinated for the semi-structured interviews and field notes. The semistructured face-to-face interview lasted 30-50 minutes. Member checking was used to ensure the meaning of participants' responses to the interview questions is accurately captured. One-on-one interviews with the 10 participants were completed over three weeks. The data obtained from the interviews and field studies were analyzed manually.

It is pertinent to mention that the researcher adopted the face-to-face interview method, where an immediate response may be derived from the semi-structured interview questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The following steps were followed:

1. Obtained Walden University IRB approval for the data collection process

2. Obtained consent from the participants identified

3. Scheduled and interview with participants to collect data and to audio-record the interview

4. Transcribed audio-recorded interview

5. Performed member checking by allowing participants to review the transcripts' summary to ensure accuracy in the researcher's interpretation and meaning of participants' interview responses

6. Imported textual transcripts into Microsoft word for data analysis

Data Collection

The data collection techniques used in this study include interviews, document reviews, and field notes. The interview process will involve conceptualization of the interview project, establishing access and making contact with the interviewees, embarking on data collection, transcribing the data collected, presenting the data collected, and sharing the lessons learned and outcomes of the study with all the research stakeholders (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For the multiple-case study, data can also be collected from each case using multiple sources such as face-to-face interviews, field notes, and document review at the convenient place agreed with the participants, company documents, journals, archival materials and personal reflection on the things or issues observed. Of all the sources of data collection, a face-to-face interview presents the most authentic primary data and may also present an excellent opportunity for document review, and unspoken communication (Yin, 2017).

If well planned and handled well, an interview could be a forum by which the researcher can explore people's perspectives to achieve fuller development of information within and across groups and individuals. This could be achieved while keeping the same lines of questioning that would help the researcher look within and across experiences in several ways that help reveal new meanings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Interviews in qualitative research do not typically seek uniformity in questioning but would instead have customized replication of questions. This means that while the different interviews share vital questions, the interviewer customized the questions by asking specific follow-up questions and contextualizing further probes that are tailor-made. The interview style was semi-structured as participants could express their views and lived experiences as much as they can concern the research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The questions were asked on the research topic with follow-up questions to clarify a point further and give more precise answers. Researchers tend to focus on specific topics and ask follow-up questions to increase clarity and precision (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Multiple sources of data are recommended for multiple case studies as they can provide deep insight and information on the subject matter being investigated (Baskadara, 2014). The other sources of data for the study would be the researcher's field notes, the researcher's reflections, and document reviews (Yin, 2017). Participation in the interview shall be voluntary, and all participants shall be aware of the purpose and objectives of the research as they would be made to sign the consent form, which spells out the purpose and objectives of the research and why they have been chosen. Respect and gratitude were demonstrated for their consent to participate in the interview.

The interview process was guided by the interview protocol as approved. A laptop shall be used to transcribe the interview for the research paper using Microsoft Word and Excel software. A cell phone with the Voicea software was used to do the audio record of all interviews, while field notes were in place to take down any keyword, reflections, reactions by the interviewee, and interpretations as well (Merriam, 2009). A log was created using an Excel sheet to record discussions and track progress with participants. The excel sheet contained details of each interviewee, such as contact address, phone number, and email, without compromising privacy and confidentiality of information obtained. An interview session may last for one to two hours, and repeated interviews may occur if necessary until all desired information is received (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

To end the interviews, a standardized debriefing procedure for all the participants was followed. The procedure started by informing the participants that there are no more questions for them, and they were asked if they have any questions regarding the interview or their participation. The participants were asked to convey their feelings or any concerns they might have regarding the interview, or the process followed. Finally, they were thanked for participating. Their continued cooperation was sought and requested follow-up clarifications if it becomes necessary.

Interviews can be expensive and time-consuming but provide meaningful new findings in qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Information obtained can be very in-depth, unlike other methods of research. Non-verbal communication and personal idiosyncrasies critical to the interpretation of data obtained can be observed and noted in an interview. In a qualitative research interview, developing a personal rapport is essential and could be critical to the interview's success as the interviewee may withhold some information if he or she does not have a rapport with the interviewer (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). I ensured that interviews and data gathering was in full accordance with the IRB requirements and guidelines of Walden University.

A field survey's primary limitation is the sample size of participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The sample size in this study is limited to 10. Though the business owners or leaders were selected in such a way to make it representative of the full population, I also acknowledge that personal bias or prejudice may influence my judgment of the answers provided by the participants selected. I endeavor to make the participants comfortable and assure them of the confidentiality of the exercise. Different data collection methods were deployed, especially the use of interviews, field notes, and document review.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis in qualitative research is the review of data to decipher meaningful patterns that lead to thematic answers to the primary or central research question of a research study (Yin 2017). It is the total of all the processes and procedures used to make sense of the data generated in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It is the deliberate scrutiny of data at every stage of the research process. The scrutiny here, involves data organization and management, the immersive engagement with the data, and writing and representation. The three processes make up the three-pronged approach to data analysis.

The grounded theory attempts to develop theory from field data. The data can be generated from various sources such as field notes, interviews, documents, and other sources. Data analysis begins as soon as the first piece of data is generated (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). According to Schwadt (2015), grounded theory methodology refers to any approach used in developing theoretical concepts or models from primary data. Grounded theory methodology is a specific set of rigorous procedures used in analyzing qualitative data to generate a theory of social behavior.

In developing a theory, empirical indicators are noted in the field data generated. A comparison is made looking for similarities and differences; the similarities and uniformities are categorized and coded. Concepts are developed from the coding, and explanations of possible relationships are developed or determined. Hypothesis or tentative theories are developed from the relationship observed and the comparisons made, which are further improved or sharpened by additional information provided by new data. Theoretical sampling is used to test an emergent theory in grounded theory research methodology (Ravitch & Carl, 2015).

Data generated from the multiple-case study were analyzed using memo notes, as well as categorization using codes and thematic analysis, and narrative analysis to connect meanings (Maxwell, 2013). There is no best way of conducting research analysis. However, the analysis option chosen by the researcher should answer the research question comprehensively. Memos are written by the researcher to aid his/her understanding of the experience being discussed by the interviewee. In the categorization strategies, the researcher uses coding to categorize words and phrases with similar meanings with regards to the research question. A step by step qualitative data analysis was adopted as described in the following paragraphs.

The first step is for the researcher to know the data. Knowing the data can be achieved by reading and re-reading the data and noting the impressions made. If there are tape recordings, it should be listened to several times until meaning is made. Avoid bias in every way, explain the limitations encountered in the research, and the level of analysis deemed appropriate for the data obtained.

The second step is to focus on the analysis. The analysis of data should be focused on the purpose of the evaluation. In analyzing the data, the key questions should be written down, the research topic must be borne in mind, and appropriate answers sought while conducting the analysis. The analysis should focus on the research question or topic, with the use of open-ended questions. Looking at how the respondents answered the interview questions, noting the consistencies and differences in answers given. Questions asked were used to analyze data, time or event, respondents or group of respondents, case studies, or combinations of all the categorizations.

The third step involved categorizing the information. This is sometimes referred to as coding the data or indexing the data. It involves identifying themes or patterns, ideas, concepts, incidents, terminology, or phrases used, behaviors, interactions, and incidents. Then categorizing them with the similarities or differences identified. The fourth step is to identify patterns and connections within and between categories. As the data is organized both within and between categories, I noticed patterns and connections between the different categories. The researcher may notice similarities or subtle variations in his/her analysis of the data, which could be identified using the within-category description, creating broader categories, creating an order of relative importance of each category, and identifying relationships. Finally, the fifth step is putting it all together. This is the process of using the themes, connections, and categorizations to explain the findings. This stage is called interpreting the data, attaching meaning and significance to the analysis. One could start by listing the critical findings discovered as a result of the categorizing and sorting data.

Maxwell (2013) noted that categorization is not about counting words or similar items but more of rearranging words and texts to capture the similarities of items within the same category. The codes are used to identify words and phrases with the same meanings and the categories used to connect them. The descriptive coding method was used as the basic analytical technique in this research (Saldana, 2016). This is because it serves the purpose of symbolically assigning meanings to data or segments of data generated in the fieldwork. A descriptive coding method is recommended for starters or researchers with no previous experience in qualitative coding of data (Saldana, 2016).

In case study qualitative research, for an in-depth understanding of the data generated from fieldwork, the researcher must immerse himself/herself in the data and decipher trends and put meanings to those trends regarding the investigated phenomenon. The analysis of data in qualitative research can be flexible, unlike the collection of quantitative data that follow laid down procedures and processes in quantitative research. The interpretation and analysis of qualitative data depend mainly on the alternative interpretation possibilities based on the researcher's style, how the evidence was presented, and the rigor he/she puts into an evaluation (Baillie, 2015).

Methodological triangulation involves seeking a second and third source of data for the research. It is arguably the most common type of triangulation used in case studies (Anney, 2014). Methodological triangulation has two types, viz: (a) cross-case method and (b) within method. Cross case method involves the use of two different methods of data collection, such as qualitative and quantitative (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Within method triangulation involves the use of more than one data set collected from different sources but within one data collection method. Multiple sources of data are advised for data collection in qualitative studies because it gives credibility and authenticity to the findings. Yin (2017) is a proponent of the cross-case method of data analysis. He posited that the cross-case method of data synthesis is more appropriate, where different cases are compared and contrasted with one another instead of dealing with an individual case. Cross-case synthesis is also more efficient than content analysis in doctorate research studies where the researcher compares and contrasts cases instead of analyzing single cases (Yin, 2017).

Multiple source evidence gives the researcher the ability to check and re-check the findings for consistency from different interviewees (Yin, 2017). Some scholars have argued that the element of human judgment bears on the outcome of qualitative research. That line of argument does not recognize that in-depth research and freedom of expression abound in qualitative research (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Designs that use both the cross-case method and within-case methods have been found to foster a generation of theoretical propositions and constructs than when only within-case analysis is used. Yin (2017), discussed the five steps of data collection which include (a) data collection, (b) grouping data (c) regrouping data based on themes (d) evaluating the information from data (e) recognizing emergent themes. Rowley (2012) offered similar four steps for data analysis, viz: (a) organizing the set of data (b) getting acquainted with the data (c) all processes to classify, code, and interpret the data, and lastly, (d) presentation of findings.

Discrepant data or outliers should be investigated further. This is because discrepant data could reveal information not found in the modal data or norm. An in-depth analysis of the discrepant data may challenge preconceived notions and the themes that are being developed. The more a researcher challenges, questions, and looks for alternative explanations, the more complex and comprehensive the interpretations become (Ravitch and Carl, 2016).

Qualitative data analysis is an iterative and recursive process. This is because data analysis is an active and ongoing process starting from when the first set of data is collected, and each set of the subsequent analytic process builds on the other such that the layers and complexities in the data ultimately form the basis of the findings of the study

(Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative data analysis is formative and ongoing as well as summative because meaning is often ascribed after data has been collected, and the researcher tries to connect the meaning from all data collected. Formative data analysis entails engaging in multiple analytic processes, including developing how the data analysis should drive the research questions and data collection instruments (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Lastly, qualitative data analysis requires data and theory triangulation, just like triangulation in data collection. This is sometimes referred to as analytic triangulation. As earlier mentioned, triangulation refers to getting data from multiple perspectives to answer the research questions asked (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Nvivo software from Microsoft Word and Excel spreadsheet was used to analyze data. The alternative use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) programs may also be employed. The choice of analysis technique is mostly dependent on the size of the project, the funds available for the project, and the time expected to be spent on the project (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Issues of Trustworthiness

The issues of trustworthiness in qualitative research are central to its acceptance as a credible method of inquiry. Though the qualitative method of research has faced several criticisms for its lack of rigor and trustworthiness, proponents of qualitative research and qualitative researchers have continued to defend the critical role it plays in understanding several human phenomena in their natural setting (Maria, 2015). The need to employ strategies that ensured rigor is even more compelling in qualitative studies, especially for a novice researcher (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Often, validity is used interchangeably with trustworthiness. The quality of research depends mostly on the trustworthiness of the research methodology (Anney, 2014). There is a need for a comprehensive explanation and description of the process used in recruiting participants, interaction with participants, and data collection, data recording, and data analysis (Hyett et al., 2014). Accordingly, a proper description of the case selection strategies must be stated to explain why a case was chosen over others.

Qualitative researchers demonstrate fidelity to participants' experiences rather than specific methods. Unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers use a lens not based on scores, instruments, or design. However, a lens established on the interviewers' views, the participants or interviewees, and of other external individuals not directly linked to the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research depends more on semi-structured interviews, which gives room for freedom of expression and thought, thereby strengthening the trustworthiness/validity and reliability of the study (Foley & O'Connor, 2013).

Qualitative researchers adhere to a set of different principles and standards or criteria than quantitative researchers to assess validity or trustworthiness, given the differences in perspectives and mindset (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These standards include credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures. Guba (1981) drew parallels for these qualitative standards with the quantitative standards of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Qualitative researchers should develop validity techniques that align with the research questions, research purpose, and research context. By so doing, rigor in the study can be ensured. In the following paragraphs, the qualitative research standards were explained further.

Credibility

Credibility is the ability to consider all the complexities that present themselves in a research study and the researcher's ability to deal with identified patterns that are not easily explained. Credibility provides assurances of a fit between the participants' experiences and their responses with regards to the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). To a large extent, credibility is akin to the quantitative concept of internal validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The credibility of research implies that the findings and interpretations are plausible to the "researched" (participants). There may not be a perfect match in some studies.

Data from multiple sources were used to ensure credibility and internal validity in putting together the field notes, interviews, and document review. As earlier stated, a purposeful sampling technique was used to select participants. This further deepens our knowledge of the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015). Other methods to ensure the study's credibility are triangulation of my data to ensure correctness and objectivity. Triangulation is a set of processes employed by a researcher to enhance the validity of a study. It is generally considered to have more than one source of information or different methods to challenge or confirm a set of interpretations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Triangulation could be in the form of methodological triangulation, data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and perspectival triangulation. It could be prolonged contact with the interviewees to ensure consistency in answers and repeat visits where further clarification is desired. To ensure the study's credibility and validity, member-checks was undertaken, the saturation of observations was ensured, and reflexivity and peer review were carried out (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability, which is akin to external validity, means that qualitative research is bound contextually (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The goal of qualitative research is to develop descriptive, context-relevant statements and not necessarily produce true statements that could be generalized to other settings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) sums up the meaning of transferability by answering the question: "How can one know the extent to which the findings of an inquiry may also be applied to other contexts or with other respondents?" Once the answer to this question is objectively definite, we can talk about the study's transferability or universality. Transferability refers to the applicability of findings based on the comparability of contexts.

Transferability can be achieved by having detail description of the data and the context in which the study is carried out (thick description) such that both readers, audiences, and other stakeholders can make comparisons to other contexts based on comprehensive information as much as possible (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Thick description refers to how a researcher in a qualitative study accurately and thoroughly describes the study setting, context, participants, and related experiences resulting in complex interpretations and findings that allow the audience to make more contextualized meaning (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Thick description implies a depth of detail in the context usually collected from multiple data sources, including document review and field notes. It allows readers and other stakeholders to get enough information on the contextual depth such that they can picture the setting in their minds and form opinions about the quality of research and the researcher's interpretations. Transferability and validity give the assurance that a study can be related to other similar studies in the literature (Patton, 2015).

Dependability

Dependability, which is the qualitative counterpart to reliability in quantitative research, refers to the stability of the data (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). A qualitative study is considered dependable because of its consistency and stability over time (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Dependability implies that the researcher has a reasoned argument for collecting his data, and the data is consistent with his argument. It also implies that the data collected answers the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2014). Dependability and reliability provide the highest level of assurance that a systematic and well-documented approach that can be replicated by other researchers to arrive at the same conclusions have been followed by the researcher (Patton, 2015). Dependability accounts for factors of instability and change within the natural context.

To ensure the dependability of the research, a well-defined and documented study methodology was followed, using the approved interview protocol to generate my data. The criteria for choosing participants were clear, documented, and clearly defined. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate and comprehensive capture of the views and experiences narrated and expressed during the interview, before being stored in a safe place. Any element of bias shall be eliminated during the collection of data and the interpretation of data. All the reflections that inform my conceptualizations and conclusions are documented. The fieldwork was rigorous and in-depth, so the information extracted from there regarding the phenomenon being studied is credible and dependable (Patton, 2015). Just like other validity constructs, an excellent research design is critical to achieving dependability. Triangulation and sequencing of methods, with a good rationale for choosing a data collection plan, bearing the research question in mind (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Confirmability

Confirmability is often taken as the qualitative counterpart to objectivity in quantitative research. Confirmability gives assurances that the data conceptualizations, interpretations, and conclusions are from the researcher's opinions and imaginations (Patton, 2015). It presupposes that a qualitative researcher does not claim objectivity, but seeks to have confirmable data and relative freedom and neutrality (Miles et al., 2014). Qualitative researchers do not seek objectivity, but their findings or conclusions should be confirmed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Confirmability is also the capacity to authenticate the internal coherence of data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations. Confirmability can be achieved by triangulation, researcher reflexivity, and external audits (Guba, 1981). Researcher reflexivity is a process that entails looking inwards to eliminate all traces of personal bias that may influence the data collection and interpretation. During the interviews, leading questions were avoided, and all preconceptions or personal beliefs shall be put aside to avoid bias (Baskadara, 2014).

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures in qualitative research have to do with taking a relational approach and stance on the research study. There are basic ethical considerations to make in dealing with human subjects (Patton, 2015). The Institutional Review Board has described basic guidelines that should be followed to ensure the protection of participants in a research endeavor. Quantitative research is primarily centered on relationships. Hence it is imperative to frame relational considerations as ethical issues (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ethics in qualitative research has many dimensions. It is contextual, emergent, and relational. Attention was paid to the procedural and transactional aspects and the relational and socio-political dimensions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

To comply with the desired ethical standards, I contacted the target participants only after obtaining IRB approval (#06-05-20-0318143). Contacts were made with the select SME leaders to obtain their consent of participation and to be interviewed. Participants were asked to sign a consent form. Participation in the study is purely a voluntary act, and appreciation was shown for the gesture. Also, full disclosure was made to the participants on the purpose of the research, the extent of the participant’s role, and the possible use of the research outcome (Sanjari et al., 2014).

Protection of the participants was provided by ensuring their confidentiality is maintained, and their narration regarding their business interest is adequately protected. Codes are employed to represent participants and their business. The researcher adopted the concept of beneficence, which entails that I should always seek participants' welfare and not cause harm to research participants in any way (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that withdrawal at any time was possible during the data collection process. For filing and storage, each file regarding each SME shall be given a password, and stored in a fire-proof cabinet, locked in a safe place. The files should be kept for at least five years before destruction (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Confidentiality

There was a face-to-face contact between the interviewee and the interviewer. Confidentiality refers to avoiding the participants' connection to their comments in the study (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). All comments that could link the specific names or role of participants to the interview were avoided. To prevent compromising confidentiality, study participants were asked to provide any additional comments or revisions to the transcript confidentially and to return the transcript by email. Data confidentiality is described as making data secured from unauthorized parties (Bojanc & Jerman-Blazic, 2013). The records are protected using a hard drive on a secure computer and password-protected files to prevent unauthorized users' access.

Summary and Transition

Chapter 3 dealt with the research design and rationale and the appropriate methodology used for the study. The study explored the strategies for sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria. A detailed description of the qualitative multiple-case study methodology was provided, and a justification for the chosen methodology was made.

Qualitative studies are preferred where the role of the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection was also mentioned and noted. The selection criteria and the basis for selecting participants were explained in the section where participant selection logic was discussed. This was noted as critical to the quality of the research work. Instrumentation has to do with the tools for data collection. The semi-structured interview was used mainly, and this is the preferred method in qualitative research as the participants can express themselves freely. The linkage between the interview questions and the research questions was showed. It was noted that the answers must speak to the research questions.

I collected data from multiple sources to give credibility to the data and the information extracted from there. The data analysis plan involved all the processes and procedures in analyzing and extracting information from the data generated in the fieldwork. The issues of qualitative research standards of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were discussed. All the standards would make the research work reliable and valid. It was shown that all ethical procedures were followed to ensure the participants’ protection in the research and confidentiality of participants was not compromised. Chapter Four and Chapter Five contains the interpretation of the data generated, and further discussions, conclusions, and recommendations are made.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that leaders use in sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos. Most SME leaders lack the necessary skills and understanding to manage their enterprise beyond 5 years. The main research question was “What strategies do leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond 5 years?” There has been limited research on what strategies to employ for sustained profitability and continued operation. The purpose of this research was to address the gap in knowledge in exploring the strategies that leaders use in sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos. The findings revealed the strategies that can be used to sustain the business continuously for 5 years and beyond. Different factors account for business failure, and a combination of identified strategies may likely mitigate these factors. Data analysis was carried out in two stages: within-case content analysis of data and the thematic cross-case analysis of data. In this chapter, the research setting, the composition, nature of the research participants, and the demography of the participants are discussed. Subsequently, the procedure of the data collection is explained. A summary of the codes and themes developed from the raw data are also discussed.

Research Setting

The study involved collecting data from 10 SME leaders doing business in Lekki successfully for over 5 years. Lekki was selected as the main research setting because the area consists of a high number of SMEs that have been in business for more than 10 years. Participants operated businesses within selected industries that include manufacturing, education, general services, and financial services.

The participants were selected by purposeful sampling method. The interview method was semistructured, enabling the participants to answer the questions in the best way they could without limitations or constraints, ensuring convenience, comfort, and privacy as the participants dictated the time. The interviews took place in a quiet library and after work. The interviews were conducted after office working hours to allow for optimal concentration from the interviewees.

I sought permission from the participants to record our conversation with my android phone, using Voicea software. I started with Question 1 and ending with Question 9. I followed up with additional questions elicited by the response from the participants. The interview ended with a further exchange of pleasantries, as I thanked the participant for accepting to take part in the study. Three of the interviews lasted for 54 minutes, four lasted for 58 minutes, two lasted for 48 minutes, and one interview lasted 45 minutes. I told them of a need to call for a member-checking interview, which lasted for 30 minutes. At the end of the interview, I played back some sections of the interview to ensure that the audio recording quality was good. The participants expressed their satisfaction with the data collection. I transferred the recordings to my laptop computer in separate files for each record and saved them with a password for each file. I subsequently moved the audio data into Microsoft Word files for each participant.

Demographics

This study was based in Lekki, Lagos and the 10 participants selected was based on the eligibility criteria:

- SME leaders that have operated successfully for over 5 years,
- SMEs that are employing more than 10 persons but not more than 200 employees,
- SMEs involved in general trading, educational services, financial services, and small manufacturing; these sectors account for 75% of SME businesses in Nigeria. (SMEDAN, 2017)

Participant 1

Participant 1 is the owner-manager of a bottled water manufacturing company operating in Lekki continuously for over 12 years. The company started business in 2008 and has 62 employees in its employment. This falls into the category of medium enterprises in the SME classification criteria. P1 is a chemical engineer and certified accountant. He had worked in a multinational oil company before venturing into the bottled water business.

Participant 2

Participant 2 runs an educational services company. The company was established in 2006 and had 53 employees. This makes the company fall in the category of medium-sized enterprises in Nigeria. The owner-manager is a graduate of a premier university in Nigeria who worked with some consulting firms before venturing into the provision of educational services, including a private secondary school. The company has been run successfully and continuously for 14 years.

Participant 3

Participant 3 is an entrepreneur engaged in wholesale of goods and services (general commerce). A graduate of one of Nigeria's premier polytechnics, she was previously working for a bank before setting up her business in 2012. As at the time of the interview, the enterprise has a staff of 18 persons, which makes it a small business in the categorization of SMEs in Nigeria. Each staff has a specific job function. Total revenue has grown continuously every year since its inception.

Participant 4

Participant 4 is an owner-manager of a medium enterprise engaged in the financial services sector since 2009. She graduated with a first degree in mathematics and worked in some financial institutions before resigning to set up the business. It has a staff strength of 55 employees. This puts her enterprise in the medium business category of SMEs in Nigeria. The company has operated successfully for 11 years.

Participant 5

Participant 5 is an entrepreneur engaged in wholesale distribution of soft drinks (general commerce). He commenced this line of business in 2003 and has operated for 17 years continuously. He is a graduate of economics and had worked in several multinational companies and banks before going into private business. He has 65 employees. This puts his business in the medium-size category.

Participant 6

Participant 6 is the owner-manager of a small manufacturing enterprise. He has 18 employees and operates in a highly automated environment. The participant's composition makes it fall into the category of small enterprises in the Nigerian SME categorization criteria. The enterprise commenced business in 2014 and has run successfully for over 6 years. The participant worked briefly as a production engineer before setting up his own business.

Participant 7

Participant 7 is a graduate of zoology who set up a retail business in Lekki. The enterprise employs 16 people and is engaged in the sales and distribution of perfumes and fragrances. The business has grown continuously since its inception in 2012. The proprietor who is the owner-manager worked in other companies before leaving to set up his retail distribution business (general commerce). He is looking at further expansion to other parts of Lagos.

Participant 8

Participant 8 is engaged in educational consulting services and has been in his chosen business line for over 10 years. The consultancy was set up in 2010 in Lekki, and the enterprise has a staff strength of 18 persons. This puts the enterprise in the category of small business in the Nigerian SME classification criteria. Before starting his enterprise, he worked for two multinational corporations. He manages the company by himself.

Participant 9

Participant 9 is an owner-manager of a manufacturing enterprise established in 2011 after a successful law practice. He currently has a staff of 60 people, which makes his business fall into medium enterprises in the Nigerian SME classification criteria. The enterprise has run successfully continuously for about 9 years with year on year growth in revenues since the commencement of business. He operates the business from a location in Lekki.

Participant 10

Participant 10 is engaged in general sales and commerce of petroleum products. She is a graduate of botany from a premier university and worked in both consulting and financial services for 12 years before resigning to establish the retail petroleum stations in Lekki. She operates from three locations within Lekki and has 56 people in her employment, which makes her enterprise a medium enterprise in the Nigerian SME classification criteria. Participant 10 has run her business as owner-manager since 2001, making it 19 years of continued growth and business profitability in the business.

Table 3 shows the demographics of participants in the study. The year of commencement of business, the business sector of operation, the number of employees, and the level of education of each participant is shown. The classification of the business as a small or medium enterprise is based on the number of employees by the SMEDAN Report (2017). From the report, a small enterprise has 20 employees or more but less than 50 employees. A medium enterprise has 50 employees or more but not more than 200 employees. It was also noted that businesses in the manufacturing, general trading, education, and financial services sectors account for about 75% of the SMEs that operate in Nigeria. This distribution holds true for the Lekki area too (SMEDAN, 2017).

Table 3

Participants' Demographics

	Business Sector	Year of Commencement of Business	Years in Position	Number of Employees	Gender	Level of Education
P1	Manufacturing	2008	12	62	Male	Master's degree
P2	Education	2006	14	53	Male	Master's degree
P3	General Commerce	2012	8	18	Female	Bachelor's degree
P4	Financial Services	2009	11	55	Female	Master's degree
P5	General Commerce	2003	17	65	Male	Bachelor's degree
P6	Manufacturing	2014	8	16	Male	Master's degree
P7	Financial Services	2012	8	16	Male	Master's degree
P8	Education	2010	10	18	Male	Master's degree
P9	Manufacturing	2011	9	60	Male	Master's degree
P10	General Commerce	2001	19	56	Female	Master's degree

Data Collection

Data collection commenced after obtaining IRB approval. The data collection techniques used in this study include interviews, document reviews, and field notes. Multiple data sources are recommended for multiple case studies as they can provide deep insight and information on the subject matter being investigated (Baskadara, 2014).

The interview process involved conceptualization of the interview project, establishing access and making contact with the interviewees, embarking on data collection, transcribing the data collected, presenting the data collected, and sharing the lessons learned and outcomes of the study with all the research stakeholders (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Of all the data collection sources, face-to-face interview were the most authentic primary data and also presented a good opportunity for document review and unspoken communication (Yin, 2017). Interviews can be expensive and time-consuming but provide meaningful new findings in qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Information obtained can be in-depth, unlike other methods of research. Nonverbal communication and personal peculiarities, which are critical to interpreting data obtained, can be observed and noted in an interview.

If well planned and handled well, an interview can be a forum by which the researcher can explore people’s perspectives to develop information within and across groups and individuals fully. This can be achieved while keeping the same questioning, which helps the researcher look within and across experiences in several ways that help reveal new meanings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Interviews in qualitative research do not typically seek uniformity in questioning but rather customized replication of questions. This means that while the different interviews share key questions, the interviewer customizes the questions by asking specific follow-up questions and contextualizing further probes that are tailor-made for the interviewee. The questions were asked on the research topic with follow-up questions to clarify a point further and give more precise answers. Researchers tend to focus on specific topics and ask follow-up questions to increase clarity and precision (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Further, the interview style was semistructured, as participants were allowed to express their views and lived experiences as much as they can concern the research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The interview process was guided by the interview protocol as approved to ensure dependability. A laptop was used to transcribe the interview for the research paper using Microsoft Word and Excel software. A cell phone with the Voicea software was used to do the audio record of all interviews, while field notes were in place to take down any keyword, reflections, and reactions by the interviewee, and interpretations (Merriam, 2009). A log was created using an Excel sheet to record discussions and track progress with participants. The Excel sheet contained each interviewee's details such as contact address, phone number, and e-mail without compromising privacy and confidentiality of information obtained. An interview session may last for 1 to 2 hours, and repeated interviews may occur if necessary until all desired information is received (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I ensured that interviews and data gathering was in full accordance with the IRB guidelines of Walden University. Additionally, in a qualitative research interview, developing a personal rapport is important. It can be critical to the interview's success, as the interviewee may withhold some information if he or she does not have a rapport with the interviewer (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Participation in the interviews was voluntary. All participants were also aware of the purpose and objectives of the research, as they signed the consent form that described the purpose and objectives of the research and why they were chosen. Respect and gratitude were demonstrated for their consent to participate in the interview.

The primary limitation of a field survey is the sample size of participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The sample size in this study was limited to 10. Though the business owners or leaders were selected in such a way to make it representative of the full population, I also acknowledge that personal bias or prejudice may influence my judgment of the answers provided by the participants selected. I endeavored to make the participants comfortable and assure them of the confidentiality of the exercise. Different data collection methods were deployed, especially the use of interviews, field notes, and document review. See Table 4 for an alignment of the data collection with the research question and interview questions.

Table 4

Summary of Data Collection Elements Using a Multiple Case Study

Research Question	Interview Questions	Types of Data Collection Tool	Analysis
What strategies do leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years?	What are the strategies that have contributed to your sustained success in operating a small to medium enterprise in Lekki?	Semistructured interview, field notes, and document review	Process of transcription, coding, categorizing and analysis of participants responses using member checking.
	What are your major challenges of doing business in Lekki as a founder/operator? How do you surmount those challenges you encounter in running your business? How do you recruit your customers? What do you do to keep your customers? How do you respond to changes in the business environment since you commenced business to date? What is the role of your business in the lives of your customers? How do you see your business in the next five years? What other information or experiences that may benefit future business leaders you may wish to share?		

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis in qualitative research is the review of data to decipher meaningful patterns that lead to thematic answers to a research study's primary or central research question (Yin 2017). The total of all the processes and procedures used to make sense of the data generated in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It is the deliberate scrutiny of data at every stage of the research process. The examination here, involves data organization and management, the immersive engagement with the data, and writing and representation. The three processes mentioned above make up the three-pronged approach to data analysis.

Case study research involves studying a case or multiple cases of real life events, usually in contemporary setting (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). As earlier mentioned, a case is usually bounded by time and space. My multiple-case study took place in the Lekki area of Lagos State, and the study was carried out between June 6 and July 20, 2020. The data collected were from various sources such as field notes, interviews, and documents. Data analysis begins as soon as the first piece of data is generated (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Data generated from the multiple-case study were analyzed using memo notes, as well as categorization using codes and thematic analysis, and narrative analysis to connect meanings (Maxwell, 2013). There is no best way of conducting research analysis; however, the researcher's analysis option should answer the research question comprehensively. Memos are written by the researcher to aid his/her understanding of the experience being discussed by the interviewee. In the categorization strategies, the researcher uses coding to categorize words and phrases with similar meanings regarding the research question. A step by step qualitative data analysis was adopted as follows:

First, is for the researcher to know the data. Understanding the data can be achieved by reading and re-reading the data and noting the impressions you have. If there are tape recordings, it should have listened to several times until meaning is made. Avoid bias in every way, explain the limitations encountered in the research, and the level of analysis deemed appropriate for the data obtained. The second step is to focus on the analysis. The analysis of data should be focused on the purpose of the evaluation. In analyzing the data, the key questions should be written down, the research topic must be borne in mind, and appropriate answers sought while conducting the analysis. The analysis should be focused on the research question or topic, and period or event. Looking at how the respondents answered the interview questions, noting the consistencies and differences in answers given. Questions could analyze data asked, time or event, respondents or group of respondents, case studied, or a combination of all the categorizations mentioned above.

The third step is to categorize the information. This is sometimes referred to as coding the data or indexing the data. This involves identifying themes or patterns, ideas, concepts, incidents, terminology, or phrases used, behaviors, interactions, and incidents. Then categorizing them with the similarities or differences identified. The fourth step is to identify patterns and connections within and between categories. The researcher may notice similarities or subtle variations in his/her analysis of the data, which could be identified using the within category description, creating larger categories, creating an order of relative importance of each category, and identifying relationships. The fifth step is putting it all together. This is the process of using the themes, connections, and categorizations to explain the findings. This stage is called interpreting the data, attaching meaning and significance to the analysis. One could start by listing the important findings discovered as a result of the categorizing and sorting of data.

Maxwell (2013), noted that categorization is not about counting words or similar items but more of rearranging words and texts to capture the similarities of items within the same category. The codes are used to identify words and phrases with the same meanings and the categories used to connect them. The descriptive coding method was used as the basic analytical technique in this research (Saldana, 2016). This is because it serves the purpose of symbolically assigning meanings to data or segments of data generated in the fieldwork. A descriptive coding method is recommended for starters or researchers with no previous experience in qualitative coding data (Saldana, 2016).

In case study qualitative research, for an in-depth understanding of the data generated from fieldwork, the researcher must immerse himself/herself in the data and decipher trends, and put meanings to those trends regarding the phenomenon being investigated. The data analysis in qualitative research can be flexible, unlike the collection of quantitative data that follow laid down procedures and processes in quantitative research. The interpretation and analysis of qualitative data depend largely on the alternative interpretation possibilities based on the researcher's style, how the evidence was presented, and the rigor he/she puts into an evaluation (Baillie, 2015).

Methodological triangulation involves seeking a second and third source of data for the research (Anney, 2014). Methodological triangulation has two types, namely (a) cross-case method and (b) within the method. Cross case method involves using two different data collection methods, such as qualitative and quantitative (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Within the method, triangulation involves using more than one data set collected from different sources but within one data collection method. Multiple sources of data are advised for data collection in qualitative studies because it gives credibility and authenticity to the findings. Yin (2017) is a proponent of the cross-case method of data analysis. He posited that the cross-case data synthesis method is more appropriate, where different cases are compared and contrasted with one another instead of dealing with an individual case. Cross-case synthesis is also more efficient than content analysis in doctorate research studies where the researcher compares and contrasts cases instead of analyzing single cases (Yin, 2017). Methodological triangulation has some inherent limitation as data collected from different sources, or using different methods may not be easily comparable. They come in different forms and will often defy direct comparison (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Multiple source evidence also gives the researcher the ability to check and re-check the findings for consistency from different interviewees (Yin, 2017). Some scholars have argued that the element of human judgment bears on the outcome of qualitative research. That line of argument does not recognize that deep research and freedom of expression abound in qualitative research (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Designs that use both the cross-case and within-case methods have been found to foster a generation of theoretical propositions and constructs than when only within-case analysis is used. Yin (2017), discussed the five steps of data collection which include (a) data collection, (b) grouping data (c) regrouping data based on themes (d) evaluating the information from data (e) recognizing emergent themes. Rowley (2012) offered similar four steps for data analysis, namely (a) organizing the set of data (b) getting acquainted with the data (c) all processes to classify, code, and interpret the data, and lastly, (d) presentation of findings.

Discrepant data or outliers were investigated further. This is because discrepant data could reveal information not found in the modal data or norm. A deep analysis of the discrepant data may challenge preconceived notions as well as the themes that are being developed. The more a researcher challenges, questions, and looks for alternative explanations, the more complex and comprehensive the interpretations become (Ravitch and Carl, 2016).

Qualitative data analysis is an iterative and recursive process. This is because data analysis is an active and ongoing process starting from when the first set of data is collected, and each set of the subsequent analytic process builds on the other such that the layers and complexities in the data ultimately form the basis of the findings of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative data analysis is formative and ongoing as well as summative because meaning is often ascribed after data has been collected, and the researcher tries to connect the meaning from all data collected. Formative data analysis entails engaging in multiple analytic processes, including developing how the data analysis should drive the research questions and data collection instruments (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The findings in this study resulted from data analysis and interpretation from the data collection process. Data collection included the transcribed interviews, field notes, and documents review, through a manual coding process to generate themes. The transcription process took nine working days. I produced over 100 pages of transcribed data pages. I had limitation with some expressions due to language pronouncement, speech pattern, and jargons. The coding process took another six days. Through the back and forth process between explanation and understanding of the interview recorded, I was able to achieve the emergence of themes (see Table 5). The recurring themes that were mentioned by all or most of the participants included (a) ability and doggedness, (b) financial planning, (c) direct marketing and competitive advantage, (d) social media marketing and human relationship, (e) information and communication technology and innovation, (f) effective customer relations, (g) exploring adequate sources of funding, (h) effective staff training and motivation, and (i) servant leadership approach.

Table 5

Data Analysis: Codes, Categories, and Emerging Themes from Interview Process

Codes/Categories	Emerging Themes	Number of Occurrence	Percentage of Occurrence
Be dogged in your pursuit, challenges abound but are surmountable	Agility and Doggedness	10	100%
Outsourcing of non-core activities, effective strategy, securing strategic funding, adequate planning, and adaptation to changes We ensure business profitability and growth. We offer financial advisory, insurance, management, taxation, and strategy formulation for clients	Financial Planning	10	100%
One-on-one marketing calls and referrals, deployment of social media tools, product papers for desired markets Direct marketing, business promotions for drive-in customers, One-on-one marketing calls and referrals, deployment of social media tools, product papers for desired markets	Direct Marketing & Competitive Advantage	9	90%
Wide range of services to suit client's needs, leadership, social media to boost customer base and market products. Outsource of service delivery to cut out the effect of heavy traffic, social media promotions, alternative energy sources, good tax management and avoidance of double tax, close relationship with key customers	Social Media Marketing & Human Relationship	9	90%
Keep abreast of changes and better ways of doing business to serve clients better, monitor changes in technology, fiscal, monetary environment. Proactiveness, innovativeness, staying on top of the game, relating to people of like business-minds	Information & Communication Technology and Innovation	10	100%
Building trusts, setting customer expectations, offering service surprises, using automation to re-engage customers, leverage customer feedback surveys, learning from customer complaints	Effective Customer Relations	10	100%
Funding is the life blood of a business. Our service is very relevant to all our customers	Exploring Adequate Sources of Funding	10	100%
Hands-on training, head-hunting for tested and reliable hands, willingness to pay more to retain good hands.	Effective Staff Training and Motivation	8	80%
Employment of qualified staff, proper planning, commitment of the founder/owner-manager	Servant leadership Approach	8	80%

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is the ability to consider all the complexities that present themselves in a research study and the researcher's ability to deal with identified patterns that are not easily explained. Credibility provides assurances of a fit between the participants' experiences and their responses with regards to the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). To a large extent, credibility is akin to the quantitative concept of internal validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Research credibility implies that the findings and interpretations are plausible to the "researched" (participants). There may not be a perfect match in some studies.

Data from multiple sources were used to ensure credibility and internal validity in putting together the field notes, interviews, and document review. As earlier stated, a purposeful sampling technique was used to select participants. This further deepens our knowledge of the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015). Other methods to ensure the study's credibility are triangulation of my data to ensure correctness and objectivity. Triangulation is a set of processes employed by a researcher to enhance the validity of a study. It is generally considered to have more than one source of information or use different methods to challenge or confirm a set of interpretations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Triangulation could be in the form of methodological triangulation, data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and perspectival triangulation. Prolonged contact with the interviewees to ensure consistency in answers and to repeat visits where further clarification is desired. To ensure credibility, member-checks was undertaken, saturation was ensured, and reflexivity and peer review were carried out (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability, which is akin to external validity, means that qualitative research is bound contextually (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research aims to develop descriptive, context-relevant statements and not necessarily to produce true reports that could be generalized to other settings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) sums up the meaning of transferability by answering the question: “How can one know the extent to which the findings of an inquiry may also be applied to other contexts or with other respondents?” Transferability refers to the applicability of findings based on the comparability of contexts.

Transferability can be achieved by having a detailed description of the data and the context in which the study is carried out. Both readers, audiences, and other stakeholders can make comparisons to other contexts based on comprehensive information as much as possible (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The thick description refers to how a researcher in a qualitative study accurately and thoroughly describe the study setting, context, participants, and related experiences resulting in complex interpretations and findings that allow the audience to make more contextualized meaning (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The thick description implies a depth of detail in the context usually collected from multiple data sources, including document review and field notes. It allows readers and other stakeholders to get enough information on the contextual depth to picture the setting in their minds and form opinions about the quality of research and the researcher's interpretations. Transferability and validity assure that a study can be related to other similar studies in the literature (Patton, 2015).

Dependability

Dependability, which is the qualitative counterpart to reliability in quantitative research, refers to the data (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). A qualitative study is considered dependable because of its consistency and stability (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Dependability implies that the researcher has a reasoned argument for collecting his data, and the data is consistent with his argument. It also implies that the data collected answers the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2014). Dependability and reliability provide the highest level of assurance that a systematic and well-documented approach that can be replicated by other researchers to arrive at the same conclusions have been followed by the researcher (Patton, 2015). Dependability accounts for factors of instability and change within the natural context.

To ensure the research's dependability, I used a well-defined and documented study methodology, using the approved interview protocol to generate my data. The criteria for choosing participants were clear, documented, and clearly defined. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate and comprehensive capture of the views and experiences narrated and expressed during the interview, before being stored in a safe place. Any element of bias shall be eliminated during the collection of data and the interpretation of data. All the reflections that inform my conceptualizations and conclusions are documented. The fieldwork was rigorous and in-depth, so the information extracted therefrom regarding the studied phenomenon is credible and dependable (Patton, 2015). Just like other validity constructs, a very good research design is critical to achieving dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is often taken as the qualitative counterpart to objectivity in quantitative research. Confirmability gives assurances that the data conceptualizations, interpretations, and conclusions are from the researcher's opinions and imaginations (Patton, 2015). It presupposes that a qualitative researcher does not claim to be objective, but seeks to have confirmable data and relative freedom and neutrality (Miles et al., 2014). Qualitative researchers do not find objectivity, but their findings or conclusions should be confirmed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Confirmability is also the capacity to authenticate the internal coherence of data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations. Confirmability can be achieved by triangulation, researcher reflexivity, and external audits (Guba, 1981). Researcher reflexivity is a process that entails looking inwards to eliminate all traces of personal bias that may influence the data collection and interpretation. During the interviews, leading questions were avoided, and all preconceptions or personal beliefs shall be put aside to avoid bias (Baskadara, 2014).

Study Results

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the strategies that leaders use in sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria. The central research question of this study is as follows: What strategies do leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years? I will use this section to highlight the nine themes that emerged in the data collection process.

Theme 1: Agility and Doggedness

The first emergent theme resulted from an analysis and interpretation of the data collection from the semistructured interview question, field notes, and document review. 10 participants who represent 100% responded agility and doggedness was the strategies that leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years. Participant 1 stated "be dogged in your pursuit, challenges abound but are surmountable, ability to surmount challenges." Participant 2 stated "business experience in Nigeria are different from academic knowledge, the very volatile economic and political situation in Nigeria require experience to deal successively." Participant 3 said:

> Be prepared for adversity, emphasis on enterprise risk management [ERM], demand accountability at all levels, and stay focused but make changes where necessary, inspire staff, good leadership, led by example, pray. It is very important not to mix business finance with personal finance, learn a business before venturing into it, budget discipline, good staff welfare package, maintain good relationship with competitors, and staying focused.

Participant 4 said "we operate on agility in this volatile, and complex environment where business is unpredictable and uncertain." Participant 5,6,7,8,9, and 10 summed it up by saying that "it is very important not to mix business finance with personal finance, learn a business before venturing into it, agility, doggedness, budget discipline, good staff welfare package, maintain good relationship with competitors, and staying focused."

Theme 2: Financial Planning

The second emergent theme resulted from an analysis and interpretation of the data collection from the semistructured interview question, field notes, and document review. 10 participants who represent 100% responded financial planning was the strategies that leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years.

Participant 1 said "outsourcing of non-core activities, effective strategy, securing strategic funding, adequate planning, and adaptation to changes." Participant 5 said "seeking funds from intervention funds, study government policies and seek value benefits, work within budgets, shared infrastructure, training and retraining of staff. Lack of finance, government regulations not protective, poor infrastructure, difficulty in retaining qualified skilled staff." Participant 7 stated

> financial planning help to avoid high power consumption, mixed business district such as residential and office buildings, high cost of utility services, wrong perception that business is for the rich. Expense control, leadership by founder/owner manager, reward good performance and sanction poor performance

Participant 2 said "Diligent in financial appropriation, using qualified and financial and financial experts has been a practice in our organization to have the discipline it takes for business survival and growth." The rest participants summed it up by saying that the ability of a company to have financial planning is a framework and direction to its sustenance."

Theme 3: Direct Marketing and Competitive Advantage

The third emergent theme resulted from an analysis and interpretation of the data collection from the semistructured interview question, field notes, and document review. Nine participants who represent 90% responded direct marketing and competitive advantage was the strategies that leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years. Participant 10 said "Direct marketing, business promotions for drive-in customers is a required strategy employed by me when reengineering of business focus was required." Participant 7 stated "One-on-one marketing calls and referrals, deployment of social media tools, product papers for desired markets." Participant 8 said "Use of fliers, print media, and social media, marketing, podcast, webinars, seminars." Participant 1 and 2 agreed that through direct market, door to door approach, market has contributed to their customers' retention rate and also give them lead in customer acquisition. Other participants summed it up by saying that having direct reach with individual or corporate could ensure patronage is on an upward trend.

Theme 4: Information and Communication Technology and Innovation

The fourth emergent theme resulted from an analysis and interpretation of the data collection from the semistructured interview question, field notes, and document review. 10 participants who represent 100% responded information and communication technology and innovation was the strategies that leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years. Participant 1 stated “Securing strategic funding sources, outsourcing of non-core activities, exceptional inventory management, value pricing, utilization of information technology.” Participant 2 and 3 noted that aligning your business to the rest of the world using information and communication technology was strategy I started using at a teenage age. Now, I make 80% of transactions online and the COVID-19 did not affect our business as a result of the investment we made into ICT prior to the pandemic. Participant 8 said “Keep abreast of changes and better ways of doing business to serve clients better, monitor changes in technology, fiscal, monetary environment.” The rest participants summed it up by saying, Information and communication technology is the new normal for business sustainability and surviving VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) environment such as Nigeria.

Theme 5: Social Media Marketing and Human Relationship

The fifth emergent theme resulted from an analysis and interpretation of the data collection from the semistructured interview question, field notes, and document review. 9 participants who represent 90% responded social median marketing and human relationship was the strategies that leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years. Participant 1 quoted from Mahatma Gandhi’s quote that “customers are the most important visitors in our premises, they are not distraction to our business, rather they are part of it, we are not doing them a favor, rather they are giving us the opportunity to serve them”. Participant 8 stated “Beyond revenue forecast, we want to make social impacts, be a leader in our chosen market, respected brand, highly skilled workforce, carefully planned and structured succession planning, enter new markets, able to attract best hands".

Theme 6: Effective Customer Relations

The sixth emergent theme resulted from an analysis and interpretation of the data collection from the semistructured interview question, field notes, and document review. Nine participants who represent 90% responded effective customer relations was the strategies that leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years. Participant 1 said

> Building trusts, setting customer expectations, offering service surprises, using automation to re-engage customers, leverage customer feedback surveys, learning from customer complaints. Website email engagement, referral program, definition of target audience, using the right acquisition channel, leverage video content, content creation

Participant 3 said "excellent after-sales service, cost management, staff welfare, and focus on customer need. Personal relationships, provide good quality/genuine products, excellent after-sales service, effective communication with customers" Participant 4 said "quick decision time, personalized customer service, low leverage level, tailor-made products to suit client needs. Meeting their needs, complaints handled quickly, appropriate pricing, exceptional service. Participant 5 said "Impeccable service delivery." Participant 6 mentioned "exceed expectations, provision of service level agreement.” Participant 7 said “Transparency, provision of standard reports, adding value to customer’s business, regular business calls, giving concessions, image management.” Participant 8, 9, and others stated that “Regular follow-ups, ensure product offering is suitable, business communication of new offerings to database, discounts.”

Theme 7: Exploring Adequate Sources of Funding

The seventh emergent theme resulted from an analysis and interpretation of the data collection from the semistructured interview question, field notes, and document review. Ten participants who represent 100% responded exploring adequate sources of funding was the strategies that leaders of SME business in Lekki use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years. Participant 1 said

> Securing strategic funding sources, outsourcing of non-core activities, exceptional inventory management, value pricing, utilization of information technology. Outsourcing of non-core activities, effective strategy, securing strategic funding, adequate planning, and adaptation to changes.

Participant 4 said “Funding is the life blood of a business. Our service is very relevant to all our customers.” Participant 7 stated

> Beyond revenue forecast, we want to make social impacts, be a leader in our chosen market, respected brand, highly skilled workforce, carefully planned and structured succession planning, enter new markets, able to

attract best hands. Expense control, leadership by founder/owner manager, reward good performance and sanction poor performance.

Other participants summed it up by saying a wide range of services to suit client's needs, leadership skills, social media deployment to boost customer base, and marketing of products.

Theme 8: Effective Staff Training and Motivation

The eight emergent theme resulted from an analysis and interpretation of the data collection from the semistructured interview question, field notes, and document review. 8 participants who represent 80% responded effective staff training and motivation was the strategies that leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years.

Participant 2 stated

> Hands-on training, head-hunting for tested and reliable hands, willingness to pay more to retain good hands. Shared experiences with other market players, attending seminars and conferences both locally and abroad, continuous management training consulting with subject matter experts

Participant 10 stated "Human capital/right staffing, good relationship with staff, honesty, consistency, no bank loans." Participant 4 said

> Lack of integrity of staff, cost of doing business - electricity, security, traffic situation, repayment difficulties, and collateral transfer is difficult. Continuous surveillance on staff activities, zero tolerance on staff found culpable, training, adequate remuneration, code of corporate governance,

> zero tolerance, strict hours of operation, strict lending rules, and usage of other forms of collateral.

Participant 5 said “Seeking funds from intervention funds, study government policies and seek value benefits, work within budgets, shared infrastructure, training and retraining of staff.” Participant 7 mentioned

> Compliance with statutory changes, communicate external changes to board and staff and seek alternative strategies, adapt to changes, introduce new products, communicate changes to customers. Be prepared for adversity, emphasis on enterprise risk management [ERM], demand accountability at all levels, stay focused but make changes where necessary, inspire staff, good leadership, led by example, pray.

Other participants agreed on the relevance of staff training and motivation

Theme 9: Servant Leadership Approach

The ninth emergent theme resulted from an analysis and interpretation of the data collection from the semistructured interview question, field notes, and document review. 8 participants who represent 80% responded servant leadership approach was the strategies that leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years. Participant 5 said “No one carries the vision of the business better than the founder/owner. Others only follow your zeal and enthusiasm, small business owners should look beyond the immediate and try to be more futuristic.” Participant 7 said “Be prepared for adversity, emphasis on enterprise risk management [ERM], demand accountability at all levels, stay focused but make changes where necessary, inspire staff, good leadership, led by example, pray." Participant 8 mentioned "Understand the principle of leadership, knowledge of business, environment, stakeholders' management, trust, empathy, and teamwork." Participant 9 mentioned "Leadership, close personal contacts with customers and staff." The rest of the five participants agreed by saying using a servant leadership approach has been the model of attracting and sustaining staff who in turn defend the company both in thin and thick times of business.

Summary

Chapter 4 addressed the demographics, research setting, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the description of the main themes and categories. The data resulted from the interview responses from 10 SMEs from industries such as the manufacturing sector, trading services, hospitality industry, education, oil and gas service companies, and financial services in the Lekki area that have survived beyond five years. From the data collection and analysis process, eight themes emerged: agility and doggedness, financial planning, direct marketing, competitive advantage, information & communication technology, and innovation. Other themes included social media marketing and human relationship, effective customer relations, exploring adequate sources of funding, effective staff training & motivation, and servant leadership approach. Chapter 5 includes the interpretation and analysis of the findings, the limitations, the recommendations, and the study's social change implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that leaders use in sustaining SMEs in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria. The research question was “What strategies do leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond 5 years?” This study involved a multiple case study to bring attention to major factors underlying SME performance and the strategies they used to sustain business beyond 5 years. The key findings included nine emergent themes: agility and doggedness, financial planning, direct marketing and competitive advantage, information and communication technology and innovation, social media marketing and human relationship, effective customer relations, exploring adequate sources of funding, effective staff training and motivation, and servant leadership approach. In Chapter 5, I discuss the interpretation of these findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications for social change.

Interpretation of Findings

The themes that emerged were topics that impacted the SME business in Lekki regarding their strategies for sustained success in operating their business beyond 5 years. Through these themes, participants addressed the research question and built on the literature review. The following sections include an interpretation of each subject.

Agility and Doggedness

Agility and doggedness were the strategies leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria used that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond 5 years. Agility is an organization’s ability to observe varying demands efficiently (Rane et al., 2020). Agility refers to adapting and reacting to unexpected changes within and between organizations quickly (Dehgani & Navimipour, 2019). By definition, agility depends on a wide range of operation management capabilities like available information and communication technology infrastructure, adequate knowledge and decision-making capabilities of people, people's involvement, and adequate support (Dehgani & Navimipour, 2019). The lack of top management alignment and commitment, lack of digital strategy, lack of new technology competencies, and financial factors inefficiencies are barriers that would arise while improving agility in any organization (Rane et al., 2020). Further, agility is the ability to maximize positive outcomes and opportunities and minimize negative outcomes. Agility is directly associated with an organization's performance in a highly competitive environment (Dehgani & Navimipour, 2019). By being agile and showing doggedness, SME businesses' leaders have sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond 5 years.

Financial Planning

Financial planning was also one of the strategies leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria used that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their SMEs beyond 5 years. Financial planning entails a comprehensive assessment of current and future financial status (Kumar et al., 2019). Financial planning is a complex, multidimensional task and includes a wide array of activities such as cash flow management, savings, investments, tax planning, real estate management, insurance planning and retirement planning (Kumar et al., 2019). Though SMEs play a crucial role in every economy due to their significant contribution to new job creation, entrepreneurship, and innovation, many face several challenges in their management systems, with lack of an efficient and effective financial management being a major one (Karadag, 2017). Financial planning is concerned with understanding the factors that determine the value of a business's uncertain cash-flows over time, and with management of these factors through careful financial management and control and sound financial decision-making (Karadag, 2017). Financial planning was a strategy used by the SME leaders at Lekki to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years.

Direct Marketing and Competitive Advantage

Direct marketing and competitive advantage was another strategy business leaders mentioned. Direct marketing strategy is a tool SME uses to sustain competitive advantage (Lin et al., 2020). With increasing globalization and intensifying worldwide competition, many firms are starting to invest in direct marketing, export to pursue growth opportunities, diversify business risks, and increase profits (Tan & Sousa, 2016). As firms continue to internationalize at an increasing rate and the competition in the global markets intensifies, the relevance of possessing the capabilities required to meet foreign customer requirements more effectively than competitors becomes ever more important for firms (Tan & Sousa, 2016). Using direct marketing and upgrading positive brand image also helps firms, particularly SMEs, improve their industrial competitiveness, function as industrial barriers against potential competitors, and accomplish financial rewards (Lin et al., 2020).

Information and Communication Technology and Innovation

Another strategy for business sustainability involved information and communication technology and innovation. Practical advanced use of technology has opened innovative practices for information professionals to manage knowledge in organizations, especially the Internet-of-things or the Internet-of-everything (Makori, 2017). Internet-of-things refers to the use of intelligently connected devices and systems to obtain information (Makori, 2017). Intelligence and innovation of the Internet have led to digital technology applications such as social computing, social media, telecommunications, and mobile communications (Makori, 2017). The dynamic and multiplicity nature of the Internet-of-things technologies reshaping academic institutions and information organizations’ potential has created renewed knowledge and innovation through mobile-learning for distance and e-learning programs (Makori, 2017). Consequently, there is need to educate most SME leaders who currently lack knowledge on how to upgrade their business operation from the traditional record keeping using notebooks to using information communication technology.

Social Media Marketing and Human Relationship

The theme social media marketing and human relationship was also a strategy leaders of SME business in Lekki used, which have contributed to their sustained success in operating their SMEs beyond 5 years. The post-modern era of business has come across many innovations, including the social media, though social media has also offered challenges in business sustainability and corporate communications (Basri & Siam, 2019). However, social media influence offers a marketing platform for the information age, offering an avenue and forum for increased sales, giving an innovative edge to SMEs in a bid to reduce expenditures, cost and increase profitability and creating a benchmark of direct client communication in modern public relations (Agostini et al., 2017; Basri & Siam, 2019). The current practice in using social media in marketing has created new customers for business. Several products are being sold online through social media marketing and communication. The need to enforce human relationship can never be overemphasized in ensuring true satisfaction. Future researchers may explore how human relationship influence the social media marketing and how such relationship could differentiate leaders in the market.

Effective Customer Relations

Effective customer relations was another strategy that business leaders mentioned. Cost minimization and resource allocation alone are not sufficient to survive in the market (Balci & Cetin, 2017). Delivering superior service quality is also the key to survive competition. Understanding customers' characteristics, needs, and wants are important to develop new services, create differentiation, and maintain customer relations (Balci & Cetin, 2017). Segmenting customers into meaningful homogenous groups may help business leaders know their customers better, understand specific requirements of each cluster, differentiate their service, or develop new services based on segments (Balci & Cetin, 2017). Segmentation is also important regarding identifying and profitably managing customers through the efficient use of resources (Balci & Cetin, 2017).

Good customer relations in terms of customer interaction is relevant because satisfied customers are more loyal and will continue using the service (Bellingkrodt &

Wallenburg, 2015). Service delivery continues to expand as competitors try to differentiate their offerings by viewing the exchanges as all-inclusive processes (Kim et al., 2020). Successful service delivery usually requires diverse actors' collaborative efforts (Kim et al., 2020). Service providers even recognize that customers help with service delivery (Kim et al., 2020). Customer co-production receives broad scholarly attention in the services marketing literature (Kim et al., 2020). Customers are free agents looking to maximize their service experience (Kim et al., 2020). The more prolonged the service setting, the higher the likelihood of customers interacting with other customers (Kim et al., 2020). This customer-to-customer interactions also influence service recipients' perceptions of the service provider (Kim et al., 2020). When customers share their service space with other customers, customer-to-customer interactions naturally occur (Kim et al., 2020).

Exploring Adequate Sources of Funding

The seventh theme was exploring adequate sources of funding. There is evidence showing that small businesses suffer from financial constraints that hamper their ability to grow. They have less access to formal external sources of finance than larger companies and rely on informal funding sources such as family and friends (Harel & Kaufmann, 2016). However, several financial tools have emerged, such as leasing and factoring, but these solutions relate to specific deals and provide only a partial solution (Harel & Kaufmann, 2016). This theme revealed the different sources of financing SME, which may allow practitioners to explore those several options and leverage on their availability. The government and the general public may also benefit from this finding by increased awareness to practitioners and prospective practitioners of the different sources of accessing loan, therefore reducing unemployment and business failure.

Effective Staff Training and Motivation

Effective staff training and motivation also contributed to the leaders' sustained success in operating their SMEs beyond 5 years. SME leaders may need to draw up a developmental agenda for their staff who currently lack training or have shortage of knowledge. The SME leaders can introduce in-house training or introduce external training system to close the skills gap identified among staff in the business. This finding supports previous studies. For example, Panagiotakopoulos (2020) found that management training in small businesses had a positive impact on organizational performance. In particular, the participants who completed formal training interventions argued that their firms achieved increased profitability during 2017 and 2018, improved staff productivity, decreased the staff turnover rate, and enhanced staff satisfaction and motivation compared with the less-trained owners of small firms in the same sector (Panagiotakopoulos, 2020).

Apart from training employees, other training forms where a trained employee transfers such knowledge to others can serve as motivation and increase staff retention. Training effectiveness and training transfer are used interchangeably in the training paradigm (Arasanmi, 2019). Training transfer connotes end-users' accountability evidence through the use and demonstration of acquired knowledge and skills in task performance (Arasanmi, 2019). Training transfer has been described as applying gained knowledge and skills from training in achieving daily job outcomes (Arasanmi, 2019).

Thus, training transfer involves cognitive, knowledge, and behavioral skills in task environments (Arasanmi, 2019). Training transfer is synonymous with post-training performance in the workplace. Workplace performance comprises acquired ability, skills, and knowledge in solving task-related problems and making operational decisions and accomplishing expected business standards for the organization (Arasanmi, 2019).

Servant Leadership Approach

The ninth theme resulted from the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the semistructured interview questions. I found that the servant leadership approach was the strategy leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria used that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years. This ninth theme supported Sendjaya et al. (2019). Although prior research has shown that servant leadership leads to citizenship behavior, no study has explored how leaders of SME business used servant leadership approach in Lekki contribute to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years. Several leadership practices that may serve as motivation to staff are (a) improvement in communication between leaders and subordinate, (b) delegation of duties by leaders to subordinates, and (c) introduction of succession planning practice in SME businesses in Lekki Nigeria.

Sendjaya et al. (2019) evaluated servant leadership in promoting climate variables, including positive organizational climate, service climate, and trust climate. Servant leaders serve as positive role models that move followers from self-serving to other-serving individuals within the organization, creating perceptions of ethical organizational functioning and the meaning they assign to the work environment such as psychological, and ethical climate (Sendjaya et al., 2019). Leadership is a key characteristic that helps in focusing efforts of all organizational actors towards achieving the organization's overall goals (Al-Agadi et al., 2019).

Servant leadership has emerged as a significant leadership approach, which promotes leaders who serve their followers to improve follower performance and, eventually, the organization's performance (Al-Agadi et al., 2019). In an organizational context, this orientation to serve is driven by leaders' concerns about employee individual growth, empowerment, and development of mutual trust. Servant leaders have the attitude of leading others from a perspective of placing the needs of both the organization and people's needs above their own needs and desires (Al-Agadi et al., 2019). The findings on this study may contribute to the body of knowledge and for future researchers who may be interested in developing strategies that leaders use in sustaining SMEs in African countries or across the world.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations were about the methodology used and the scope of the study among others. From the scope of the study, the study has a limited scope since it focused on SME leaders and business in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria. Therefore, including other SMEs from other part of Lagos to determine the strategies they have adopted to achieve business survival was not considered. Another limitation was the referral of SME leaders to participate in the study. When a referral occurred, I was unsure what the two participants discussed that might have influenced the collected data. Another limitation is that some of the participants may have omitted some details in their responses, and some may have exaggerated their responses.

I used member checking to establish the reliability and validity of this study and verified the participants' statements within a limited time frame, this may have impacted on the responses of the participants due to lack of sufficient time for proper reflection. The consideration for time restraints, rescheduling, and cancellations was also a contributing factor that might have limited this study. I used Microsoft Word and Excel for the data organization and audit trail to elicit reflexivity towards enhancing the study's dependability and confirmability. The use of hand-coding, note-taking, and digital audio recorder for the interviews facilitated the credibility and confirmation of the data collection. Consistent checking for reliability and accuracy of the data ensured that the study did not miss any data or have inconsistencies. I will suggest that future researchers focus on other parts of Lagos, Nigeria or other states in Nigeria to evaluate and compare the strategies SME leaders use in sustaining small to medium scale enterprises beyond five years.

Recommendations

The recommendations for this study include practice recommendations and those for future research. The practice recommendations are borne of the study's findings to provide SME leaders with proven tangible and successful strategies used by SME leaders in the Nigerian SME environment. The recommendations for studies to be carried out to address the gaps and limitations found in this study and to address the research question: What strategies do leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years? Also, further studies should be carried out to explore how mini and micro enterprises survive in other parts of Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation for Practice

Small and medium enterprise survival and growth. All SME leaders in Nigeria must strive to ensure the survival and growth of their business irrespective of the climate and changes experienced in the country and the world in general. The COVID-19 period has been confronted with lots of uncertainty, complex, volatile, and ambiguous environments in Nigeria; exchange rate volatility is also a reality. However, focusing on survival and growth by being agile and dogged as revealed in the theme one that emerged. The survival and growth of SME are the survival and growth of the individuals, the owners, and the country where the SME business is carried out. SME can also exploit the social media advantage to promote survival and growth. Firms can access resources through network relationships principally in two ways: by acquiring resources through a market transaction or by mobilizing resources. Acheampong et al. (2018) appraised SME to transfer resources from other SMEs to ensure survival and growth. This recommendation is grounded on theme one and theme five.

Recommendation for Further Research

Financial planning and discipline. All leaders of SME in Nigeria must have financial discipline as well as adequate financial planning to ensure continuity. In the course of the interview, I observed that some SME leaders operate a business in spaces that appeared insufficient for their business while their running costs were very high as compared to the industry practice. I recommend that SME leaders in Lekki have sufficient financial planning systems to justify their business location. Otherwise, they should relocate to less expensive areas of Lagos, Nigeria, where the cost of rent is less expansive and where the population is also very high for adequate patronage. This recommendation is grounded on theme two in the emergent themes. Karagad (2017) advised that SMEs should have adequate financial resources to take advantage of technology levels, and engage in research and development (R & D) spending in these economic units, as well as attain sufficient education and managerial capabilities.

Information on financial planning and discipline may be significant to SME leaders as they will improve their financial planning skills by recruiting qualified accountants to manage their finance department. The study findings have also created awareness to a prospective SME leader in having an in-depth understanding of the strategies to adopt that ensures SME sustainability. The study findings may also be significant to the society; a properly managed SME can attract infrastructure to its locality, create more business opportunities for owners of SME, employ more staff, pay taxes to the government, and contribute to positive social change through the corporate social responsibility goals.

Implications for Social Change

The possible impact for positive social change is SME’s longevity in Nigeria, thereby reducing business failure. Business failure has severe negative ripple effects for employees, their families, and society due to the firm’s reduced economic contribution.

Additionally, upskilling SME leaders with key strategies for sustainable success, gives the leaders a survival toolkit that fosters better performance and improved results.

Theoretical Implication

SME leaders can use this study's learning to create positive social change by applying the emerging themes of agility and doggedness, financial planning, direct marketing, and competitive advantage, information and communication technology, innovation, social media marketing and human relationship, effective customer relations, exploring adequate sources of funding, effective staff training and motivation, and servant leadership approach. These themes have the added benefit of empowering employees, injecting ethics into decision-making and leadership, directly growing employees, managing their talents, and preparing leaders to win despite the odds. Agility and doggedness imply that SMEs must be ready to change and adapt to Nigeria's changing environment to survive and remain in business to ensure the employees, community, and government remain effective and successful. With financial planning, SMEs will be able to take advantage of future opportunities and grow adequately.

Methodological Implication

The methodological implication is grounded on the fact that three different methods were used to triangulate the data collected; semistructured interview, field notes, and document reviews. Methodological triangulation for correlating data from multiple data collection methods such as semistructured interview, field notes, and document review increases the chances of data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The methodological triangulation is used to achieve richness in depth (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

The study methodological implication includes, achieving the qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological method of data collection and study.

Conclusions

These study findings were used to address the strategies, leaders of SME business in Lekki, Nigeria use that have contributed to their sustained success in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years. The nine strategies that emerged from the study were used by the 10 SME leaders in Lekki in operating their small to medium enterprises beyond five years. The strategies directly inform the specific management problem identified in this study's foundational research problem that leaders of SMEs in Lekki lack the necessary strategies to grow and sustain their business beyond five years of operation. Nine themes emerged in the study that addressed the research question. The emergent themes were: agility and doggedness, financial planning, direct marketing and competitive advantage, information and communication technology, innovation, social media marketing and human relationship, effective customer relations, exploring adequate sources of funding, effective staff training and motivation, and servant leadership approach. The SME leaders, individual employees, and the government have the responsibility to plan the SME for survival, taking advantage of training provided at the work place, and knowledge from previous education. The entrepreneurship experience attained can be channeled into a realizable small-scale business venture for the benefit of all stakeholders (Hyder & Lussier, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic commenced after this topic was initiated. During the interview, I would have asked questions relating to how businesses were surviving during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, such questions were not part of the interview submitted to IRB for approval. Despite few discussions that surrounded the pandemic at this point of data collection, such interest or discussion was outside the scope of my study. Again, Nigeria had experienced some business turbulence such as devaluation of currency and inflation. This devaluation has further created a turbulent business environment for business owners, thereby creating a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) business environment for SME owners in Nigeria. I also wish to explore the strategies that SME owners in Nigeria used in doing business in a VUCA environment such as Nigeria and survive beyond five years. Future researchers may find these two areas interesting for further studies.

References

Abdullahi, I., & Sulaiman, C. (2015). The determinants of small and medium-sized enterprises performance in Nigeria. *Advances in Economics and Business*, *3*, 184-189. doi:10.13189/aeb.2015.030504

Abosede, A. J., Hassan, B. A., & Oko-Oza, R. O. (2017). Performance of small and medium enterprises in Lagos State: The implications of finance. *JORIND*, *15*, 45-84. doi:10.1117/001-2016-0014

Adebayo, T. S., Alheety, S. N., & Yusoff, W. S. (2019). Factors affecting SMEs' internationalization process in the Southwest Nigeria. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management Practices*, *2*, 44-62. doi:10.24940/theijhss/2019/v7/i2/HS1902-061

Adeola, O., & Evans, O. (2017). The impact of microfinance on financial inclusion in Nigeria. *Journal of Developing Areas, 51*, 193-206. doi:10.1353/jda.2017.0097.

Agostini, L., Nosella, A., & Soranzo, B. (2017). Measuring the impact of relational capital on customer performance in the SME B2B sector. *Business Process Management Journal, 23,* 1144-1166. doi:10.1108/BPMJ-10-2016-0205

Agwu, M. O., & Emeti, C. I. (2014). Issues, challenges and prospects of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Port-Harcourt city, Nigeria. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, *3*, 101-114. doi:10.14207/ejsd.2014.v3n1p101

Ajayi, B. (2016). The impact of entrepreneurial orientation and networking capabilities on the export performance of Nigerian agricultural SMEs. *Journal of*

Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Emerging Economies, 2(1), 1-23. doi:10.1177/2393957515619720

Ajike, E. O., Nnorom, G. K., Kwarbai, J. D., & Egwuonwu, T. K. (2015). Intellectual capital and performance sustainability of SMEs in Lagos Nigeria. *International Journal of Advanced Studies in Business Strategies and Management*, *4*(1), 77-88. Retrieved from http://www.internationalpolicybrief.org

Akhtar, F., Lodhi, S. A., & Khan, S. S. (2015). Pamaculture approach: Linking ecological sustainability to business strategies. *Management of Environmental Quality: An International Journal, 26,* 795-809. doi:10.1108/MEQ-01-2015-0001

Al-Agadi, R., Muhammed, S., Abidi, O., & Dzenopoljac, V. (2019). Impact of servant leadership on intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, *40,* 472-484. doi:10.1108/LODJ-09-2018-0337

Alaro, A. A., & Alalubosa, A. H. (2019). Potential of Shariah complaint microfinance in alleviating poverty in Nigeria. *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management, 12,* 115-129. doi:10.1108/IMEFM-01-2017-0021

Ali, A. J. (2014). Freedom and economic prosperity. *International Journal of Commerce and Management*, *24,* 2-5. doi:10.1108/IJCOMA-12-2013-0127

Anochie, U. C., Ude, D. K., & Egbo, V. O. (2015). Entrepreneurship and socio-economic development: The case of Nigeria. *International Journal of Management Sciences, 6*, 346-365. doi:10.1108/IJMS-2014-00145

Anney, V. (2014). Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: Looking at trustworthiness criteria. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, *5*, 272-281. Retrieved from http://jeteraps.scholarlinkresearch.com

Arasanmi, C. N. (2019). Training effectiveness in an enterprise resource planning system environment. *European Journal of Training and Development, 43*, 456-469. doi:10.1108/EJTD-09-2018-0087

Aryeetey, E., Baah-Nuakoh, A., Duggleby, T., Hettige, H., & Steel, W. (1994). Supply and demand for finance of small-scale enterprises in Ghana. Discussion Paper No. 251. doi:10.1596/0-8213-2964-2

Ayyagari, M., Demirguc-Kunt, A., & Maksimovic, V. (2014). Who creates jobs in developing countries? *Small Business Economics*, *43*, 75-99. doi:10.1007/s11187-014-9549-5

Baillie, L. (2015). Promoting and evaluating scientific rigour in qualitative research. *Nursing Standard*, *29*(46), 36-42. doi:10.7748/ns.29.46.36. e8830

Balci, G., & Cetin, I. B. (2017). Market segmentation in container shipping services. A qualitative study. *Management Research Review, 40*, 1100-1116. doi:10.1108/MRR-01-2017-0012

Bankole, P. (2007). The entrepreneurship challenge in Nigeria. Retrieved from http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=1675

Baskadara, S. (2014). Qualitative case study guidelines. *The Qualitative Report, 19*(24), 1-19. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu

Basri, W. M., & Siam, M. R. (2019). Social media and corporate communication antecedents of SME sustainability performance. *Journal of Economic and*

Administrative Sciences, 35, 172-182. doi:10.1108/JEAS-01-2018-0011

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report, 13*(4), 544-559. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu

Bellingkrodt, S., & Wallenburg, C. M. (2015). The service excellence in logistic management. *International Journal of Logistics Management, 26*, 254-274. doi:10.1108/IJLM-06-2012-0038

Biedenbach, G., & Manzhynski, S. (2016). Internal Branding and sustainability: Investigating perceptions of employees. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 25*(3), 1-25. doi:10.1108/JPBM-06-2015-0913

Bloomberg, L., & Volpe, M. (2008). *Completing qualitative research: A roadmap from beginning to end.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bojanc, R., & Jerman-Blazic, B. (2013). A quantitative model for information security risk management. *Engineering Management Journal, 25*(2), 25-37. doi:10.1080/10429247.2013.11431972

Brown, J., Dillard, J., Hopper, T., Byrch, C., Milne, M. J., Morgan, R., & Kearins, K. (2015). Seeds of hope? Exploring business actors' diverse understandings of sustainable development. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 4*, 61-84. doi:10.1108/AAAJ-08-2013-1438

Brundtland, G. (1987). *Our common future: The report of the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Brysiewicz, P., & Erlingsson, C. (2013). Orientation among multiple truths: An introduction to qualitative research. *African Journal of Emergency Medicine, 3*, 92-99. doi:10.1016/j.afjem.2012.04.005

Burkholder, G. J., Cox, K. A., & Crawford, L. M. (2016). The scholar-practitioner's guide to research design. Baltimore, MD: Laureate.

Central Bank of Nigeria. (2005). Micro finance policy, regulatory and supervisory framework for Nigeria. *Central Bank of Nigeria Report*. Retrieved from http://www.cenbank.org/out/Publications/guidelines/dfd/2006/microfinance%20policy.pdf

Central Bank of Nigeria. (2015). N300 billion real sector support facility: Guidelines. Abuja, Nigeria: *Development Finance Department*. Retrieved from https://www.cbn.gov.ng/

Collins, D. (2016). Lean strategy: Start-ups need both agility and direction. *Harvard Business Review*, 63-68. Retrieved from https://hbr.org/2016/03/lean-strategy

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cronin, C. (2014). Using case study research as a rigorous form of inquiry. *Nurse Researcher, 21*(5), 19-27. doi:10.7748/nr.21.5.19. e1240

Darcy, C., Hill, J., McCabe, T. J., & McGovern, P. (2014). A consideration of organizational sustainability in the SME context: A resource-based view and composite model. *European Journal of Training and Development, 38*, 398-414. doi:10.1108/EJTD-10-2013-0108

Das, M., Rangarajan, K., & Dutta, G. (2018). Corporate sustainability in small and medium-sized enterprises. A literature analysis and road ahead. *Journal of Indian Business Research, 4,* 84-108. doi:10.1108/JIBR-09-2017-0166

Dehgani, R., & Navimipour, N. J. (2019). The impact of information technology and communication systems on the agility of supply chain management systems. *Kybernetes*, *48*, 2217-2236.https://doi.org.10.1108/K-2018-0532

Denzin, N. K. (2012). Triangulation 2.0. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 6*, 80-88.doi:10.1177/1558689812437186

de Santos, R. R., de Melo-Melo, F. J. C., Claudino, C. N. Q., & Medeiroz, D. D. (2017). Model for formulating competitive strategy: The supplementary health sector case. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, *24*, 219-243. doi:10.1108/BIJ-07-2015-0076

DesJardins, J. (2016). Is it time to jump off the sustainability bandwagon? Business Ethics Quarterly, 26, 117-135. doi:10.1017/beq.2016.12

Eniola, A. (2014). The role of SME firm performance in Nigeria. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, *3*(12), 33-47. Retrieved March 30, 2014, from www.arabianjbmr.com/pdfs/OM_VOL_3 (12)/title

Eniola, A., & Ektebang, H. (2014). SME firms' performance in Nigeria: Competitive advantage and its impact. *International Journal of Research Studies in Management*, *3*(2), 75-86. doi: 10.5861/ijrsm.2014.854

Effiom, L., & Etim, S. (2018). Success of small and medium enterprises in Nigeria: Do environmental factors matter? *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, *9*(4). Retrieved from www.iiste.

Ekekwe, O. J. (2013). Relationship between institutional frameworks and growth of SMEs in Nigeria's petroleum industry (*Doctoral dissertation*). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3554901)

Etuk, R. U., Etuk, G. R., & Baghebo, M. (2014). Small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) and Nigeria's economic development. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 5*(7), 656-662. doi:10.5901/mjss. 2014.v5n7p656

Eswarlal, V. K., & Valessi, M. (2014). Different stages of business sustainability: A visual metaphor. *Management Research: The Journal of Iberoamerican Academy of Management, 12*, 308-325. doi:10.1108/MRJIAM-12-2013-0535

Faloye, O. D. (2015). The key determinants of innovation in small and medium scale enterprises in southwestern Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, *11,* 45-66.doi:10.1177/ESJ-2014-001112

Foley, D., & O'Connor, A. J. (2013). Social capital and networking practices of indigenous entrepreneurs. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 51, 276-296.doi:10.1111/jsbm.12017

Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 20*, 1408-1416. Available at http://www.nova.edu/sss/QR/QR20/9/fusc

Gbandi, E. C., & Amissah, G. (2014). Financing options for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal, 10*(1), 327-340. Retrieved from http://eujournal.org/index.php/esj

Gray, D., & Jones, K. (2016). Using organizational development and learning methods to develop resilience for sustainable futures with SMEs and micro businesses. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development, 23,* 474-494.doi:10.1108/JSBED-03-2015-0031

Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Resources Information Center Annual Review Paper*, *29*, 75-91

Guest, G., Namey, E., & Mitchell, M. (2013). Collecting qualitative data: A field manual for applied research. *CA*: Sage.

Haines, D. (2017). Ethical considerations in qualitative case study research recruiting participants with profound intellectual disabilities. *Research Ethics*, *13*, 219–232. doi:10.1177/1747016117711971

Harel, R., & Kaufmann, D. (2016). Financing innovative SMEs of traditional sectors. The supply side. *EuroMed Journal of Business, 11*, 84-100.https://doi.org.10.1108/EMJB-02-2015-0007

Harper, M., & Cole, P. (2012). Member checking: Can benefits be gained similar to group therapy? *The Qualitative Report, 17*, 510-517. Retrieved from http://tqr.nova.edu/

Heale, R., & Forbes, D. (2013). Understanding triangulation in research. *Evidence Based Nursing, 16,* 98-98. doi:10.1136/eb-2013-101494

Henslin, J. M. (2013). Essentials of sociology: A down-to-earth approach. *Upper Saddle River,* NJ: Pearson.

Hyett, N., Kenn-y, A., & Dickson-Swift, V. (2014). Methodology or method? A critical review of qualitative case study reports. *International Journal of Qualitative*

Studies on Health and Well-being, *9*, 1-13. doi:10.3402/qhw. v9.23606

Hyder, S., & Lussier, R. N. (2016). Why businesses succeed or fail: A study on small business in Pakistan. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economics*, *8*(1), 82-100.doi:10.1108/JEEE-03-2015-0020

Kachouie, R., Mavondo, F., & Sands, S. (2018). Dynamic marketing capabilities view on creating market change. *European Journal of Marketing*, *4*, 1-13. doi:10/1108/EJM-10-2016-0588

Karadag, H. (2017). The impact of industry, firm age and education level on financial management performance in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*, *9*(3), 300-314.https://doi.org.10.1108/JEEE-09-2019-0037

Kayanula, D., & Quartey, P. (2000). The policy environment for promoting small and medium-sized enterprises in Ghana and Malawi. *Finance and Development Research Programme*, Working Paper Series, Paper No 15, IDPM, University of Manchester.

Kim, M. S. (2014). Doing social constructivist research means making empathic and aesthetic connections with participants. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *22*(4), 538–553. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2014.947835

Kim, J., Choi, S., & Martin, D. (2020). The halo effect of C2C interaction quality in prolonged close-proximity service settings. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *12*, 64-81. https://doi.org.10.1108/JSM-02-2019-0098

Kuhlman, T., & Farrington, J. (2010). What is Sustainability? Sustainability, 2, 3436-

3448. doi:10.3390/su2113436

Kumar, S., Tomar, S., & Verma, D. (2019). Women's financial planning for retirement. *International Journal of Bank Marketing, 37,* 120-141.https://doi.org.10.1108/IJBM-08-2017-0165

Lee Kaivo-Oja, J. R., & Lauraeus, I. T. (2018). The VUCA approach as a solution concept to corporate foresight challenges and global technological disruption. *Foresight, 20*, 27-49.doi:10.1108/FS-06-2017-0022

Lin, F., Ansell, J., Marshall, A., & Ojiako, U. (2020). Managing and building B2B SME brands. An emerging market perspective. *PSU Research Review, 3,* 191-214.https://doi.org.10.1108/PRR-04-2019-0010

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic Inquiry. *Newbury Park* CA: Sage Publications

Makori, E. O. (2017). Promoting innovation and application of internet of things in academic and research information organizations. *Library Review, 66,* 655-678.https://doi.org.10.1108/L-01-2017-0002

Maria, K. (2015). Combating challenges to establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 12*, 397–414. doi:10.1080/14780887.2015.1021941

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (2016). Designing qualitative research (3rd ed.). *Thousand Oaks,* CA: Sage.

McIntosh, M. J., & Morse, J. M. (2015). Situating and constructing diversity in semi-structured interviews. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research, 2,* 1-12.

doi:10.1177/2333393615597674

McPhee, W. (2014). A new sustainability model: Engaging the entire firm. Journal of Business Strategy, 35, 4-12. doi:10.1108-JBS-11-2013-0106

Meflinda, A., Mahyarni, M., Indrayani, H., & Wulandari, H. (2018). The effect of social capital and knowledge sharing to the small medium enterprise performance and sustainability strategies. *International Journal of Law and Management, 60* 988-997.doi:10.1108/IJLMA-03-2017-0073

Merriam, S. B. (2009). Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation. *San Francisco:* Josey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation (4th ed.). *San Francisco,* CA: Jossey-Bass.

Microfinance policy, regulatory and supervisory framework for Nigeria (2005). *Central Bank of Nigeria.* Retrieved from https://www.cbn.gov.ng

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). Qualitative data analysis: A method source book. *Thousand Oaks,* CA: Sage.

Mohammed, U. D., Oben'Umar, A. B., & Nzelibe, G. C. O. (2016, February). Entrepreneurial orientation, access to debt finance and the performance of small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. In *Proceedings of the Multidisciplinary Academic Conference* (pp. 77-94).

Muller, A. L., & Pfleger, R. (2014). Business transformation towards sustainability. Business Research, 7, 313-350. doi:10.1007/s40685-014-0011-y

Munn, Z., Porritt, K., Lockwood, C., Aromataris, E., & Pearson, A. (2014). Establishing confidence in the output of qualitative research synthesis: The ConQual approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology, 14*, 1-7. doi:10.1186/1471-2288-14-108

Nuryadin, S. (2016). A study of students' understanding of corporate social responsibility concepts at post graduate program Universitas Negeri Jakarta. International *Journal of Education and Research, 4*, 193-200. Retrieved from ijern.com/journal/2016/November-2016/16.pdf

Obokoh, L. O., & Goldman, G. (2016). Infrastructure deficiency and the performance of small- and medium-sized enterprises in Nigeria's liberalized economy. *Acta Commercii*, *16*(1), 339-348. doi:10.4102/ac. v16i1.339

Ofili, O. U. (2014). Challenges facing entrepreneurship in Nigeria. *International Journal of Business and Management, 9*(12), 258-274. doi:10.5539/ijbm. v9n12p258

Ogunleye, T. (2017). Financial inclusion and the role of women in Nigeria. *African Development Review, 29*(2), 249-258. 10p. doi: 10.1111/1467-8268.12254

Ogbeide, G., Osaretin, E., Kojo, E., & Ifelunini, I. (2016). Can income inequality reduction be used as an instrument for poverty reduction? Dynamic evidence from Nigeria. *Journal of Academic Research in Economics, 8*(2), 307-319. Retrieved from the Walden University Library.

Oladele, P. O., & Akeke, N. I. (2016). Effect of strategic leadership styles on sales and employment growth in small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. *International Journal of Information, Business and Management, 8*(2), 1-18. Retrieved from http://www.ijibm.elitehall.com

Olatomide, W. O. (2012). Concept, Measurement and Causes of Poverty: Nigeria in

Perspective. *American Journal of Economics*, p-ISSN: 2166-4951, e-ISSN: 2166-496X 2012; 2(1): 25-36. doi: 10.5923/j.economics.20120201.04

Ololube, N. P., Uriah, O. A., & Dudafa, U. J. (2014). The role of university management in sustainable national development through innovation and entrepreneurial nosiness. *International Journal of Educational Foundations and Management, 2*(1), 13-24.doi:10.1108/IJEFM-2013-0010001

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Byers, V. T. (2014). An exemplar for combining the collection, analysis, and interpretation of verbal and nonverbal data in qualitative research. *International Journal of Education, 6*(1), 183-246. doi:10.5296/ije. v6i1.4399

Oseni, E. (2017). The relevance of entrepreneurship education to the development of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration, Finance & Law, 11*, 137-144.doi:10.1108/JPAFL-2016-0014

Ossai, A. (2017). The problems and prospects of small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) growth and development in Nigeria: A study of selected SMEs in Delta State. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, *10*(3), 278-294. Retrieved from http://www.ijsre.com

Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, B. (2014). SME: Issues, challenges, and prospects. *A paper presented at the FSS 2020 International Conference, Abuja, Nigeria*. Retrieved from https://www.cbn.gov.ng

Panagiotakopoulos, A. (2020). Exploring the link between management training and organizational performance in the small business context. *Journal of Workplace Learning, 32,* 245-257.https://doi.org.10.1108/JWL-10-2019-0121

Patton, M. Q. (2015). Qualitative research & evaluation methods (4th ed.). *Thousand Oaks,* CA: Sage Publications.

Rane, S. B., Narvel, V. A., & Bhandarkar, B. M. (2020). Developing strategies to improve agility. *Business Process Management Journal, 26*, 257-286.https://doi.org.10.1108/BPMJ-07-2017-0196

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological. *Thousand Oaks*, CA: Sage Publications.

Ridder, H. G. (2017). The theory contribution of case study research designs. *Business Research 10*, 281–305. doi:10.1007/s40685-017-0045-z

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., & Ormston, R. (2013). Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Rowley, J. (2012). Conducting research interviews. *Management Research Review, 35*, 260-271. doi:10.1108/01409171211210154

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). Qualitative Interviewing: The art of hearing data (3rd ed.). *Thousand Oaks,* CA: Sage

Sanjari, M., Bahramnezhad, F., Fomani, F. K., Shoghi, M., & Cheraghi, M. A. (2014). Ethical challenges of researchers in qualitative studies: The necessity to develop a specific guideline. *Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine, 7*(14), 1-6. Retrieved from jmehm.tums.ac.ir

Schwadt, T. A. (2015). The SAGE dictionary of qualitative inquiry (4th ed.). *Thousand Oaks,* CA: Sage

Schwaninger, M. (2015). Organizing for sustainability: A cybernetic concept for sustainable renewal. *Kybernetes, 44*, 935-954. doi:10.1108/K-01-2015-0008

Sendjaya, S., Eva, N., Robin, M., Sugianto, L., ButarButar, I., & Hartel, C. (2019). Leading others to go beyond the call of duty. *Personnel Review*, *49*, 620-635.https://doi.org.10.1108/PR-08-2018-0285

Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria [SMEDAN], (2013). SMEDAN and National Bureau of Statistics Collaborative Survey: *Selected Findings*. Retrieved from nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/290

Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria [SMEDAN], (2015). SMEDAN & Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS): *Survey report on micro, small, and medium enterprises in Nigeria.* Retrieved from http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng

Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria [SMEDAN], (2017). SMEDAN & Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS): *Survey report on micro, small, and medium enterprises in Nigeria.* Retrieved from http://smedan.gov.ng/

Stake, R. E. (2013). Multiple-case study analysis. *Guilford Press,* New York, NY.

Tacq, J. (2011). Causality in qualitative and quantitative research. *Quality & Quantity, 45*, 263–291. doi:10.1007/s11135-009-9293-0

Tan, Q., & Sousa, C. M. (2016). Leveraging marketing capabilities into competitive advantage and export performance. *International Marketing Review, 32*, 78-102.https://doi.org.10.1108/IMR-12-2013-0279

Tche, J. (2009). Role of microfinance saving in Cameroon. A neo-structuralist analysis.

International Journal of Development Issues, 8, 48-60.doi:10.1108/14468950910967065

Teece, D. J. (2017). Business models and dynamic capabilities. Long range planning. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2017.06.007.

Teece, D. J. (2018). Dynamic capabilities as (workable) management systems theory. *Journal of Management & Organization*, *24(3),* 359–368. doi:10.1017/jmo.2017.75

Teh, D., & Corbitt, B. (2015). Building sustainability strategy in business. *Journal of Business Strategy*, *36,* 39-46. doi:10.1108/JBS-08-2014-0099

von Bertalanffy, L. (1968). General systems theory: Foundations, development, application. *New York,* NY: Braziller.

Wagner, B., & Svensson, G. (2014). A framework to navigate sustainability in business networks: The transformative business sustainability (TBS) model. European Business Review, 26, 340-367. doi:10.1108/EBR-12-2013-0146

Wahga, A. I., Blundel, R., & Schaefer, A. (2018). Understanding the drivers of sustainability entrepreneurial practices in Pakistain leather industry. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research, 24*, 382-407.doi:10.1108/IJEBR-11-2015-0263

Weisfeld-Spolter, S., Sussan, F., Rippe, C., & Gould, S. (2018). Integrating affect, cognition, and culture in Hispanic financial planning. *International Journal of Bank Marketing, 36,* 726-743.https://doi.org.10.1108/IJBM-09-2017-0201

World Bank (2015). Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) finance. Retrieved from http://www.worldbank.org

World Bank (2017). The World Bank in Nigeria. Retrieved from http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/overview

Yazan, B. (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *The Qualitative Report,* 20(2), 134-152. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu

Yin, R. K. (2009). Case study research: Design and methods (5th ed.). *Thousand Oaks,* CA: Sage Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2014). Case study research: Design and methods (5th ed.). *Thousand Oaks*, CA: Sage Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2017). Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.). *Thousand Oaks,* CA: Sage Publications

Yusuf, T. O., & Dansu, F. S. (2013). SMES, business risks and sustainability in Nigeria. *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences, 2*(9), 76-94. Retrieved from http://www.ejbss.com

Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

	What the researcher would do	What the researcher would say (Script of Interview)
1.	Introduce the interview session with salutation and introduce oneself to the interviewee and the purpose of the interview. Ensure the participant feels comfortable physically and emotionally.	a) Good day Mr./Mrs. Xxxx, my name is Kingsley Umadia, a doctoral student of Walden University conducting a research on exploring the strategies for sustaining small to medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria.
2.	Present the consent form, discuss it, and answer any questions and concerns that may arise therefrom.	b) Thanks for taking out time to respond to my invitation to participate in this study. Here is a copy of your signed consent form for your record.
3.	Give participant a copy of the signed consent form.	c) I believe you have read and understood the content of the consent form. I also believe you agree with the contents. If you have any reservations, concerns or questions, I would wish to address them before we proceed with the interview.
4.	Request consent to record the interview before turning on the recording device.	1) What are the strategies that have contributed to your sustained success in operating a small to medium enterprises in Lekki?
5.	Follow the procedure to introduce participants with coded identification, noting the date and time.	2) What are your major challenges of doing business in Lekki as a founder/operator?
6.	Begin the interview starting from question 1 and follow through the 9th question.	3) How do you surmount those challenges you encounter in running your business?
7.	Follow up with additional questions elicited by the response from the participants.	4) How do you recruit your customers?
8.	End the interview sequence. Then, discuss member-checking with participants.	5) What do you do to keep your customers?
9.	Thank participants for accepting to take part in the study. Confirm contact numbers for follow-up questions and to address concerns from participants.	6) How do you respond to changes in the business environment since you commenced business to date?
10.	Ensure non-verbal cues are noted. Paraphrase where necessary to elucidate meaning. Ask follow-up questions for more depth.	7) What is the role of your service or product in the lives of your customers?
11.	Conclude the interview and thank the participants.	8) How do you see your business in the next five years?
12.	Schedule follow-up member checking interview	9) What other information or experiences that may benefit future business leaders you may wish to share? 10) Thanks for accepting to participate in this study and taking your time to share experiences with me on the research topic. I transcribed the data obtained from this interview and forward same to you to ensure correctness and accuracy of the transcription within 48 hours from today.
13.	If possible and appropriate, follow-up by email or a handwritten note of thanks	11) Please like to agree time for us to meet again to review the result of my analysis and interpretation of the findings of the interview. This would only be for about 45 minutes. 12) Thank you.

Appendix B: CITI Certificate

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 09-Dec-2019
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 34499477

This is to certify that:

KINGSLEY UMADIA

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Student Researchers (Curriculum Group)
Student Researchers (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Walden University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w5a56cc83-478a-47a0-825f-8c0cc4d9e43a-34499477