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Strategies Import-Export Entrepreneurs Need to Succeed in the Global Market

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Athanasius Nde Awasom Longcha

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

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by

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MS, University of Maryland, 2010

MBA, National University, San Diego, 1988

BBA, National University, San Diego, 1986

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

April 2024

Abstract

An import or export entrepreneur has the potential for failure in the global market; consequently, some entrepreneurs are concerned because a lack of strategies could result in business failure. Grounded in Michael Porter's five forces model, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies some import-export entrepreneurs use to succeed in the global market for 5 years. Four entrepreneurs in business for over 5 years participated in the multiple case study. Data collection was through semistructured virtual interviews. Four themes emerged through thematic analysis: (a) identify and address problems related to complex global markets, (b) identify and use all available resources to plan for the future, (c) identify and use a variety of methods to promote the business, and (d) identify and use all resources to finance the business. A key recommendation is that present and future entrepreneurs consolidate their relationships with suppliers, customers, and employees when executing business activities. The implications for positive social change include the potential for entrepreneurs to create employment and better living conditions, strengthen employee capacity, enhance economic infrastructure, and allow participation in local events.

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Dedication

I thank the Almighty God for giving me the strength to endure the pain due to poor health during this doctoral journey, my mother, Princess Theresia Bih Awasom, for her prayers, and my dear wife Victorine and children for their love and dedicated financial support, especially during periods of hospitalization. Unfortunately, my mom and Victorine left this world the same year I completed this dissertation's final section. I wish they were alive to see me in a cap and gown on the momentous graduation day to cheer me up.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

International trade began with the early civilizations and continued without significant disruptions until recent years, when the global COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted export and import flows for both developed and developing economies (Babirye et al., 2023). A good business strategy is crucial for success, as it helps entrepreneurs cultivate creativity and produce quality products in a competitive market (Kumar & Kumar, 2020). Unfortunately, the pandemic has impacted supply- and demand-side economies due to lockdowns (Gupta et al., 2022). Hence, it has affected international trading activities for goods and services (Baldwin & Di Mauro, 2020; Shaikh, 2020).

Zhang et al. (2022) argued that as the pandemic continued to spread, most countries experienced a decline in export/import trade, and many global traders were still struggling to recover from the after-effects of the deadly disease. Entrepreneurs may use the constructs of Porter's (1979) five forces model (FFM) as a strategic guide to recover from the shocks of the pandemic and gain a competitive advantage in the global market. This study aimed to identify strategies entrepreneurs in the import and export business could use to compete internationally.

Background of the Problem

COVID-19 has devastated countries globally, ranging from a significant loss of lives to a decline in business productivity, forcing many entrepreneurs to close their businesses permanently (Alessa et al., 2021). Additionally, Kennedy and Sutrasna (2023)

remarked that the pandemic had a direct and indirect impact on the international flow of goods and services, causing changes in the world economy and the position of each country in their respective regions. All countries have felt the negative impact of the pandemic despite the continuous efforts of governments on all continents to put measures in place to mitigate its damaging effects (Uğurlu & Jindřichovská, 2022). In response to the pandemic, some countries imposed import-export restrictions, preventing the flow of critical products to other developed and developing economies (Hoekman et al., 2020). For example, most African countries implemented containment measures ranging from border closures to complete lockdowns (Obayelu et al., 2021). The recommendations may help entrepreneurs develop strategies for competing successfully in the global market.

Between the negative impacts of the pandemic on the one hand and the mitigation measures on the other, countries have started showing new trends in some of their macroeconomic, health, and social indicators (Jindřichovská & Uğurlu, 2021). In international business, for example, the import-export trends of some of the world's major trading economies indicate that their trade in goods has recovered and has been growing above the pre-pandemic levels (Liu et al., 2022).

Problem and Purpose

Worldwide, import-export entrepreneurs play significant roles in distributing goods and services, although they face many challenges, including stiff competition, which affects business functioning (Kanupriya, 2021). For example, Bushe (2019) noted

that 40% of new businesses in South Africa fail in their first year, 60% in the second year, and 90% in the first ten years due to their owners' lack of an entrepreneurial mindset, poor business strategies, and insufficient control systems. The general business problem is that inadequate planning has impacted import-export business owners in developed and developing economies, contributing to business failures. The specific business problem is that some entrepreneurs in the import-export industry lack strategies to succeed in the global market beyond 5 years.

This qualitative multiple case study aimed to explore strategies some import-export entrepreneurs use to succeed in the global market beyond 5 years. The target population included entrepreneurs from Nigeria, Cameroon, and Canada who have successfully used various techniques to compete in the import-export trade for over 5 years. The implication of this study for positive social change is that the success of entrepreneurs could have an impact, for example, creating employment for them to live better lives, community development, and participation in local events. The findings will help entrepreneurs develop strategies to compete in the import-export trade, generating more revenue. More income could, in turn, help the owners create employment opportunities to alleviate poverty, for example. The participation of well-informed entrepreneurs in the global market could improve the trade balance between developed and developing nations.

Nature of the Study

Researchers may choose a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research method to investigate an issue. I used a qualitative approach for this study because it was the most appropriate for exploring entrepreneurs' strategies for managing import-export businesses and remaining competitive in the global market. Kaae and Traulsen (2020) noted that qualitative research is a means to develop an in-depth understanding of the human experience and find the underlying reasons, attitudes, and motivations governing such behavior. Conversely, quantitative researchers deal with quantifying and analyzing variables using statistical techniques and software to answer questions such as how many items involve numeric calculations to compare and test hypotheses (Mohajan, 2020).

For this study, a quantitative approach was inappropriate because numeric calculations would not assist in addressing the research problem. Furthermore, mixed-methods research combines quantitative and qualitative research methods in the same research inquiry (Gilmartin & Esterhuizen, 2020). Because the nature of the study's investigation precluded using the quantitative approach, the mixed-methods discussion was inappropriate.

Upon choosing to use a qualitative method, I considered three designs for conducting the research: (a) case study, (b) phenomenology, and (c) ethnography. After analysis, I selected the case study design as the most appropriate one because it best fits the scope of my research. Researchers use this design to collect data using open-ended semistructured interview questionnaires, documents, direct observation, archival records,

and physical artifacts (Yin, 2018). I rejected the others because they did not fit the criteria for the type of research necessary to achieve the objectives of the study.

Phenomenology involves studying individual participants' experiences and describing their similarities (Klinke & Fernandez, 2023). The objective of my study was not to understand the unique lived experiences of a target population. Therefore, phenomenology was not an appropriate research design for this inquiry. Ethnography is a design that involves gathering information through direct observation and face-to-face interaction with members of a target population to obtain a holistic understanding of their culture (Shin & Miller, 2022). The focus of this study was not to understand a target population's culture; hence, I did not select ethnography.

Finally, I decided to use a qualitative multiple-case design because, according to Yin (2018), it is appropriate for examining complexities using various sources of evidence. The benefit of conducting a multiple case study is that researchers can investigate the differences and similarities of several cases and analyze the data for each subject (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The evidence generated from various case studies is robust and reliable (Bhangu et al., 2023).

Research Question

What strategies do entrepreneurs in import-export business use to succeed in the global market beyond 5 years?

Interview Questions

1. What strategic problems did you face when starting the business, and what strategies did you use to address the issues?
2. What methods contributed to the growth of your business?
3. What strategies contributed the most to your success as an entrepreneur?
4. What leadership techniques increased your ability to succeed in the global market beyond 5 years?
5. What strategies did you use to finance the business?
6. Which method worked best for you to succeed in the import/export business?
7. What strategies did you implement to check the bargaining power of buyers and sellers?
8. What is your long-term plan to check the threat of new entrants in the import-export market to gain a competitive advantage?
9. Which other strategies did you recommend for entrepreneurs in the import-export business?

Conceptual Framework

The lens of this study is Michael Porter's (1979) FFM competitive theory and Kim and Mauborgne's (2015) blue and red ocean theory. Both models serve as guides to explore how entrepreneurs compete in the global market. Porter formulated the FFM in 1979. It is a framework for identifying and analyzing forces that drive competition among entrepreneurs within a market. Porter established the following fundamental FFM

constructs underlying the competitive strategy: (a) intense rivalry among existing competitors, (b) the threat of new entrants, (c) the threat of substitutes and counterfeits, (d) the bargaining powers of suppliers, and (e) the bargaining powers of buyers. Porter claimed that industry structure influences a firm's competitive nature and the potential strategies available to competitors. Byun et al. (2020) noted that the competitive approach means doing things differently from one's rivals or using similar items differently, depending on managerial perceptions through a lens of fear, confidence, or cooperation.

Such perceptions motivate thinkers to come up with theories to mitigate intense competition. Kim and Mauborgne (2015) introduced the blue ocean strategy (BOS) (Massoudi & Ahmed, 2021) and the red ocean strategy (ROS; Hermanto, 2023), which they claimed makes competition irrelevant. The market universe comprises red and blue oceans. Red oceans contain existing industries where competition is fierce as entrepreneurs struggle to outperform each other (Kim & Mauborgne, 2015). In contrast, blue ocean markets include untapped markets with fewer entrepreneurs. Kim and Mauborgne's BOS and ROS focus on situations with low competition where rivalry is irrelevant.

Operational Definitions

Business competition: Business competition involves the lower-cost production principle of cost minimization and the ability of business owners to win in a marketing situation and improve their competitive position as entrepreneurs, focusing on internal processes and increasing business efficiency (Horvathova & Mokrisova, 2020).

Business failure: Bushe (2019) described business failure as when an entrepreneur becomes insolvent and unable to pay creditors in time because of a lack of skills, management knowledge, planning capacity, business experience, or an entrepreneurial mindset to manage a successful enterprise.

Business innovation: Moradi et al. (2021) described business innovation as the creation or reinvention of existing business models by designing value-creating systems or building unique, innovative systems that capture value or solve problems.

Business strategy: A business strategy is a guideline for companies to compete and achieve business continuity (Chong & Ali, 2022).

Business sustainability: Business sustainability addresses internal and external controls, competencies, shareholder rights, and social or environmental challenges society faces (e.g., climate, migration, corruption, water, poverty, pandemics, youth unemployment, sovereign debt overload, financial instability, and resolution; Singhal, 2023).

Enterprise: An enterprise is a business unit, a government agency, an entire corporation, or a combination of businesses operating as a partnership (Ullman, 2020). These entities may share a unique set of goals and objectives.

Export consortium: A consortium is a traditional form of cooperation between institutions and exporters or importers who share resources and expertise, thus reducing costs. Such collaborations often emerge in high-risk businesses (Zavolokina et al., 2020).

Outsourcing: Outsourcing is a decision that involves contracting out certain activities or business processes necessary for manufacturing goods or providing services. It transfers specific functions or activities to specialized suppliers (Akhtar, 2023).

Social innovation: Social innovation promotes social entrepreneurship, providing a framework for understanding systems innovation (Dantas et al., 2023).

Stakeholders: Stakeholders in a business organization are the manager, management team, shareholders, financiers, and global and local societal team players (Larsson & Larsson, 2020). Stakeholders are interested in the business and can affect the company's life cycle through their actions.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions guide how researchers approach their investigations, their views concerning the nature of reality, and the role of values in the research process, including the methods used and research questions (Abdumalikovich, 2023). The first assumption was that the study participants would understand the strategies managers or business owners used in the import-export trade to compete globally. Second, I also assumed that they would answer the interview questions accurately. The third assumption was that some entrepreneurs in import-export marketing faced managerial problems that negatively affected their ability to compete globally. The fourth assumption was that the participants would be knowledgeable, comprehend the interview questions, and provide details that reflected individual experiences.

The fifth assumption was that the entrepreneurs would be honest when answering questions and willing to provide written documents to facilitate the research process. The sixth assumption was that the recommendations of this multiple case study would contribute to positive social change that may improve citizens' quality of life and living standards. I assumed that future researchers might be able to establish rapport with their interviewees by assuring them that every answer counts so that they only respond to questions for which they have accurate information. The last assumption was that the findings from analyzing the participants' data would provide business owners and managers in the import-export sector with strategies for sustaining their businesses beyond 5 years.

Limitations

Limitations are issues beyond a researcher's control that may affect a study (Yin, 2018). Kaae and Traulsen (2020) contended that a qualitative case study's primary constraint is that researchers often study a limited number of participants. Consequently, the results may not represent the views of the target population, making it impossible to generalize. The first limitation was that the entrepreneurs might withhold basic information they considered confidential. The second limitation was that some participants might not remember the strategies used within the previous 5 years in the import-export business. Third, inadequate responses or respondents' biases might affect the accuracy of the data collected. Fourth, the study does not cover how import-export

entrepreneurs coped with the effects of the pandemic to keep their businesses going successfully.

Delimitations

Coker (2022) explained that a delimitation is what a researcher includes or excludes to make a research project manageable, with a focus on the research question. The primary delimitation was the study's target participants, from whom I selected four entrepreneurs from three counties for this study. The second delimitation in this research was the problem statement, which meant that other problems associated with this research were not considered. As the researcher explored strategies entrepreneurs used to succeed in global markets, only successful entrepreneurs who had been in the import-export industry for more than 5 years were involved.

Significance of the Study

The case study is significant because the recommendations will help entrepreneurs in the import-export business compete in the global market, which, in turn, could improve a country's negative trade balance. Entrepreneurship is increasingly essential in filling domestic markets with consumer goods, expanding current services, and developing potential export markets (Togayeva, 2023). The findings can help import-export entrepreneurs set the foundation for longevity, revenue growth, and becoming more competitive, and GDP growth could be a consequence. Specifically, the findings from the study may help entrepreneurs in the import-export sector to (a) produce effective business plans, (b) efficiently manage resources, (c) enhance company

performance, (d) motivate employees, and (e) develop strategies to support business growth and competitive advantage.

Contribution to Business Practice

In the qualitative case study, my focus was on comprehending the experiences of entrepreneurs and the strategies they successfully used to compete in the global market. Poor performance may produce a negative trade balance. For example, America's trade deficit was \$90.3 billion in November, up \$0.7 billion from \$89.6 billion in October 2023 (US Census Bureau, 2023). Consequently, entrepreneurs in international trade need strategies to compete and succeed in the global market (Liñán et al., 2020). The study's recommendations might help importers and exporters compete effectively in the worldwide ecosystem.

Implications for Social Change

The effect of the study on social change is that entrepreneurs could create employment opportunities. The success of local businesses might enable business owners to contribute financially to civil society through voluntary, charity, educational, and healthcare institutions. Furthermore, federal, state, and local governments would collect more taxes from successful businesses to improve the social and economic infrastructures, indirectly influencing positive social change in a nation. For example, urban gentrification could attract cultural and religious groups, new business investments, improved citizens' living conditions, and more people into urban areas (Van de Kamp, 2023). Consequently, entrepreneurs may help alleviate health, poverty, education, and

unemployment issues by leading people who have low incomes on a path toward a meaningful life (Prakash & Pandey, 2023). The developments would benefit society, as the quality of life would improve.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

This professional and academic literature review concentrated on sources related to import-export entrepreneurs in the global market who have been in business for 5 or more years. The overarching research question was: What strategies do entrepreneurs in import-export business use to succeed in the global market beyond 5 years? My research databases included Walden University Library: EBSCO, ProQuest, Business Source Complete, Sage Publications, ABI/INFORM, Research Gate, Google Scholar, and Emerald Insights. The keywords and terms I used to conduct the searches in the databases included *Porter's five forces model*, *globalization*, *risk management in global markets*, *blue versus red ocean strategies*, *implementation of FFM and blue/red ocean strategies*, *the resource-based view (RBV)*, and *outsourcing*. This study contains 242 references, including 210 (86.7%) published within 5 years of the estimated graduation date, and 199, or 82.2%, are peer-reviewed (Table 1).

Table 1*Sources of Data for the Literature Review*

Publication type	Published within 5 years from 2020	Older than 5 years	Total
Peer-reviewed journals	199	24	223
Books	5	7	12
Dissertations	1	0	1
Government publications	5	1	6
Total sources	210	32	242
% of sources	86.78%	13.22%	100%

Porter's Five Forces Model (The Conceptual Framework of the Study)

The goal of every entrepreneur is to make a profit and enhance business performance; to accomplish these objectives, a business owner must develop strategies that will guide the implementation of a competitive process. Akçagün et al. (2023) argued that entrepreneurs must articulate a sound strategic approach in a competitive landscape that comprehensively assesses factors influencing industry performance. Porter (1979) developed the FFM theory of competition to determine an industry's external factors. These include rivalry among enduring competitors, intimidation by new entrants in the industry, the negotiating ability of suppliers, the aggressive bargaining power of buyers in the market, and the threat of duplication and counterfeiting (Budiharso et al., 2022; Chong & Ali, 2022). Budiharso et al. (2022) maintained that Porter's FFM helped energize competition in the global market. I used Porter's FFM as a guide to explore strategies import-export entrepreneurs use to gain a competitive advantage in the worldwide market. The five forces include rivalry among enduring competitors,

intimidation by new entrants in the industry, the negotiating ability of suppliers, and the aggressive bargaining power of buyers in the market.

Rivalry Among Enduring Competitors

Porter (1990) posited that the appropriate tool to examine rivalry is the FFM because its elements interact to create favorable conditions for innovation. Galvin et al. (2020) argued that intense rivalry results in entrepreneurs seeking to become price-oriented competitors or price differentiators through innovation. Such developments attract new entrants. Consequently, competition intensifies. Their survival and long-term competitive advantage depend on growth and development activities in an increasingly competitive environment caused by globalization (Durgut & Şakar, 2023). Economic globalization in the 21st century led to the expansion of contacts and services, ushering in a new age characterized by growth in business activities in several industries until COVID-19 struck, decreasing the volume of international trade. Vidya and Prabheesh (2020) noted that the pandemic has affected the world economy, and the world's GDP has recently experienced a catastrophic contraction.

An intensive entrepreneurial competition requires that companies be professionally managed to survive in the long term, in addition to technology, capital, finance, operating systems, and high-quality human resources (Vrabcová & Urbancová, 2023). Saputra et al. (2023) stated that strategies for competing include advertising, a persuasive message that attracts consumers' attention. Akgün and Arslan (2023) added that technological developments, especially from the 1990s until today, have caused

many changes in marketing and other areas of international business. Akgün, Arslan, Saini, and Bansal (2023) maintained that technological developments, especially from the 1990s until today, have been swift and have caused many changes in marketing and other areas of international business. Schlegelmilch (2022) believed that export trade, domestic marketing, and international trade are the precursors of global marketing. Mwakawi and Kavale (2020) identified Porter's competitive strategies as (a) cost leadership, (b) cost focus, and (c) market segmentation and differentiation in the production of goods and services in an industry. Karabulut et al. (2022) and Pusztai et al. (2023) noted that entrepreneurs could achieve a competitive advantage in the international market by sending salespeople with unique products to potential customers, meeting in business-to-business conferences organized by consulates, chambers of commerce, and trade associations. In that regard, to compete in the global market, entrepreneurs must develop strategies for gaining a competitive advantage in the international marketplace.

Braun et al. (2019) believed that a business strategy fundamentally answers how an entrepreneur will win against competitors or favorably position the company and external forces while honing, refining, and protecting unique resources and capabilities. A lack of industry knowledge can negatively affect the survival of a business at the global level. Cakranegara et al. (2022) noted that creativity in implementing new ideas is a requirement for business continuity, and to successfully compete, entrepreneurs must be creative; otherwise, the business will not grow and may go bankrupt. Entrepreneurs adopt aggressive marketing strategies to market their products and gain an advantage over their

competitors by collecting customer feedback on their needs and wants better than competitors (Ngetich, 2023). Dushnitsky et al. (2022) contended that a strategy is about choices after due diligence. Entrepreneurial success depends on multiple options that guide business executives through trade-offs to target customers and resources that reinforce one another to create value. Therefore, considering all strategic elements, an entrepreneur can develop a competitive advantage within an industry.

Competitive cost of production involves other elements; for example, (a) price discounting, (b) new product introduction, (c) advertising campaigns, and (d) service improvements (Porter, 2008). Aslam et al. (2020) added that practical innovation boosts corporate activities, creates customer value, and generates economic growth and sustainable competitive advantage in a highly competitive business environment. Therefore, importers or exporters need to develop competitive strategies to enhance business operations in the global market. Although Porter's FFM has shaped the strategic thinking of practicing managers, the model has also faced criticism. Petit and Teece (2021) favored dynamic competition, arguing that the vigorous competition paradigm treats competition and innovation as co-determinants of changes in the market structure. It allows the observation of factors ranging from industry-level differences to levels of market concentration and how innovation affects competitive outcomes (Petit & Teece, 2021).

Despite all the positive narratives, Porter's (1979) FFM will not benefit entrepreneurs in an economy with monopolies because of the absence of competition.

Isabelle et al. (2020) argued that Porter's original FFM no longer meets the more complex needs of operating businesses in the 21st century and could lead to flawed decision-making processes. Its application, especially in emerging economies such as China, is limited because of government interference with entrepreneurial activities, which may cause some business owners to relocate. Isabelle et al. (2020) concluded that the primary FFM does not meet the challenging needs of operations now and could lead to defective decision-making approaches when adopted by capital-intensive industries and those using information procedures, mining, for example. Before analyzing the business landscape, an entrepreneur must understand the industry and competitors in the global market.

Porter's theory on competing could help in this situation.

Intimidation by New Entrants in the Industry

Porter (1980, 1985) described the threat of new entrants as the second characteristic of an industry structure, enabling entrepreneurs to create or maintain a competitive advantage. A new entrant with a better substitute product could shift the dynamics globally. In contrast, the cost of inputs may hinder market entry and prevent incumbent entrepreneurs from exiting the market, considering that their investment in equipment and resources is significant (Evro et al., 2023). Furthermore, new entrants often penetrate the market with considerable force and advanced technologies, churning out superior substitute products that could dislodge the traditional incumbents in the global market (McDonald & Eisenhardt, 2020). New entrants could also have different goals, strategies, and behaviors.

As new entrants break into an industry, they leverage existing capabilities, as Pepsi's directors did when management decided to diversify into the bottled water industry and Microsoft's campaign to offer free internet browsers (Porter, 2008). Breaking into a new market requires strategic planning. Therefore, the recommendations from this research could help importers and exporters successfully enter a new global market. When the threat is high, incumbents hold down prices or boost investment to deter new competitors, and if entry barriers are low, newcomers expect little retaliation from the entrenched competitors (Porter). Entry barriers are advantages existing marketers hold over new entrants, and sometimes incumbents form consortiums to prevent the threat of new entrants (Holland & Kavuri, 2023).

Given the complex nature of operating businesses globally, some owners create import-export consortiums for a competitive advantage. An export consortium is an agreement between entrepreneurs that empowers independent business owners to take advantage of international opportunities brought by globalization in a competitive environment (Ghayoomi et al., 2020). An export consortium is a formal strategic forum combining several companies for a long-term partnership between exporters who act as service providers, facilitating their firms' access to foreign markets (Ghayoomi et al. 2020). A consortium is the hub of several inter-organizational competition networks, combining cooperation and competition. Such active collaborations exist among businesses like Apple and Samsung, with different philosophies and orientations. Managers of companies operating in the import-export sector could create alliances to

compete in international markets (Aslam et al., 2022). Such partnerships could create competitive advantages.

The Negotiating Ability of Suppliers

Suppliers play a significant role in the distribution of goods and services. The third factor identified by Porter (1980, 1985) relates to suppliers' bargaining power. Paksoy et al. (2023) disclosed that the bargaining expertise of suppliers is a critical attribute of the market structure in which an entrepreneur operates. Suppliers' bargaining power needs consideration when constructing a firm's strategy (Boudreaux, 2020). Dominant suppliers may capture more value by charging higher prices, limiting quality or services (Islami et al., 2020), or shifting the cost to industry participants as Microsoft did (Porter, 2008). The managers of Microsoft, a dominant player in the computer industry, reduced other computer firms' profits by charging high prices for operating systems (Adner & Lieberman, 2021).

Lucrative markets usually attract more suppliers, which can quickly lower the bargaining power of suppliers. If only a few suppliers dominate the market, the suppliers have more bargaining power (Porter, 2008). Suppliers' power can influence prices, limit the quality and quantity of products, limit profitability, and even force some entrepreneurs to exit the market (Porter, 2008). In a local or international market, the bargaining power of suppliers depends on their ability to make counteroffers, delay agreements, or veto specific proposals that can easily influence the bargaining power process (Görlach & Motz, 2023). Peleckis et al. (2020) noted that competitive policies

influence suppliers' bargaining power in a market and can provide additional opportunities to minimize the negative impact of unfair competition among entrepreneurs. In some economies, managers of supply chains gain power by obtaining exclusive rights through a license, but such authorization could lead to a monopoly.

Entrepreneurs could pursue other alternatives in foreign markets. A company manager who invests in research and development or takes over other firms may become the dominant supplier. As competition becomes more global, many entrepreneurs use strategic alliances to enter new markets, obtain new skills, and share risks and resources to remain competitive (Anoke et al., 2022). Suppliers who adopt that strategy could have a competitive advantage.

The Aggressive Bargaining Power of Buyers in the Market

The actions of aggressive buyers can exert a devastating effect on suppliers. Buyer power is the control a buyer has over a supplier during negotiations, resulting in good contractual terms for the buyer. Ahearne et al. (2022) maintained that information technology reinforced buyers' power as entrepreneurs could access pertinent information about sellers, product prices, or services in today's global market. For example, competitors could use information technology to learn about a product or service, prices, and other details without depending on sellers or salespeople to give them the information. Goyal (2020) added that buyers have high power, especially in industries with high fixed costs, where industry products are homogeneous, or when buyers do not face high switching costs. If dominant buyers operate in an industry, they will use their

privileged position to force a price reduction (Fountoukidis et al., 2023). Incumbent suppliers may differentiate their products and charge different prices to check the influence of buyers. In that case, buyers' power will be much lower. Alternatively, exporters trying to make sales could avoid the power of aggressive buyers by exploring opportunities in blue ocean markets.

The Threat of Substitutes and Counterfeiters

Substitution may be the only option available to an international trader. Shrivastava (2023) postulated that a substitute is a service or product that can offer a similar satisfaction level as the product or service consumers already find acceptable. The threat of substitutes often shifts as technology advances, creating new replacements or changes in price-performance comparison (Porter, 2008). Porter's FFM includes a description of a buyer's propensity to substitute one product for another based on the ratio between price and performance, as well as between price and other factors that come into play, such as the perceived level of product differentiation and the buyer's switching costs (Iqbal et al., 2023).

Other forms of substitution include imitation and counterfeited auto parts, which are problems plaguing the global market (Shen et al., 2022). De Santana et al. (2023) noted that sometimes counterfeiting is profitable as counterfeiters could use improved substitutes in a market to make a profit. An example from the automobile industry was developing new plastic materials that enabled industry members to reduce metallic materials and vehicle size (Porter, 2008). Oskar (2021) added that Swiss watchmakers

and European and American automakers had suffered enormous losses due to fake or counterfeit products. Such illegal activities cause significant damage to an economy through lost revenue and diminished capital investment (Inamdar, 2020). Entrepreneurs should develop strategies for identifying fake products to counter local and international counterfeiters and imitators in the global market.

Globalization

Developed, developing, and underdeveloped economies are transforming into a global market. In a globalized world, the activities of entrepreneurs in the import-export business play a significant role in increasing a nation's GDP (Andavar et al., 2021). Beeharry and Demir (2023) noted that globalization is reshaping the world into a single market with worldwide connections through the mobility of people, goods, capital, technology, information, and ideas. Smith (2021) opined that globalism would bring excellent development that would spread prosperity to less developed countries, resulting in economic growth and wealth creation, bringing prosperity to millions of formerly impoverished people. The promise seems lovely and is the way to riches and health for the masses; however, the reality paints a different picture, as many countries amassed debts that have plunged their people into misery (Smith, 2021). The effect of globalization on a country's economy is not limited only by its level of development but has impacted employment worldwide (Stofkova & Sukalova, 2020). With improved strategies, import and export entrepreneurs may gain a competitive advantage in the global market.

Risk Management in Global Markets

Managing risks and resilience in cross-border trade is challenging given that the multiple stakeholders, operations, and corporate environmental exposures to hazards trigger the deployment of specific management practices tackling adversity, problems, and disruptions that may involve controversial issues (Ali & Chua, 2023). Using digital technologies such as social media platforms, smart mobile phones, e-commerce, and blockchain to manage business entities is a critical strategic tool for risk management that ensures sustainability and development (Araz et al., 2020). Other risks include transporting drugs and hazardous materials through border crossings (Alam et al., 2020). Efficient management of cross-border risk could help mitigate cross-border problems that need resolutions. Entrepreneurs need to consider transportation risks as they venture into the global market.

Governments and international organizations have established various controls, lockdowns, or export/import restrictions of products, such as medical supplies, through international agreements, which leaders of local companies cannot negotiate or handle environmental problems (Evenett et al., 2022). Other issues and conflicts include information shared with customs, brokers, or documents passing through several intermediaries, different political systems, traditions, and cultures; the absence of technology and nontransparent bank transactions sometimes create information risks (Khmeleva et al., 2022). Chang et al. (2020) posted that the emergence and development of blockchain technology provided solutions to problems in the cross-border trade

business process. With the creation of free trade zones, many local employees may feel less able to compete with expatriates (Dong et al., 2022).

Red Versus Blue Ocean Strategies

Some entrepreneurs succeed in the global market, while others fail in business ventures because of fierce competition in a crowded Red Ocean (RO) market environment. A red ocean represents a market echo system where players use various techniques to outperform their rivals to get a more significant share of existing market demand (Chang et al., 2020; Išoraitė & Alperytė, 2022; Krishnan et al., 2022). Those who cannot withstand the competitive challenges in the Red Ocean market succeed in looking for opportunities in the Blue Ocean (BO) marketplace (Markopoulos et al., 2020). The BOS is a business administrative concept that prescribes entrepreneurs to exploit new markets rather than go head-to-head with each other in a crowded red ocean market (Awladthan et al., 2023). The real opportunity is to create an uncontested market space (Ganguly, 2020). Managers of blue ocean companies do not aim to outperform the competition but to make the competition irrelevant (Sari et al., 2023). Before developing global competition strategies, importers and exporters must understand the operations in blue and red ocean markets.

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The resource-based view (RBV) framework for enterprise is used to identify and manage risks. Nikmah et al. (2021) posited that entrepreneurs entering the global market should consider using RBV to compete in the international business landscape. In

contrast to FFM interpretations, RBV addresses the relevant role that assists a company executive in nurturing a competitive dominance and figuring out the combined resources needed to have an advantage in the globalized competitive market (Donnellan & Rutledge, 2019). Mishra et al. (2019) noted that managers use the resource-based theory to link various risks to an extensive organizational resource set. (Barney (1991) stated that managers or business owners should protect their resources and capabilities in-house to reduce the threat of imitation. Arbelo et al. (2021) maintained that entrepreneurs achieve a continuous competitive advantage by creating resources and abilities that are rare, valuable, inimitable, and non-substitutable.

The relevance of RBV is in its application in several industries with the help of technology. Adopting emerging technologies enhances the implementation of RBV (Nayak et al., 2023). Change in a productive business environment catalyzes the constant emergence of problems. Arbelo et al. (2021) revealed that the RBV competitive position is how specialized the assets are, and the entrepreneurs' skills focus on optimizing to create a competitive advantage. Such issues would guide corporate executives in the global import-export market. Entrepreneurs who use the RBV theory can exploit economies of scale if their enterprises are more diversified and do not have acute cash flow problems (Talom & Tengeh, 2020). The RBV theory's successful application in imports and exports depends on essential strategies to help managers compete in the global market.

Transition

This study has three sections to explore strategies entrepreneurs in import-export businesses use to compete in the global market. Section 1 started with the background of the problem, followed by the general and specific business problems. Other components included the purpose statement and the study's nature, which justified why a multiple case study was suitable for this investigation. Furthermore, Section 1 covered the research question, interview questions, conceptual framework, definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, the study's significance, and a professional and academic literature review. Section 2 begins with a recap of the purpose statement, followed by a description of the researcher's responsibility, participants, research methodology and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, techniques, analysis, reliability, and validity. In these sections, I explore strategies entrepreneurs in the global market have used to compete internationally. Section 3 of this research inquiry includes the study results and recommendations on how entrepreneurs can apply the findings to professional business practices. Section 3 ends with a summary of the implications for social change and suggestions for further research.

Section 2: The Project

Some entrepreneurs in developed and developing economies specialize in exporting and importing goods and services in the global and regional markets. The importance of global trade demonstrates the need for this study of strategies that could enable business owners to compete in the international business landscape. Section 2 includes the purpose statement and discusses the researcher's role, participants, sample and population, research method and design, ethical research, data collection instruments and techniques, data analysis, reliability, and validity.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative multiple case study aimed to explore strategies some import-export entrepreneurs use to succeed in the global market beyond 5 years. The target population included entrepreneurs from Nigeria, Cameroon, and Canada who have successfully used various techniques to compete in the import-export trade. The implication of this study for positive social change is that other entrepreneurs in the import-export business could use the results to generate more revenue. The findings will help entrepreneurs develop strategies to compete in the import-export trade, thereby generating more income, which, in turn, could help the owners create employment opportunities to alleviate poverty. The participation of well-informed entrepreneurs in the global market could improve the trade balance between developed and developing nations.

Role of the Researcher

New researchers must understand the research designs that can best address their research problem and guide them throughout the research methodology (Dawadi et al., 2021). A researcher's role is to choose a topic, select a research method and design, and develop a questionnaire to generate information for answering the research question (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). Therefore, as the primary research instrument, I adopted a suitable research method and design and engaged participants willing to participate. My other role was to serve as the research interviewer in this multiple-case study. I collected participant data through interviews and documents, coded the information according to themes, took measures to avoid bias, and interpreted the data logically to arrive at an informed conclusion.

Relationship With the Research Topic

The study of import-export businesses relates to my experience in Cameroon, where I participated in a poverty alleviation program financed by the African Development Bank. The program empowered women entrepreneurs to produce and market livestock and agricultural products. To implement this program, the African Development Bank authorized the Northwest Development Authority, where I served as the head of the Department of Finance and Administration, managing and training local entrepreneurs to produce and market their products. The program was successful, as the small business owners with surplus food and animal products could sell their goods.

Although businesses fail worldwide, organizational leaders typically investigate the causes and the strategies entrepreneurs need to succeed in global trade. Bushe (2019) posited that entrepreneurship is a relatively new concept in some African countries, and several issues contribute to the failure of most African businesses. The main factors include (a) lack of business education, (b) lack of sources of finance, (c) absence of research information, and (d) poorly managed government programs that frustrate entrepreneurs engaged in cross-border trade. I intend to work as a consultant for entrepreneurs operating in the import-export market in the United States and Africa.

Researcher's Role Related to Ethics

Barlow (2020) maintained that a novice researcher should uphold the following three ethical principles while conducting investigations: (a) justice, (b) respect for human subjects, and (c) beneficence with the highest integrity, as stipulated in the Belmont Report. Without these principles, the recommendations of any investigation will not be reliable. The principles enshrined in the Belmont Report served as a guide throughout this multiple case study regarding respect for human dignity. Respect for persons means that researchers must allow participants to consider the risks and benefits of research participation and voluntarily agree via an informed consent process (Brothers et al., 2019). In this regard, I also followed Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines that require researchers to obtain permission before conducting a study.

Karataş et al. (2023) posited that, in a research encounter, participants deserve fair and equal treatment. I conducted interviews diligently and continuously observed the core

ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and beneficence that allowed participants to construct their narratives comfortably, without any influence. Moral codes guided the research process, as participants did not feel intimidated or face cross-examination as in a legal process. Additionally, as Yin (2018) espoused, a participant could withdraw freely before or during an interview by presenting verbal or written notice.

Bias Mitigation

In a qualitative multiple-case study, bias or the researcher's beliefs may be present at all levels of the investigation and can affect the validity and reliability of research findings. Consequently, Nogueira de Tommaso et al. (2021) maintained that, in a case study, the researcher should self-reflect and acknowledge personal bias, the influence of experience, and the objective interpretation of responses. Yin (2018) contended that bias might divert or change the direction of a case study. To mitigate bias, I remained open-minded and asked questions methodically to allow the participants to answer questions without influence. In addition, I used an interview protocol (Appendix A) to ask all participants the same probing questions. Furthermore, I focused on the data collected rather than on my judgment to mitigate the possibility of personal preference that might have influenced the study results.

Interview Protocol Rationale

I used the interview questions (Appendix B) to obtain information from participants. Carlisle et al. (2023) noted that a semistructured, open-ended interview

protocol is necessary to gain participants' experiences. Sunthararajah et al. (2022) explained that researchers conduct semistructured interviews to initiate dialogue with participants about lived experiences and resolve existing questions based on their feedback. To do so, a researcher listens attentively to participants during semistructured interviews before asking in-depth questions (Roberts, 2020). Yin (2018) noted that the credibility and accuracy of the research method are essential components that must be upheld when conveying study results. As such, I conducted semistructured interviews with questions designed to obtain complete and accurate information from the participants. Finally, Cheron et al. (2022) recommended that, in a face-to-face encounter, a researcher could take notes or record a conversation to capture the interviewee's contribution to the data collection process. These recommendations guided the research process.

A researcher needs participants to provide information through interviews in a research inquiry. In qualitative research, Yin (2018) advised that investigators must select participants with enough knowledge and strategies to contribute sufficient data to answer the research question. I targeted four entrepreneurs in the import-export beyond 5 years. Furthermore, the participants were entrepreneurs doing business with customers in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Such representation was necessary to capture the strategies for business owners to operate successfully globally. Yin articulated that sampling relies on a few interviewees to obtain in-depth and detailed responses to the research questions in qualitative research. Participant selection took place through purposive sampling and

snowballing. Rebai (2023) articulated that purposive sampling, known as judgmental or subjective sampling, is a technique that does not need a set number of participants or theories but a technique in which researchers rely on judgment when choosing populations to participate in a study.

Recruiting participants in a qualitative case study can be a challenge. Chaisson et al. (2022) explained that a researcher's initial action is to obtain authorization from the IRB before accessing interviewees. Following Walden University's IRB approval (approval number 10-08-21-0380820), which expires on October 10, 2023, I contacted targeted entrepreneurs to obtain their phone numbers and other details. Then, I emailed potential participants the consent form with an introduction letter explaining the nature, purpose, and potential benefits they and other business owners might gain from the study. I requested the participants to read and sign the consent form through email to approve their participation in the research process.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a face-to-face semistructured interview was not possible. Meetings conducted via social media and telephone were the only methods acceptable to the participants. Yin (2018) noted that to gain access to participants, a researcher should have the following attributes: (a) be a good listener, (b) pose the right questions, (c) be adaptive, (d) have a solid grasp of the problems under study, and (e) be able to conduct the research ethically. Alismaiel et al. (2022) noted that researchers could use social media platforms to communicate with study participants. Olsson et al. (2022) posited that violations of rules and research regulations could harm human participants,

animal subjects, data integrity, institutions, and investigators. Walden University requires that participants in doctoral research sign a consent form to authorize a researcher to access company executives, employees, and documents. After participants signed the consent form, I contacted them by phone or email to schedule an interview. In the consent document presented to the participants, I indicated that I would protect their identity, save the data collected on a secured hard drive for 5 years, and destroy it without compensation.

Researchers have multiple options to get reliable information from a target population. Some use semistructured interviews to narrow the area of research/topic of interest while listening to the stories of subjects, and the conventional format that follows is an open statement with a few general questions to start the conversation (Naz et al., 2022). The interview method is suitable for holistically exploring research questions, as it allows qualitative data to be collected during the interview process and does not depend on preordained rules (Ludwig et al., 2019). I started by explaining the guidelines and purpose of the consent form to each participant. After receiving approval from each participant, I scheduled a date to conduct one-on-one interviews. At the start of each interview, I informally interacted with each person before the actual discussion started. Informal discussions facilitate rapport between the interviewer and the volunteer (Wolff & Burrows, 2021). A positive informal interaction between volunteers and the interviewer simplifies the research process before the interview starts.

Lobe et al. (2020) cautioned that qualitative researchers face unique opportunities and challenges due to the disruption of COVID-19, which discourages face-to-face contact. The pandemic represents a unique opportunity to study the crisis because social distancing mandates restrict traditional face-to-face investigations (Lobe et al., 2020). Considering these circumstances, I tactfully suggested conducting the interviews by telephone, and all participants willingly accepted. The interactions with the volunteers were friendly, with all participants showing interest in the topic. Detailed responses and attentiveness reduced misunderstandings. When there was a misunderstanding or ambiguity, I quickly apologized and redirected the participant to the main issues.

Research Method and Design

A suitable research method and design are essential for a successful study (Ghezzi, 2020). I favored a qualitative methodology to explore entrepreneurs' strategies to succeed in the global market beyond 5 years. I used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions for this qualitative multiple-case study to obtain the best responses and qualitative data. The case study design was appropriate for studying a phenomenon in a real-life environment and comparing findings using multiple case studies, especially in varied locations (Yin, 2018). Bennett and Braumoeller (2022) illustrated the advantages of the multiple case study approach and offered methodological advice on combining different methods by analyzing and critiquing prominent examples of multi-method research.

Research Method

Researchers can choose qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods to investigate a research problem after studying the differences and similarities of several cases. Calandra et al. (2023) noted that the benefits of a multiple case study are that investigators can capture research nuances and factors otherwise overlooked by quantitative methods or allow researchers to capture intangible elements that create value for the literature. I used the qualitative multiple-case method to find answers to the research question. Kaae and Traulsen (2020) noted that qualitative research helps an investigator understand human experience and the underlying reasons, attitudes, and motivations for behavior. Furthermore, Yin (2018) explained that researchers using the case study method employ several means to collect data, such as open-ended semistructured interviews, document reviews, and direct observation.

Qualitative research is a term used to designate approaches that include conducting inductive reasoning, collecting data in natural settings, analyzing documents, and understanding participants' viewpoints (Babchuk, 2019). Conversely, quantitative research involves quantifying and analyzing variables using statistical techniques and software to answer "how" questions. The methodology involves numerically calculating and comparing variables and predicting the result of a hypothesis (Hedilis & Hariandja, 2023). Zuma and Khumalo (2020) concluded that a quantitative researcher uses open-ended and closed questions in a structured questioning environment.

The quantitative approach was inappropriate because numeric calculations would not address the research problem. Mixed-method research combines quantitative and qualitative research methods in the same research inquiry (Baltrusch et al., 2020; Gilmartin & Esterhuizen, 2020). The approach was unsuitable for multiple case studies because of the time needed to collect data (Maraqa et al., 2021). Therefore, a qualitative method was appropriate to explore entrepreneurs' strategies to manage import-export businesses in the global market.

Research has similarities in the methods of investigation. Although there are some similarities between quantitative and qualitative methodologies in design and implementation, qualitative research has unique characteristics, including assumptions and techniques that distinguish it from other research forms (Babchuk, 2019). The qualitative methodology does not involve comparing variables like a mixed method or a quantitative study. Therefore, a qualitative multiple-case study was appropriate for exploring the strategies needed to manage import-export businesses to remain competitive in the global market.

Research Design

In developing this qualitative multiple case study, I considered several options to determine the plan that would be most suitable: single case study, multiple case study, phenomenology, or ethnography. The aim was to generate evidence that is robust and reliable. A single case study would not have provided data of the same quality as a multiple case study. A potential advantage of a multiple case study is that a researcher

can develop themes, code data, and compare, analyze, and interpret data from various sources (Xu & Zammit, 2020). Yin (2018) explained that multiple case studies enhance the probability of direct duplication, making the assumptions that result from a collection of single cases more potent than conclusions from an independent example. Schmidt et al. (2018) added that a multiple case study is the most appropriate model for examining the organizational realities in a real-life setting through an in-depth exploration of a few cases.

A qualitative case study design is suitable for presenting a detailed, multidimensional understanding of complex social and contemporary events based on evidence collected through direct observation of participants or interviewing selected individuals (Mohajan, 2020). Therefore, I picked a multiple case study design to explore strategies used by the participants to address the study's purpose. Phenomenology was not appropriate for this study. Researchers use phenomenological models to comprehend how members of the target population view themselves concerning practical acts of living accessed through the narratives, observations, and increased awareness of lived experiences rather than by providing a theory for generalization or prediction of phenomena (Awuviry-Newton et al., 2020). Furthermore, phenomenology involves studying the expertise and lived experiences of individuals who participated in the study and describing what participants had in common (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Because my goal was not to understand the unique lived experiences of a target population, phenomenology was not appropriate for the research inquiry.

Another case study design is ethnography. Nixon and Odoyo (2020) explained that ethnography involves two essential characteristics: (a) the place where the observation takes place in a natural setting, and (b) researchers must understand how an event is perceived and interpreted by community members. Therefore, researchers use ethnography to study a group of people and their culture to understand the social realities surrounding the people's everyday practices (Nixon & Odoyo, 2020). Although International trade involves different cultures, organizational culture may not significantly influence entrepreneurs' strategic choices for the global market. Therefore, ethnography was also not appropriate for the study.

Researchers conduct studies with multiple case study designs to examine the complexities of numerous sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). As the researcher in this multiple case study, I asked participants questions (Appendix B) during the semistructured interviews until no new information was available. I requested each participant to select a convenient time I could call for the open-ended semistructured interview during the research process. Furthermore, I gave the interviewees the option to choose whether to use social media, for example, Zoom or Skype, for the interaction to guard against COVID-19 or to use the phone to answer the semistructured and open-ended questions. Participants preferred using the phone to answer research questions. Qualitative researchers use open-ended questions in a semistructured conversation to interact with participants and understand their experiences until data saturation (Yin, 2018). Daher (2023) defined data saturation as “a key construct used by qualitative

research theorists to verify the rigor and validity of a study” (p. 99). Data saturation occurs after a researcher has collected enough qualitative data and reached a point where additional data, codes, or themes yield only redundant information (Johnson et al., 2019)

Another method for ensuring data saturation is constructing a saturation grid to enumerate the primary topics, making it possible to observe information recurrence. Mwita (2022) argued that data saturation is when a researcher must stop collecting more data from informants. Further collection and analysis are unnecessary as the effort will not produce new information. I used member checking and triangulation of information from multiple sources to achieve data saturation. The interpretation of data from various sources strengthened the validity of the data collected. I asked questions during the semistructured interviews until no new information was provided. Although Johnson et al. (2019) maintained that data saturation does not apply to all study designs, analyzing data from multiple sources in this qualitative case study enhanced the validity of the data collected. Data collection in some qualitative research could continue indefinitely if the event persists. I ended the investigation and began data analysis when further questioning yielded no new information. The interpretation and analysis of data from various sources strengthened the validity of the assembled data.

Population and Sampling

In any research encounter, participants provide credible information to a researcher. In this qualitative multiple case study, the target population was four entrepreneurs in the import-export business for at least 5 years. Riley et al. (2020) posited

that the sample size in a qualitative inquiry should not depend on a predicted formula but involve an adequate number of participants. Samples in qualitative research tend to be small to support the depth of the case study, and the essential criterion for determining the sample size is saturation (Zelčāne & Pipere, 2023). Sharma et al. (2020) and Rahman (2023) added that an adequate study sample size is essential for research. A suitable sample size produces reliable results that improve the generalizability of a study's findings.

There is no specific number of participants involved in a research study. Yin (2018) recommended 20 participants as acceptable for producing reliable and valuable data for a research study. I selected four experienced global entrepreneurs who provided valid and reliable information, and this sample size generated data up to the point of saturation. Any more significant number would have been time-consuming and challenging to manage. I recruited experienced adult volunteers above 40 years old with competitive global experience in the import-export business for more than 5 years. I used snowball sampling to recruit participants. Yin posited that there is no precise formula to determine the sample size, and the criteria for selecting a population of interest depend on the research question.

There are several ways to contact research participants, including by telephone. I first discussed safe recruitment and data collection strategies with the owners of the businesses. I then reviewed procedures for ensuring participants' confidentiality and data privacy before recruiting the potential participants. I recruited participants through

purposeful sampling and snowballing. I contacted the entrepreneurs and presented the Walden University informed consent form for their approval before participation. Finally, I sent each participant a letter of invitation (Appendix C) and arranged the interview dates.

I used a purposeful sampling method for the research. A purposive sampling technique is a judgment sampling approach that involves a conscious, nonrandom selection of participants due to underlying qualities. Experienced investigators must exercise their best judgment when purposive sampling by deliberately inviting participants or selecting documents, locations, or necessary items to help the researcher obtain information for the research topic (Staller, 2021). Obilor (2023) demonstrated that a researcher might use a purposeful sampling method to recruit participants based on a specific goal to gather an in-depth study or provide answers to the research problem. Zickar and Keith (2023) noted that researchers use purposeful sampling to select people who have experience and are part of a phenomenon of interest. My goal was to develop a detailed description of the research topic.

There are rules for recruiting participants in a qualitative multiple-case study. Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) noted that a qualitative inquiry lacks stringent regulations regarding the sample size. Instead, the investigation depends on the research purpose and the resources available to complete the study. Sukmawati et al. (2023) acknowledged that a purposive sampling technique, followed by snowball sampling, leads researchers to find participants with experience. The process involves selecting individuals or groups

meeting specified criteria to provide accurate information for answering a research question. In their case study, Guest et al. (2020) concluded that a researcher's sampling strategy should divert attention from the target population's numerical size to express new ideas to attain data saturation. I continued to explore the topic through the interviews until I reached data saturation.

Snowball sampling is another sampling method researchers can use to reinforce the purposeful sampling method. Sperandei et al. (2023) added that chain-referral sampling is similar to snowballing. It begins with an initial pool of participants who refer others from their networks or when participants with the desired characteristics are hard to reach. These interests could promote biases that could negatively affect the research process's attempt to get data saturation. Consequently, an interview protocol without snowball sampling is appropriate in qualitative research for a target population to feel comfortable answering research questions in a convenient location without introducing bias.

Ethical Research

In a qualitative multiple-case study, the participant's dignity is paramount and should be upheld by the researcher. Ethical conduct of research requires informed consent, voluntary participation of research participants, and IRB guarantees (Josephson & Smale, 2021). Kublin (2020) asserted that many unethical research cases begin with populations that are not fully informed about the extent of their participation or with individuals who have not given their full, voluntary consent to be a part of a research

study. I told participants they had the right to withdraw from the study without reason. Widmer et al. (2020) added that informed consent is the cornerstone of ethical conduct and safeguards participants' rights and quality of life. By obtaining permission from participants, researchers ensure participants' rights and welfare during a study. Kublin noted that obtaining valid informed consent from individuals participating in a research study guarantees the survey's ethical validity, as many cases of unethical research begin with participants who are not knowledgeable. Human subjects' concerns must include sustaining moral integrity and obtaining informed consent (Dudovskiy, 2018). I followed the ethical and moral principles contained in the informed consent form.

In this multiple case study, I followed the principles described by Darweesh et al. (2024) and Ruredzo et al. (2024) regarding respecting humans, beneficence, justice, and legal issues and holding researchers accountable for wrongdoing. Upon receiving Walden University's IRB approval (approval number 10-08-21-0380820), which expires on October 10, 2023, I emailed potential participants the consent form for their review and approval. Grady et al. (2017) noted that in an informed consent form, the nature and purpose of a study, interview questions, and data collection methods are spelled out, and the freedom to discontinue participation without reason is stipulated. Before starting each interview, I explained the details of the process and requested each participant to review the consent form before they appended their signatures to approve the conditions. I did not offer participants any incentives or inducement to participate, and their identities remained anonymous to maintain confidentiality. I provided them with my contact

information to allow any participant to withdraw from the study voluntarily via phone or email.

Contacting participants and ethically managing the relationship is the duty of every researcher. Yin (2018) recommended that researchers stick to ethical provisions by protecting participants' privacy and confidentiality and safeguarding private information during data collection and analysis. I used the following codes to protect participants' identities: P1, P2, P3, and P4, with "P" referring to "Participant." Lupton and Maslen (2019) explained that researchers use pseudonyms to ensure participants' confidentiality. I also used the following subcodes to identify participants' documents: P1D1, P2D2, P3D3, and P4D4. I will keep the records, tape recordings, and literature related to this study securely for 5 years before destroying them by shredding all papers and deleting audio recordings. I provided participants with Walden University's IRB approval (approval number 10-08-21-0380820), which will expire on October 10, 2023, for authentication and to ensure that the research exercise and all ethical protocols involved in data collection were followed.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection is an essential element of a multiple case study and can be problematic if a researcher does not handle the process well. Clark and Vealé (2018) noted that the researcher is the primary data collection instrument. As the primary data collection instrument, I conducted open-ended, semistructured interviews by telephone with four import-export entrepreneurs who had been in the business for 5 years. The

interview protocol contains the research questions (see Appendix A). Semistructured interview questions are tools that interviewers use to obtain accurate answers from the interviewees, although irrelevant and inappropriate questions can add to a distressing interview experience (Behroozi et al., 2020). The interview protocol helped me avoid making the interview experience uncomfortable for the participants. I conducted semistructured interviews by telephone as the pandemic persisted during the data collection process, limiting face-to-face interactions. Considering the advantages and disadvantages of telephone interviews, Rahman (2023) stated that telephone interviews are shorter, cost less, are reported to engender less interviewer bias, and may result in less information, while in-person interviews require more training, are conducive to physical tests, and are more challenging to schedule. I also used secondary data collection instruments.

As the primary research instrument, I used semistructured, open-ended interview questions (Appendix B) to collect participant data. I conducted the interviews using a dyadic telephone in compliance with COVID-19 containment measures. Individuals tend to speak more openly in telephone discussions. However, to obtain valuable, unbiased insights, Madula et al. (2018) suggested that a researcher should refer politely and tactfully to potential contradictions in interviewees' ambiguous statements during interviews, follow-up questions, and assertions. I used this method to obtain information from the participants, guided by the notion that semistructured discussions have no predefined rules.

Further questioning depended on how the interviewees responded to my questions. Löhr et al. (2020) asserted that dyadic conversations generate data during a researcher and participant discussion. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) added that a relational focus is a unique relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The questioning should not develop into a transactional semi-exercise but involve unfolding interactions between the researcher and the interviewee. I used these guiding principles in this research process.

Establishing rapport energizes participants when responding to questions in any research encounter. Participants may have preconceived notions about research, including mistrust (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). I inspired confidence in the participants by explaining why I was conducting the study and how their participation as experts was meaningful in addressing the research problem and enhancing my understanding of the research topic. I began with easy questions and gradually moved to more complicated questions. Other ways to strengthen rapport include speaking professionally but not very formally, avoiding jargon or slang, and using an appropriate conversational tone (Sarkar et al., 2020). Das et al. (2020) posited that researchers who choose the right words and the correct technique during in-depth semistructured interviews might be able to examine additional topics by navigating back to the key issues.

Throughout the process, and with the participants' permission, I recorded the interview proceedings electronically with a Samsung tablet and sent each participant a summary of the transcripts for confirmation. Each interview session lasted approximately

1 hour. Every piece of information provided by the research participant needed validation. In that regard, I conducted member checking or respondent validation to test the research findings' validity, reliability, and trustworthiness. McPeake et al. (2023) stated that member checking, also known as participant validation, is a technique for exploring the credibility of research results by sharing collected data with research volunteers, often in a draft format, and receiving approval of the draft summary sent to each volunteer for validation.

Furthermore, Wesolowski (2020) maintained that the notions of validity, fairness, and reliability provide quality assurance to ensure adequate data-gathering procedures and data interpretation testing. When considering the trustworthiness of qualitative research, researchers should indicate whether the findings would be reproduced in another study investigating the same problem, with the same people, and with the same underlying situational context (Rose & Johnson, 2020). The principles of trustworthiness guided this qualitative multiple-case study.

Data Collection Technique

A researcher can employ several techniques to obtain information from research participants. In a qualitative multiple case study, the following data collection types are available to a researcher: (a) organizational documentation such as emails, (b) annual reports, (c) archival records, (d) semistructured interviews, (e) videoconferencing, and (f) direct observations (Yin, 2018). Sy et al. (2020) noted that the restrictive measures implemented to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing physical

distancing measures pose challenges for researchers. Clay (2020) opined that the effects of COVID-19 on population mobility might require researchers to amend their research methods. Archibald et al. (2019) recommended that researchers use audio recording, telephone interviews, or teleconferencing technology such as Skype, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom to collect data for their investigations. The telephone was instrumental in conducting semistructured in-depth interviews with follow-up questions (Appendix A) to collect data to answer the research question. Next, I explored websites and the internet to locate peer-reviewed journals and discover strategies entrepreneurs use to compete in the global market. Documents have advantages and disadvantages. Kaae and Traulsen (2020) noted that documents reveal what people do. The main disadvantage of documentation is retrievability, as it could be challenging to find, or a participant may deliberately withhold access to a record (Yin). In such an encounter, a researcher may use other means to collect data.

For this research, field notes were also an option. Field notes or diaries represent another data collection form and allow a free writing flow to capture responses to specific questions or prompts (Lupton, 2020). The disadvantage of field notes is the possibility of data loss. The use of field notes and pilot studies enhances data collection. However, I did not use a pilot study to ascertain the necessity of this investigation; instead, I used email and phone to interact with participants. Hesitant participants were not required to participate, and I did not minimize their concerns. Shifting to an alternative format was not a requirement.

Participants followed the evolving health guidelines set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in different countries. I informed participants to direct any questions or concerns to IRB@mail.waldenu.edu. Using a semistructured, open-ended interview technique to collect data to answer a research question has advantages (Neuert et al., 2023). Data collection helps a researcher capture body language and interviewees' nonverbal actions that warrant probing using follow-up questions (Al-Hajmee, 2023). I could not observe body language because participants were from different countries, and the interview took place over the phone. Busetto et al. (2020) concluded that a semistructured discussion is a practical qualitative approach to collecting data. The advantage of qualitative interviews is that they are interactive (Busetto et al., 2020), allowing unexpected topics to emerge and overcoming researcher bias.

Bias can tarnish the credibility of research findings. Yin (2009) cautioned that using interviews as a single strategy for data collection in a qualitative study might expose the interview findings to research bias and raise questions regarding the investigation's validity and reliability. The process is time-consuming because a study requires intense preparation, and it is challenging to establish confidentiality and generalize the findings (Hosseini et al., 2024). Mahlangu et al. (2024) noted that in face-to-face interview research, the lack of privacy may limit participant's ability to talk about experiences, raising questions about the validity and credibility of the collected data. Another disadvantage is that participants can withhold pertinent documents (Yin, 2018). In addition, a recording device may malfunction when an interview is in progress. I

scheduled meetings in advance and followed up with reminders that included assurances of the confidentiality of the research information.

In this qualitative multiple case study, I examined strategies that some successful entrepreneurs used to succeed beyond 5 years in the import-export business. I started the data collection process for the research by emailing four successful business owners to invite them to participate in the study after receiving research approval from Walden University's chief academic officer. Yin (2018) noted that data collection involves collecting information from potential participants. Muthanna (2019) reported that researchers could conduct structured, semistructured, or unstructured interviews. Structured interviews contain standardized questions without the intention of collecting in-depth data, whereas unstructured interviews include open-ended, informal questions without a format or style (Muthanna, 2019). DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) affirmed that researchers use semistructured interviews to collect data by exploring participants' thoughts to obtain information. A semi-structured discussion allows interviewees to answer questions in their own words rather than providing a yes or no answer.

Before each interview, I introduced myself and explained the study's objective. The encounter was by telephone, which was considered appropriate to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. I emailed the consent form to each volunteer for their review and approval or disapproval. Before recording the semistructured interview, I notified the participants that they would receive a transcript for validation. Before the interview, I

sent all participants the interview questions in the interview protocol (Appendix A) to help them prepare their answers before the meeting.

Preparing answers to research questions in advance can reduce the time needed for a follow-up meeting with participants. To ensure credibility, fairness, validation, and trustworthiness, I submitted a summary of the information to each interviewee. I allowed the interviewees to confirm, amend, or reject any part of the summary. I followed up with a phone call with the participant to clarify any differences.

Data Organization Technique

Walden University's official protocol/guidelines require secure storage of the data. Data was in a locked metal cabinet. Proper data organization techniques increase an inquiry's validity and relevance by providing opportunities for intelligent data-driven operation and analysis (Seshan et al., 2023). Yin (2018) explained that organizational data skills start with data instrument administration, including assigned codes, notes, audio recordings, and journals for researchers to use while interacting with participants. I used pseudonyms to protect participants' identities and confidentiality.

A researcher may use labels or technology to organize data. I used codified symbols P1–P4 to protect the interviewees' privacy and their recorded information. Similarly, the identification of documentation included the following symbols: D1, D2, D3, and D4. Mulaku et al. (2023) noted that data organization and management are critical for a credible qualitative research study. In that regard, I used Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word to transcribe the interview proceedings, compile the participants'

responses to the interview questions, and save the audio files using the assigned interviewees' codes to maintain privacy.

Data Analysis

A researcher can analyze data in multiple case studies by combining several procedures to develop meaningful results. Johnson et al. (2020) recognized four types of triangulation: (a) method triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theoretical triangulation, and (d) data source triangulation. In addition, Yin (2018) distinguished five stages in data analysis: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpretation, and (e) conclusion. O'Donovan & McAuliffe (2020) and Dźwigoł and Dźwigoł-Barosz (2020) added that methodical triangulation enhances the validity and credibility of the information collected by combining several procedures to develop meaningful results. I used methodical triangulation to analyze data from several sources. A qualitative researcher must demonstrate that data analysis is systematically consistent throughout the process by disclosing the analysis methods with enough details to enable a reader to determine whether the process is credible. I started with questions in the case study interview protocol (Appendix A), beginning with simple questions before moving to more challenging problems in the triangulation process.

To accomplish triangulation, Yin (2018) posited that data collection entails arranging interview data chronologically, seeking patterns, creating categories, and identifying critical recurrent themes. Using one or more qualitative data analysis methods allows a researcher to triangulate information from interviews and documentation by

comparing findings from one source of qualitative data with other sources (Sechelski & Onwuegbuzie, 2019). I used Yin's data analysis methodology to classify the participants' responses according to codes and themes. Coding principles and themes help researchers understand their participants. I utilized NVivo software to arrange the codes, develop themes, and manage the data to strengthen the data analysis.

In summary, I reached the point of saturation when further questioning of volunteers did not produce any new information. After the analysis, I compared the central themes with the literature findings and Porter's FFM, which is the conceptual framework of this study. A researcher uses thematic analysis to recognize the fundamentals of a successful qualitative analysis. Using thematic analysis helps the researcher identify elements that need to determine how the components connect. I established the data by reflecting on the testimonies of participants recorded during the interview and used thematic analysis to determine the research themes.

Compiling Data

Compiling narrative material in multiple case studies takes many forms. Lekan et al. (2021) and Yin (2018) noted that data collection involves organizing it into topics that emerge from the themes that the researcher develops. I created files for the participants and labeled each file with the participants' code to maintain confidentiality. Transcripts and other research documents were kept in subfiles. As the primary data collection instrument, I identified and analyzed themes relevant to answering the research question before disassembling the files.

Disassembling Data

A researcher knows how to assemble and disassemble data. Disassembling data involves separating information into meaningful chunks to identify recurring themes (Yin, 2018). I sorted the data into primary headings and subheadings to pull relevant information for the study. Yin (2018) posited that researchers convert raw data into meaningful items by arranging data with headings and subheadings. I color-coded the information to identify similarities and differences in the topics. Researchers use qualitative data analysis software to convert raw data into common themes (Williams & Moser, 2019). The findings included a framework to understand the strategies that enable entrepreneurs in import-export businesses to compete globally. Yin noted that the themes uncovered in a data analysis process should respond to the study's main research question in qualitative research.

Reassembling Data

A researcher reassembles themes in tables and identifies relationships and ideas common among participants to reorganize data. Reassembling data is a process that involves recapturing and labeling disassembled data into pieces and common patterns (Yin, 2018). In that regard, I contacted members to confirm that the assembled information was not distorted or different from what they presented in the interview. Where there were disagreements, I did not try to convince the interviewee but explained the issues. Conversely, if the participant insisted on their presentation version, I accepted that view.

Interpreting Data

Any data collected during a research encounter needs interpretation. Interpreting data starts with the codes and themes analyzed during the assembly, disassembly, and reassembly of data collected during a research exercise (Yin, 2018). Bush et al. (2019) indicated that employing an interpretive phenomenological approach to research can help gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon by uncovering meaning from the lived experiences shared by participants. As the primary data instrument, I used Porter's FFM to help organize the coded data into themes. I analyzed them and compared them to the data extracted from the literature review and the other sources. I read the transcripts several times to explore and analyze the triangulated data through the participants' eyes to ensure the reliability and validity of the results.

Member Checking

In a multiple case study, member checking, transcript review, and thematic analysis are valuable tools that enhance data collection's validity, trustworthiness, and reliability. Junjie and Yingxin (2022) and Onyechi (2023) posted that the authenticity of the origin of information remains a critical factor in the overall acceptability of research findings, where the result demonstrates whether the findings are consistent with reality and promotes credibility through various triangulation processes. According to Amin et al. (2020), the member-checking process is as follows: (a) the researcher returns concise analytic categories, data interpretations, and conclusions to study participants for validation, (b) one paragraph summary for each interview question, (c) confirm the

accuracy of synthesize information with each volunteer, and (d) continue the process until the interviewees provide no new information. Amin et al. argued that by allowing participants to review research work, a researcher could claim that the work adequately presents owned and multiple realities. I conducted member checking over the phone with each participant to validate the information provided by each interviewee. I agreed with each participant that if there were no further comments after two weeks, I should assume there was no new information to add.

Reliability and Validity

In qualitative research, a researcher must seek to establish reliability and validity. Reliability and validity are essential elements a researcher considers when evaluating statements in a vigorous qualitative research process (Eldh et al., 2020). A researcher must be conversant with the methods for achieving reliability and validity and diminish subjectivity in interpreting the results (Yin, 2018). Assarroudi et al. (2018) maintained that a researcher employs reliability and validity to demonstrate the study's accuracy, exactness, and trustworthiness in a qualitative research inquiry. Yin (2018) defined truth as an inquiry's capacity to illustrate the phenomenon under examination by applying a rigorous data collection process, a reliable and reproducible data analysis method, and a defined research design.

Reliability

Reliability enhances dependability. Yin (2018) noted that the credibility and duplicability of data define the reliability of a qualitative case study. Therefore, reliability

is not the explicit absence of validity. According to Collingridge and Gantt (2019), the results of qualitative research are accepted as reliable when other researchers confirm the findings as legitimate. Yin acknowledged that researchers use reliability to substantiate the consistency of their research inquiry. Díaz et al. (2023) and Ndou-Mammbona (2023) observed that qualitative researchers use dependability to ensure the trustworthiness of their research findings. To establish an interview's authenticity, a researcher shares the transcript with participants for validation. According to Coleman (2022) and Ragab et al. (2020), member checking of the transcript is a follow-up to validate what participants convey during the interview proceedings. I invoked member checking to ensure reliability and consistency by sending summaries of transcripts to the participants to review and validate their responses.

Validity

Employing multiple sources in data collection is relevant to achieving the validity of research findings. Collingridge and Gantt (2019) referred to the fact as the reality and trustworthiness of the research method, and they indicated how well the research method measures the characteristics of the phenomenon under study. Fusch and Ness (2017) posited that data accuracy and truthfulness demonstrate the validity of a research study. Furthermore, researchers use transferability, credibility, and confirmability to substantiate a research study (Ahmed, 2024). Yin (2018) concluded that triangulation and evaluation of data sources encourage collecting information from multiple sources and focusing on corroborating the findings. I blended transferability, reliability, and data saturation to

understand the entrepreneurs' global competitive strategies. Finally, I initiated member checking to get participants to validate the interview transcript research findings and application of the results to professional practice.

Transition and Summary

In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored strategies entrepreneurs use to succeed in the global market for 5 years. Section 2 began with the purpose statement, followed by the role of the researcher, my relationship with the research topic, bias mitigation, the interview protocol, the research method, and design. Next were population and sampling, research ethics, data collection instruments, data collection, data organization, data analysis, data compilation, data assembling, disassembling, reassembling, and interpreting techniques. Furthermore, it ended with member checking, reliability, and validity. Section 3 starts with the presentation of findings, the analysis of themes, and the application to professional practice, followed by the implications for social change, recommendations for action, suggestions for further research, reflections, and conclusion.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored strategies some entrepreneurs in import-export business use to succeed in the global market beyond 5 years of operation. The participants included four entrepreneurs located in Canada (one), Cameroon (one), and Nigeria (two). The semi-structured interviews lasted about 35 to 60 minutes, and I used a Samsung tablet to capture the proceedings. I preserved confidentiality by categorizing participants as P1, P2, P3, and P4. Participants shared their experiences with the international marketplace. The overarching research question of this study was: What strategies do entrepreneurs in import-export business use to succeed in the global market beyond 5 years? Four themes emerged from the data analysis: The first identifies and addresses problems related to complex international markets. The second one covers identifying and using available resources to plan for the future. The third theme relates to identifying and using various methods to promote a business, and the fourth theme involves identifying and using all resources to finance a business. In Section 3, I present the results for professional practice and the implications for social change. I conclude this section with recommendations for future research and reflections on the research process.

Presentation of the Findings

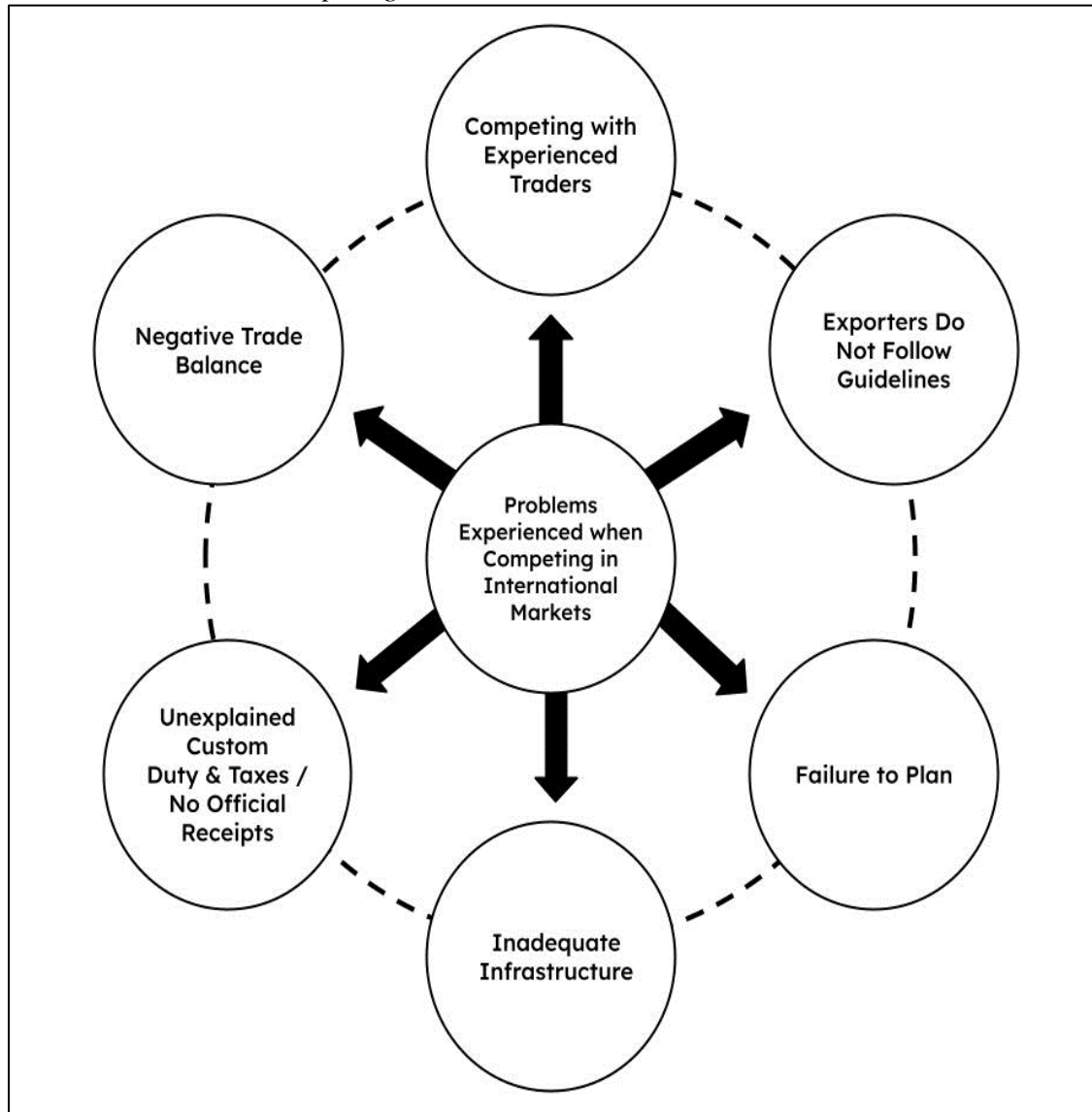
The following research question guided this study: What strategies do entrepreneurs in import-export business use to succeed in the global market beyond 5 years? Data analysis resulted in four overarching themes: (a) identify and address a

variety of problems related to complex global markets, (b) identify and use all available resources, (c) identify and use a variety of methods to promote the business, and (d) identify and use all resources to finance the business (Figure 1).

Theme 1: Identify and Address Problems Related to Complex Global Markets

Figure 1

Problems Related to Competing in International Markets



The first important theme from this multiple case study is identifying and resolving a complex global business problem to have a competitive advantage that

answers the research question. A competitive business technique aims to create a sustainable position in an industry with intense competition (Goyal, 2021). Still, many entrepreneurs have demonstrated incompetence in a competitive environment because of failure to analyze and strategize following Porter's FFM (Mugo, 2020). According to Porter, an entrepreneur gains a competitive advantage in an industry by overcoming the challenges faced by existing competitors. In addition, business owners must understand the demands of customers, suppliers' needs, potential threats from new entrants in the market, and the threat of substitute products. These factors will enable entrepreneurs in the import-export business to formulate the right global competitive strategies.

Inadequate infrastructure is a significant problem in some developing economies. In Nigeria, for example, inefficient infrastructure has remained a considerable challenge for several years, limiting the country's prospects for economic and social development (ITA, 2021; Manjo, 2023). An entrepreneur in the import-export business must consider the nature of a country's infrastructure before making plans to compete in the economy.

Another problem an entrepreneur in the import-export sector needs to consider is the taxation policy in the potential market. Poor tax policies and inefficient tax collection due to corrupt government officials reduce the funds earmarked to develop new or improve existing infrastructure in an economy (Bogetić & Naehar, 2024). This assertion aligns with comments made by P4, who stated, "I faced the issue of corrupt customs officers at the destination countries who charged vast sums of money to clear my goods. Some customs officials made charges arbitrarily." P1 also had the same experience.

New global market entrepreneurs face other issues, including competition with experienced traders (Alfisyah & Arofah, 2022). A country's reliance on agricultural exports may result in a negative trade balance. The lack of infrastructure and a healthy manufacturing base are examples of weaknesses that reinforce a negative trade balance (Effiong et al., 2022; Osinusi et al., 2022). International entrepreneurs who understand and develop strategies guided by Porter's FFM and Kim and Mauborgne's blue and red ocean strategies will have a competitive advantage in the global marketplace.

Table 2

Number of References per Participant/Resource for Theme 1

Participant/resource	Number of references
Participant 1	6
Participant 2	4
Participant 3	4
Participant 4	7
Resource 1	1
Resource 3	1
Resource 4	9
Resource 7	1
Resource 9	3

The first theme of this multiple case study was to discover and address some of the problems in the global market. In the worldwide market, import-export entrepreneurs must address transportation, storage, preservation of agricultural products, and competition with experienced traders. They must also navigate complex government regulations, pay taxes, and deal with corrupt officials when doing business in complex global markets. Table 2 reflects the total number of participant references and resources

related to Theme 1 (Table 2). The documents referred to by P1 and P3 relate to the efficient importation and exportation of goods to and from Nigeria. These documents are on government websites or the internet. The use of these documents is not elaborate because the process is tainted with corrupt practices. Although the government has spent large sums of money to acquire the necessary equipment to facilitate efficiency, the technology often lies in disarray. The situation at the border between Nigeria and Cameroon is more challenging as entrepreneurs prefer to negotiate with government officials to evade the use of official documents for personal advantage.

P2 stated, “When I arrive at the border, I deal with the agents. If you emphasize getting official documents, the officials on both sides of the border will frustrate every effort.” Obtaining export documents in Canada is not a problem. P4 stated,

Once I am ready to export, I complete the required documents and mail them to the appropriate government agencies. Documents of my containers go through the various offices without delay. Only in Cameroon were my containers delayed at the port sometimes for weeks or months and released after private negotiations.

Sometimes, the government officials don’t even look at the documents.

Linking Theme 1 to the Literature

In the literature review, P1, P3, and P4 identified problems created by corrupt government officials at the borders. P4 elucidated numerous problems entrepreneurs encounter in import/export business as follows:

When starting my business, I faced the issue of raising capital to start the business. But then, a couple of months down the road, I realized that money was not the only issue that I had to grapple with. I equally had difficulties obtaining information from those already in the business and had many experiences. I needed to know what goods would be profitable and where to buy them. I am equally required to see these commodities' costs and selling prices. I faced the issue of corrupt customs officers at the destination countries who charged vast sums of money to clear my goods. Some customs officials made charges arbitrarily. Another major hurdle that I found pretty daunting to the commencement of my business was the fact that exporters doing business in my niche market (used household goods and cars) abroad, especially in West and Central Africa, often experience the following setbacks: delivery delays, problems with paperwork, missing of goods en route, and merchandises not being handled appropriately.

P1 identified export losses and lack of training as critical problems in complex markets, stating, “Many Nigerian non-oil product exporters lost money exporting agricultural commodities and solid minerals to foreign countries. Do you know why? They lack training in export operations, management, documentation, and the best payment methods in export trade.” P2 further revealed, “There were problems with transporting and preserving large quantities of agricultural products. For example, I had issues transporting and storing large amounts of raw ginger from Kaduna to the Abuja axis.” P1

continued, “Doing business in Nigeria is very complex. The laws are there, but sometimes there are negotiations to bend the rules to meet some unintended actions to grow the business.”

P1 also commented on the problems experienced with customs officials, stating, “Sometimes customs officials charged unexplained customs duty and taxes, and most money had no official receipts. Occasionally, goods are impounded for no reason and only released after private negotiations. Transportation was also challenging.” These complaints were consistent with the National Bureau of Statistics report—NBS – Resource 1), which revealed, “Corruption and inefficiency in customs operations remain significant challenges. The Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), a revenue-generating agency of government, contributes about 5 billion naira (\$12.1 million) to the government of Nigerian (GON) coffers on an annual basis.” Resource 3 (see Table 2) also referenced corruption: “Corruption and inefficiency in customs operations remain significant challenges.” P2’s account focused on challenges with customs clearance, stating:

There were also problems with customs officials at the Nigerian border with Cameroon when I started importing from Nigeria. Custom officials charged arbitrary customs duties at the boundaries, and sometimes, the money is not accounted for as no official receipts are issued. In some cases, goods are impounded and only released when cash changes hands. Another problematic issue was carrying francs CFA and exchanging it with the Nigerian currency at

the border with fluctuating exchange rates, which was dangerous. Transportation was also tricky.

P4 recommended a solution: “To resolve the issue of the corrupt customs officers, I enlisted the services of experienced clearing agents. I still had to facilitate action by offering money to carry out the transactions.” P2 also revealed her experience with the import business:

I started the import business with a bank loan and flew to Dubai and bought woolen blankets and the containers took 8 months to arrive in Cameroon. I could not even start to pay the loan when payment was due. I developed high blood pressure, and I almost lost my house. That was the first blunder.

P2 also identified poor infrastructure tribalism as among the other problems they experienced:

Look at the impassable roads full of potholes and crumbling bridges. Empty hospital wards, no beds, empty pharmacies, no medicines, and civil servants have not received salaries for so many months. Tribalism is a problem in our society. In short, nothing is working. Even the COVID-19 tests given by the international community to test people freely are selling for amounts that people cannot afford, and people are dying. It is a regrettable situation!

Transportation plays an essential role in the transfer of goods and services in any economy, regardless of its industrial capacity, population size, or technological development. Regarding this point, P3 noted,

The Nigerian transport systems, right from inception, were poorly designed and could not scale up to meet greater demand. A design flaw causes traffic congestion on roads, overstressed railways, faltering airfields, and mass-transport blind spots. Transportation of goods and services from one place to another is critical to maintaining strong economic ties between regions in the same state. Ogunnusi et al. (2023) noted that Nigeria ranks low in the quality of its infrastructure, which impacts the ease of doing business. Low investments in transportation have resulted in the current infrastructural deficit.

The lack of expertise and experience was also identified as a critical problem. P3 commented, “I was competing with experienced traders who have been in business for decades selling the same kinds of products, and competing with such knowledgeable businesspeople was not easy.” On this point, P3’s recommendation for new entrepreneurs was as follows: “Before establishing in a particular location, they should study the road infrastructure, railway systems, and storage facilities that meet international standards before launching the business in a specific area.”

P4 summarized the issues, stating, “All this results from the sub-standard supply chain management services of the freight forwarding companies transporting my goods.” He continued, “I equally had to influence them with cash (he smiles) as they say in code language (grease their palms) (smiles again).”

P3 added, “The Nigerian trade deficit compounded these issues.” The National Bureau of Statistics recorded an N1.94 trillion foreign trade deficit in 2021 (Edward,

2021). P3 continued, “This implies a negative trade balance as Nigerian depends on exports of petroleum and some agricultural products to meet foreign exchange earnings.”

In summary, participants identified six problems related to competing in international markets: (a) exporters do not have guidelines, (b) failure to plan, (c) inadequate infrastructure, (d) unexplained custom duty and taxes, (e) negative trade balance, and (f) competition with experience traders (Figure 1).

Linking Theme 1 to the Conceptual Framework

Some of these problems are consistent with Porter’s FFM, the conceptual framework used in this multiple case study to support answering the overarching research question: What strategies do import-export entrepreneurs use to succeed in the global market beyond 5 years? Entrepreneurs must understand Porter’s competitive dynamics to develop strategies for maintaining a competitive edge in the complex international market. Intense rivalry among industry competitors is central to Porter’s FFM model. The external forces are (a) intimidation by new entrants in the industry, (b) the negotiating ability of suppliers, (c) the high bargaining powers of buyers, and (d) the threat of substitute products and counterfeiting (Soucie & Peštek, 2022; Yi et al., 2022). If exporters do not have guidelines, fail to plan, and cannot compete with experienced traders, they may not succeed in the global market, which has implications for the country’s trade balance.

P3 recommended, “For new entrepreneurs to succeed in any location, they must first study the road infrastructure, railway systems, and storage facilities that meet

international standards before launching the business in that area.” Ejechi (2022) explained that the Nigerian economy still depended mainly on exports of petroleum and some agricultural products to generate foreign exchange earnings, resulting in a trade deficit of N1.94 trillion.

Qing et al. (2022) noted that the global ecosystem has changed tremendously, and to succeed in the global landscape, entrepreneurs struggle to adapt to such a challenging situation to consolidate business sustainability (Sugiono et al., 2024). Consequently, intense rivalry will force some business owners out of the competition. Porter’s FFM involves rivalry among enduring competitors, intimidation by new entrants in the industry, the hostile ability of suppliers, the aggressive bargaining power of buyers in the market, and the threat of duplication and counterfeiting (Porter, 1980; Shreekumar et al., 2022). In addition, Shreekumar et al. (2022) posited that blockchain technology could enhance business processes by identifying fake products and that business owners could use the application to store and retrieve valuable information. In that regard, such entrepreneurs could effectively compete globally.

Linking Theme 1 to the Blue and Red Ocean Strategy of Kim and Mauborgne

In some cases, an entrepreneur could avoid competition. Kim and Mauborgne (2015) claimed that the BOS would make competition irrelevant because competitors are scarce compared to the ROS, where there is cutthroat competition among entrepreneurs. Consequently, some entrepreneurs will succeed, whereas others will fail. To minimize the problems, entrepreneurs who understand Porter’s competitive model have an advantage

in the global market. They must also understand Kim and Mauborgne's blue and red ocean concept, which makes competition irrelevant by avoiding intense cutthroat competitive activities.

Theme 2: Identify and Use All Available Resources to Plan for the Future

The second theme that emerged from this study is the identification and use of resources for the success of a business—Theme 2 (Table 3). Global entrepreneurs need essential resources to compete in the worldwide market. P1 and P3 provided resources which show that in Nigeria, the government has provided the following resources to facilitate importing or exporting goods: (a) equipment (scanners) to facilitate quick inspection of goods, (b) an information trade hub where export or import entrepreneurs can classify their imports/exports according to the current Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) codes, (c) Form “M” which authorizes the importation of goods completed by importers and is valid for 180 days, (d) the single window portal which enables importers or exporters to access current regulations and submit documents electronically, track transactions, and make payments online, and (e) the Nigeria Custom Service (NCS) also make available a Pre-Arrival Assessment Report (PAAR) which allows an importer which authorizes an importer to forward documents electronically for payment estimation and clearance before the goods arrive. P2 stated that when she gets to the Cameroon and Nigerian border, the officials will make the documents after negating the amount. P4 noted that in Canada, an entrepreneur must present the following documents: (a) Cargo Control or Manifest, (b) Commercial Invoice, (c) Custom Invoice, and (d) Bill of Lading.

Despite these guidelines, traders in Nigeria and Cameroon still circumvent these documents and make deals to their advantage. The government must identify and put resources in place to curb corruption and enable entrepreneurs to compete in the global market. Donnellan and Rutledge (2019) stated that a business owner needs to nurture competitive dominance by identifying the combined resources required to have an advantage in the global market. Such an advantage answers the research question: What strategies do entrepreneurs in import-export businesses use to succeed in the worldwide market beyond 5 years?

Linking Theme 2 to the Literature

P2 revealed that successful entrepreneurs use online resources, join social organizations, have good relations with employees and customers, have plans, and develop strategies to succeed. Others use online resources to access government guidelines that require certification. Table 4 contains the number of references from each participant or resource.

Table 3*Number of References/Resources per Participant for Theme 2*

Participant/resource	Number of references
Participant 1	16
Participant 2	14
Participant 3	9
Participant 4	9
Resource 1	1
Resource 2	6
Resource 3	3
Resource 4	1
Resource 5	4
Resource 6	1
Resource 7	5
Resource 8	4
Resource 9	4

Linking Theme 2 to the Conceptual Framework

All four participants discussed elements related to online resources and technology. P4 noted:

I did a lot of market prospection and research to fully understand the bargaining power of sellers here in Canada and buyers in Cameroon. I even hired some people abroad to visit some businessmen to check the selling prices of items in the market. I also used online resources to check prices before engaging with sellers or buyers. I avoided products with many buyers and concentrated on products where there were many sellers. When there are many sellers, supplier power is low, and buyer power to negotiate is equally intense when there are many buyers. I observe where supplier power is weak and go for the products.

The action of P4 correlates with Porter's FFM, which includes the powers of suppliers and buyers.

Furthermore, entrepreneurs need information to operate in a local or foreign market. The Nigerian customs controller stated, "The Nigeria Trade Hub serves as an information portal for traders. Users can classify their imports and exports based on applicable Harmonized Tariff Schedule codes, estimate freight charges and applicable duty, and find information on clearing processes (Resource 2)."

Regarding the information available to entrepreneurs in the import-export business, Walden (2017) stated:

The Nigerian Ports Authority has taken steps to embrace information communication technologies (ICT) for internal activities. It now focuses on exploring the best options for a single-window environment that would meet the needs of the ports and all stakeholders therein. Also, the authority has considered establishing a port community system to fill a gap before a full rollout of the National Single Window System. (p. 12)

Abdulkadir et al. (2021) quoted a United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business document (UN/CEFACT 3a), which stated, "A single window is a kind of facility that allows parties concerned in trade and transport to lodge standardized information. Documents with a single-entry point fulfill all import, export, and transit-related regulatory requirements" (p. 112).

The Single Window Portal is a channel through which traders access customs regulations online, submit customs documents, track transaction status online, and submit electronic payments (Abdulkadir et al., 2021). Walden (2017) stated,

The Nigerian Ports Authority has embraced information communication technologies (ICT) for internal activities and now focuses on exploring the best options for a single-window environment. The authority has considered establishing a Port Community System to fill the gap before a full rollout of the National Single Window System. (p. 5) for internal activities that focus on exploring the best options to meet the needs of the ports and all stakeholders.

The International Trade Administration noted that the Nigeria Ports Authority (ITA, 2023) is developing a Single Window Platform, and the objective is to coordinate all port-related and cargo clearance activities for a seamless and paperless operation (ITA, 2023). Nwokedi et al. (2021) noted that the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) uses a Pre-Arrival Assessment Report (PAAR) system, which allows importers to submit their important documents online for assessment and clearance before the arrival of the cargo. PAAR replaced the Risk Assessment Report System to facilitate trade and revenue collection (ITA, 2021). The NCS is also working with the World Customs Organization to grant authorized economic operator status to importers and clearing agents who have maintained satisfactory trade compliance (ITA, 2021). In addition, the NCS supports a fast-track window through which importers may forward their cargo to their warehouses, where customs procedures such as examination and payments occur (ITA, 2021).

Referring to the Nigerian import-export business, P3 stated,

The Fast Track allows the importer to bypass tedious port inspection processes. It reduces port storage and costs for failing to discharge or load ships within a pre-determined and agreed period. Importers believe the Fast Track schemes have consistently exhibited integrity in their documentation and dealings with NCS as technology enhances business activities locally and globally. With information technology, I can easily communicate with customers and suppliers or transmit funds to pay for goods or receive customer payments.

Similarly, Participant 2 noted the following about import/export business,

A friend of mine advised me to join the association of Mankon importers and exporters. Members of the group do import or export business with business people in many countries. Members make equal monthly contributions called "Njangi" to lend to distressed members at a low-interest rate. A recipient of the assistance pays low interest for the amount borrowed compared to bank loans. I was one of the beneficiaries of this kind of business finance. A group member in good financial standing secures the loan. In my case, I pleaded with members to give me first since no bank would lend me money. The friend who brought me to the group guaranteed that I would receive a loan of 10 million francs CFA and used half of the funds to export tomatoes to Nigeria and imported goods from Nigeria to Cameroon.

P2 continued, “Another safe strategy is to partner with someone in the import/export business for an extended period.” P3 added, “New entrepreneurs should have a mentor or collaborate with entrepreneurs who have been in the import/export business for many years.” P4 also recommended finding temporary security guards:

At the start of the business, I had security problems. I could not control the crowd. Some goods disappeared because I could not control the masses. I learned a lesson, and during subsequent trips, I recruited close friends, some family members, and temporary employees supervised by a police officer to mitigate the loss. Since then, my loss has been minimal compared to the first trip. This strategy paid off in terms of progress.

P1 had several suggestions for new entrepreneurs:

Being honest in business transactions and establishing clear communication channels with suppliers and customers helps. I make them understand that they are part of the business and that its success depends on truth, hard work, and collaboration. I give the workers sound education on the company goals, letting them understand their strengths and weaknesses. I encourage teamwork and only delegate powers to employees capable of handling assigned tasks. For any entrepreneur to start an export or import business, the potential trader should first study other businesses in the global market, possibly visiting countries worldwide. Another recommendation is to draw up a plan to start small, and the trader can operate on a large scale when fully established.

Regarding effective market strategies, P3 added:

No trader can survive without customers, and that was my focus to establish and maintain a robust customer base. I sent employees who understood the market with flyers and gifts to campaign for customers. The strategy worked well because some customers who received gifts maintained the relationship. As explained earlier, another strategy that boosted the customer base was sales at lower prices than competitors to gain a competitive advantage. At a low cost, I sold goods quicker than some of my competitors. Furthermore, I operate the business within the framework of the law. For example, I use (the SONCAP) Standards Organization of Nigeria Conformity Assessment Program, a government control certification, to prove the authenticity and safety of import or export products to and from Nigeria.

Selling at a low cost aligns with one of the concepts of Porter's FFM, which is the conceptual framework of this multiple-case study. P2 also noted:

People know me. I import what customers order and pay in advance. The strategy contributes more to my success because most customers pay in advance, so few people owe me. I have a network of people who have succeeded in international business. Also, I have a policy of cash and carry. I do not give much credit. Every two weeks, I receive goods that I paid for in advance from trusted suppliers in Nigeria through private exchanges. This method contributes most to the success of my business.

Participant 2 continued:

I set clear communication channels between my suppliers, customers, and employees to achieve the company's goals. I train and encourage employees to work as a team, motivating them with gifts for hard work. I delegate powers to trusted employees who are accountable. These qualities helped me succeed in international trade for more than 5 years. I take time to study the market both in Nigeria and Cameroon. I have reliable employees to whom I delegate powers but monitor their behaviors.

For new entrants, P2 warned:

When there is a threat of new entrants, I plan to reduce prices, differentiate my products, or look for substitutes that others do not have. Another strategy is to create a brand name for my products and order directly from the manufacturer. The brand name will differentiate my products from those of my competitors. In effect, that will help me gain a competitive advantage.

P3 added, "The strategic problem I faced in the export and import business was a committed workforce handling assigned tasks. No matter the controls put in place, some workers will not be devoted to performing as expected." P3 addressed the problem, stating, "I established a vigorous training program. In the end, I encouraged good workers with incentives to stay and work hard." P3 continued:

The global market is vast, and the long-term plan is to continually search for new suppliers and customers. In effect, new entrants will not threaten my business in

the global market. The global market is vast, and there are opportunities worldwide, particularly in Africa. If I faced challenges in one market, I would move to another country with less competitive activities.

This assertion aligns with Kim and Mauborgne's (2015) red and blue ocean strategies in the literature review. P3 continued:

Only time will tell. I recommend that new entrepreneurs first study to understand the negative and positive aspects of the business. Before establishing a particular location, they should check the road infrastructure, railway systems, and storage facilities that meet international standards before launching the company in a specific area. They should study the documents involved in global business operations. For example, new entrepreneurs should understand the following: CIF, FOB, FAS, etc. Another suggestion is to have a mentor or collaborate with entrepreneurs who have been in the import/export business for many years.

P4 noted, "Communication with the shipping and freight forwarding company staff handling my goods to analyze the origin of these issues and resolve them is essential." To succeed in the import-export business, he recommended as follows:

Listening to customers and noting what they need is a good strategy because I buy and supply what they want. I execute every transaction with transparency and integrity. I do not set too many goals but specialize in a few achievable. Time is money, so I keep time for appointments, as said, "punctuality with an open-door policy is the soul of business." Since the world is evolving, particularly in the

global market, I am adaptable to change. Instead of paying attention to problems, I focus on solving potential problems that produce results with due diligence and excellent communication skills. A good leader has a vision and the ability to solve problems when there is a crisis. These techniques have helped me succeed in the global market over the past years.

Successful entrepreneurs use various resources to help streamline their global businesses, including online resources and business social organization memberships. Participants also insisted on having a plan and maintaining good relations with employees and customers. Leaders needed to access government guidelines and required certifications. In the FFM conceptual framework of this study, Porter pointed out that adopting a unique strategy is fundamental to an entrepreneur's existence in an industry. This approach involves doing things differently or providing nonsubstitutable products, services, technology, or activities that a competitor cannot easily imitate, as confirmed by (Al-Gasawneh et al., 2022). As noted in the literature review, an entrepreneur can develop a strategic position in two methodologies: (a) by differentiating the product or service to stimulate demand and encourage brand loyalty (Kúnin & Žigić, 2023; Mwabu & Munyoki, 2022) and (b) by cost leadership (Alramdhan, 2022). The process involves reducing the costs of producing goods and services or segmenting markets for a competitive advantage.

Porter (1985) established that competitive advantage develops when an entrepreneur acquires or develops attributes that allow business owners to outperform

competitors. Wanjogo and Muathe (2022) added that business owners should analyze their competitiveness and, at the same time, consider what their contenders are doing. The tactics include developing unique strategies for evaluating their performances in the market. P2 added:

When there is a threat of new entrants, I plan to reduce prices, differentiate my products, or look for substitutes that others do not have. Another strategy is to create a brand name for my products and order directly from the manufacturer.

The brand name will differentiate my products from those of my competitors. In effect, that will help me gain a competitive advantage.

This strategy aligns with the FFM conceptual framework of this study. Porter (1985) noted that low cost and differentiation are two basic strategic behaviors entrepreneurs use to gain a competitive advantage.

Theme 3: Identify and Use a Variety of Methods to Promote the Business

Business promotion is an essential tenet entrepreneurs use to have a competitive advantage. It is a significant strategy manager of companies of all sizes use to promote products, services, and sales, attract new customers, and improve customer loyalty (Bondarenko & Vyshnivska, 2023).

Linking Theme 3 to the Literature

Business promotion is a significant strategy for managing small- and medium-sized businesses and large corporations to promote products and services to increase sales, attract new customers, and improve customer loyalty (Bondarenko & Vyshnivska,

2023). Participants revealed they used various methods to promote their businesses. P2 remarked, “Leaders join both business and social organizations to help understand the local market and the global arena.” P2 continued, “Leaders should use word-of-mouth, personal contact, social interactions, and social media to promote their business and inform customers and suppliers about their products.” Theme 3 (Table 4) references documents and resources related to promotional and marketing activities participants use to communicate with suppliers and customers through various channels. The primary activities include using information technologies and social media to market products to consumers and communicate with suppliers. These include direct marketing, mobile phones, emails, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, radio, television, billboards and posters, distributors, referrals, and word-of-mouth advertising.

Table 4

Number of References/Resources per Participant for Theme 3

Participant	Number of references
Participant 1	6
Participant 2	7
Participant 3	2
Participant 4	0

Regarding the methods for promoting their business, P1 stated that he used social media and face-to-face contact. He concluded, “These advertisement forms help inform my suppliers and customers. Occasionally, employees distribute informative flyers in public places and contact customers face-to-face.”

Similarly, P1 emphasized, “Locally, word-of-mouth and personal contact are powerful methods to inform customers and suppliers of agricultural products. It was a good method to inform customers before the Covid-19 pandemic reduced the number of individual contacts.” P3 agreed, saying, “Advertising the products on the radio or in newspapers is good. Personal contact contributed the most to my success as an importer/exporter.” P2 noted, “I am a member of many social groups, and my popularity as an importer contributes to the growth of the business, and I have a network of people who have succeeded in international business.”

To adopt a successful promotional strategy, P2 recommended,

Any businessman or woman needs dedication and knowledge, must be social and have leadership qualities to do import and export. I am a social person. I visit social groups and make donations to organizers at annual events. I set clear communication channels between my suppliers, customers, and employees to achieve the company's goals. I train and encourage employees to work as a team, motivating them with gifts for hard work. I delegate powers to trusted employees who are accountable. These qualities helped me succeed in import and export trade for over 5 years.

P4 emphasized the need for personal contact with customers, saying, “I sometimes get on the plane myself to meet the customers because it is important to meet people face-to-face, build business relationships, and assess the progress of the business.” P3

summarized this theme: "I have a global mindset and experience directed towards achieving success in the worldwide market."

To succeed in marketing quality products in the global market, entrepreneurs must first identify quality products to import or export and the distribution channels they will use to reach the consumers. Inappropriate selection leads to additional costs for the entrepreneur, weakening performance and contributing to resource wastage (Islam et al., 2021). Islam et al. added that inappropriate delivery of unsafe and low-quality food not only triggers costly food crises and foodborne diseases but also frustrates consumer confidence and the performance of food chain entrepreneurs. Therefore, traceability and identification are the know-how to follow the movement of products through an identified stage(s) of the supply chain and trigger the continuous collection of information about the product's traceable resource unit (TRU; Islam et al., 2021).

Selling products or services in the global market depends on the entrepreneur's ability to use various methods to promote the business locally and in the international marketplace. Information technologies have revolutionized how business owners promote their businesses in local and global markets.

Linking Theme 3 to the Conceptual Framework

Theme 4: Identify and Use All Resources to Finance the Business

Finance is essential as the foundation of every business, and no local or international entrepreneur can survive without some form of financial support. Some sources of finance that entrepreneurs can use to finance their operations in the global

market include personal savings (Rusu et al., 2022), home equity loans (Kerr et al., 2022), and loans from financial companies, which are more accessible to entrepreneurs, especially export-focused entrepreneurs (Nariman & Heshmati, 2022). In addition, entrepreneurs can use informal finance from family members or friends (Yahya & Ogunyemi, 2024) and government solutions in the form of subsidies, which have been used to empower entrepreneurs of diverse financial capabilities in the era of COVID-19 (Gródek-Szostak et al., 2022). Without these resources, many entrepreneurs have closed their businesses, and some continue to struggle in the global market, especially during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Oketch, 2022).

Linking Theme 4 to the Literature

Participants revealed that leaders must use personal savings, bank loans, private acquaintances, and related organizations to provide finances to start a global business. Table 5 illustrates the number of references per participant for Theme 4. The references reflect the various documents/sources P1 uses to finance his business entities. Finance institutions and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) support import and export entrepreneurs significantly. Other support institutions include the Nigerian Industry Bank, the Import and Export Bank, the Agricultural Bank, the Industry Bank, commercial banks, and the Nigerian small and medium-sized business development agency. A business owner is required to register the business to qualify for help. Other forms of business finance come from personal savings, family, social organizations, and letters of credit.

Table 5*Number of References/Resources per Participant for Theme 4*

Participant	Number of references
Participant 1	6
Participant 2	0
Participant 3	0
Participant 4	0

P1 began by stating, “I started the import and export business with money I saved over the past years,” and then continued, “Since then, the bank has provided loans whenever I need help by issuing letters of credit. Another strategy was establishing a good relationship with customers. P1 insisted, “Since I can get financial support from the bank managers, I do not think it is necessary to have shareholders or a partnership in the future.” P3 added, “I started with personal savings, although saving to fund a business is time-consuming.” P4 described how he started:

I worked full-time while doing the import and export part-time. I saved most of the income I got from my part-time job. When I needed more money for my business, I took a loan from my bank to finance the business. Part of my capital also came from my spouse. As the company continued to expand, I never withdrew money for personal use; instead, I plowed back the profits into the business. Also, I use credit cards to buy goods. After each sale, I paid for all the credit cards to maintain a good credit score. As I said before, financial support also came from my spouse.

While operating their businesses, participants experienced the problem of corruption. P4 explained how he solved the problem, “To resolve the issue of the corrupt customs officers, I enlisted the services of experienced clearing agents. I still had to facilitate action by offering money to carry out the transactions.” On this point, P3 revealed how he competed in the market:

I had to reduce the prices of my goods to differentiate my products from competitors. Another problem was finance, and the problem was solved when I got a loan from the bank. The bank also issued letters of credit to finance my international transactions.

Similarly, P2 revealed her experience with business financing:

I started the import business with a bank loan and flew to Dubai and bought woolen blankets, and the containers took 8 months to arrive in Cameroon. I could not even start to pay the loan when payment was due. I developed high blood pressure, and I almost lost my house. That was the first blunder.

P2 explained how she solved the problem:

A friend of mine advised me to join the association of Mankon importers and exporters. Members of the group do import or export business with businesspeople in many countries. Members make equal monthly contributions called "Njangi" to lend to distressed members at a low-interest rate. A recipient of the assistance pays low interest for the amount borrowed compared to bank loans. Following her advice, I joined the group and applied for a loan. The friend who

brought me to the group guaranteed and I received 10 million francs CFA and used half of the funds to export tomatoes to Nigeria and import goods from Nigeria to Cameroon. Besides the banks, some private people do the exchanges as a business. The unofficial financial deals work as follows: You pay them the money in Cameroon, then the persons instruct their agent in Nigeria to pay your supplier in Nigerian currency. Finally, a loader takes the documents to your supplier in Nigeria, picks up the goods, and brings them to you in Cameroon. Such arrangements cut down the cost of transportation and unnecessary expenses to government officials at the borders. I am also a member of many social groups and can easily borrow money from the groups with low interest to finance my business. Also, most members of the groups are my financiers who order goods from Nigeria through me. The financiers pay for such transactions in advance, and I use the money to place orders from Nigeria. They also pay for the extra cost incurred in importing goods from Nigeria if there are additional expenses.

P2 added:

I have a policy of cash and carry. I do not give much credit. Every 2 weeks, I receive goods that I paid for in advance from trusted suppliers in Nigeria through private exchanges. The method contributes most to the success of my business.

Participants revealed that exporters or importers must use personal savings, bank loans, private acquaintances, and related organizations to finance their global expansion initiatives. They also acknowledged that entrepreneurs must deal with competition

problems, including corruption, to stay in business. Some of these challenges aligned with the conceptual framework.

Linking Theme 4 to the Conceptual Framework

As stated in the conceptual framework, some of the challenges entrepreneurs face are (a) uncontrollable competition by business owners in the industry, (b) the power of suppliers and buyers, (c) the threat of new entrants in the same market, and (d) substitute products and counterfeiting (Soucie & Peštek, 2022; Yi et al., 2022). Business owners operating under Porter's FFM guidelines could develop strategies to enhance competitive activities worldwide. The approach by P4 validates this assertion. He stated:

I avoided products with many buyers and concentrated on products where there were many sellers. When there are many sellers, supplier power to negotiate is low, and buyer power to negotiate is equally low when there are many buyers. I observe where supplier power is weak and go for the products.

Linking Theme 4 to Kim and Mauborgne's Blue/Red Ocean Concept

Regarding the strategies for competing globally, P3 added:

The global market is vast, and the long-term plan is to continually search for new suppliers and new customers. In effect, new entrants will not threaten my business in the global market. The global market is vast, and there are opportunities worldwide, particularly in Africa. If I faced challenges in one market, I would move to another country with less competitive activities.

This strategy coincides with Kim and Mauborgne's (2015) blue and red ocean (BOS) strategies in the literature review. Kim and Mauborgne claimed that the BOS makes competition irrelevant after studying managers' operations in 150 companies in 30 industries. They discovered that only 14% created new markets and achieved significantly higher profits. Kim and Mauborgne described the potential strategy for business success as creating new demand in uncontested markets rather than competing in existing red ocean markets. A red ocean represents markets or industries where there is fierce competition.

Applications to Professional Practice

The following research question guided this study: What strategies do import-export entrepreneurs use to succeed in the global market beyond 5 years? Data analysis resulted in four overarching themes: (a) identify and address a variety of problems related to complex global markets, (b) identify and use all available resources, (c) identify and use a variety of methods to promote the business, and (d) identify and use all resources to finance the business. These results suggest that leaders must address transportation, storage, preservation of agricultural products, competition with experienced traders, navigating complex government regulations and tax procedures, and grappling with corrupt officials when doing business in the complex global market. Participants revealed that successful entrepreneurs use online resources, join social organizations, have good relations with employees and customers, and have a plan. Leaders used online resources to access government guidelines and required certifications. Leaders must join business

and social organizations to help understand the local and global markets. Entrepreneurs in the import-export sector should use word-of-mouth, personal contact, social interactions, and social media potent methods for promoting business and informing customers and suppliers about their products. Participants revealed that leaders must use personal savings, bank loans, private acquaintances, and related organizations to finance their expansion to new markets.

Implications for Social Change

The significance of this multiple case study for social change is the potential for entrepreneurs to develop strategies that will enable business owners in the import and export sector to have a competitive advantage in the global market. The success of importers and exporters may improve national, state, and local economies by creating jobs. Job creation improves living conditions for individuals in developed, developing, and underdeveloped economies. Contributing to economic growth will increase tax revenues generated for upgrading the social and economic infrastructure. New health facilities will be built and equipped. Improved roads, airports, seaports, railways, and bridges will enhance the living standards of the world's population. The conditions of people in rural areas will improve due to the establishment of new industries and cultural and educational institutions, preventing the migration of rural populations to the cities.

Recommendations for Action

Nyu et al. (2022) stated that competition and survival in competitive markets could be challenging due to the variability in supply and demand pressures and the

diversity of goods and services provided in the global market. In this multiple case study, I sought to answer the following research question: What strategies do import-export entrepreneurs use to succeed in the global market beyond 5 years? The recommendations from this multiple case study may guide entrepreneurs planning to enter or struggling to compete in the global market. I recommend that entrepreneurs in the import/export business adopt the four themes of this study to gain a competitive edge in the global market. These are (a) identify and address problems related to the complex global market, (b) identify and use all available resources that will make them succeed, (c) identify and use methods that will promote the business, and (d) identify and use all resources to finance the business.

Present and future entrepreneurs in import-export business should consider the recommendations of these multiple case studies, Porter's (1979) FFM and Kim and Mauborgne's (2015) blue and red ocean strategies as they compete in the global market. Entrepreneurs should also strengthen their relationships with customers, suppliers, and employees when managing business activities. Such connections will benefit all stakeholders in the worldwide market.

I plan to disseminate the findings to the four volunteers who participated in this study, hoping they will share the information with their customers, suppliers, and staff. I will also transfer this report to the Chambers of Commerce in Lagos, Nigeria, Cameroon, Canada, and the American Small Business Administration. Academic community members will benefit equally from this research's findings, which will be published in

international peer-reviewed journals and professional publications. Business consultants, brokers, and clearing agents involved in import and export can access the report from these sources. I will also provide copies to the AfCFTA and African Union secretariats so that African entrepreneurs engaged in the import-export business in the global market could benefit.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this research study, I used multiple case studies to explore strategies entrepreneurs in the import-export sector use to succeed in the global market for 5 years. I limited the study participants to four experienced import and export entrepreneurs who successfully implemented competitive strategies worldwide. Since this study concentrates on four individual import and export entrepreneurs, I recommend that future researchers include multinational corporations and explore strategies managers of these business entities use to compete in the global market to deliver goods and services.

Failing to deliver goods as scheduled creates unhappy customers and unnecessary financial losses. Minondo (2021) noted that the reduction in global economic activity due to the lockdown of economic activities by governments has led to a vast decrease in the worldwide flow of goods and services. The World Trade Organization reported a 14.3% decline in global trade volume in the second quarter of 2020 compared with the first quarter of that same year, posing a risk to the success of international or local entrepreneurs (Minondo, 2021). Future researchers could investigate and develop the best

methodologies to prepare for a similar pandemic that could interrupt world economic activities.

Arreyndip (2021) and Obeng (2020) professed that the AfCFTA constitutes the biggest separate market in the world, including 55 countries, 1.3 billion persons, and an economic zone with a GDP valued at \$3.4 trillion. It is a blue ocean market that import and export entrepreneurs in other economies could explore to their advantage. Also, African export entrepreneurs could benefit in such a large market. Business owners worldwide need Porter's FFM to develop competitive strategies in AfCFTA. Income from such activities could elevate 30 million inhabitants out of poverty, and realizing its full potential will depend on implementing significant policy reforms and trade facilitation measures (Maliszewska et al., 2020). Abrego et al. (2020) stated that implementing the AfCFTA could minimize uncertainties in trading activities, which may collectively enhance direct foreign investment, potentially boosting economic activities as countries emerge from the pandemic. Odusote and Aduak (2022) cautioned that the aspirations of the AfCFTA might not materialize if leaders refuse to fight corruption in the continent and among member states. With a successful implementation of AfCFTA, the production of goods and services will increase, transportation services will improve, and the construction of educational and health institutions will accelerate. Entrepreneurs in the import and export sectors could benefit equally from such activities, leading to positive social change.

Reflections

The start of the doctoral program was full of excitement, and I did not know that it was quite a rigorous program full of many challenges. Roos et al. (2021) once said doctoral students experience various challenges on their journey to a degree, and high dropout rates indicate that these challenges have become fundamental for many students. Cutri and Lau (2023) emphasized that obtaining a doctoral degree is challenging but worthwhile. It requires postgraduate students to invest years of physical, academic, and emotional energy in contributing to educational advances highlighted in recent years.

My excitement was tainted with health problems. I had three related heart surgeries and one on my stomach. With the pain and added pressure from the criticisms of the DBA program and some family members, I considered dropping out after I lost my mother in January 2022 and my spouse in June 2022. However, with determination and encouragement from fellow DBA students and professors, I continued to write the dissertation's final paragraphs.

The rigorous nature of the program has prepared me to bring social and economic change when I return to my country. The knowledge I gained while researching strategies entrepreneurs need to compete in the global market will help me function well as a consultant in the import-export sector in the AfCFTA. Because most African farmers are women, I will establish structures, such as cooperatives and common initiative groups, to help the youths preserve and export agricultural products to other African countries and economies. These actions may positively affect this study's Participants 1, 2, and 3.

Another effort to encourage participation in the global market is to create an educational institution where students can learn import and export procedures. Byaro et al. (2023), Essien (2022), and Nkoa et al. (2023) stated that despite Africa having abundant natural resources, this endowment has not translated into the expected wealth creation and better living conditions for the people. Therefore, one of the reasons for conducting this study is to create awareness of this phenomenon to trigger social and economic change for the people of the subcontinent.

I look forward to the day I will join the line of newly graduated doctors at commencement. It will be a happy moment and a dream come true.

Conclusion

The global market is vast and has intense competitors. Therefore, this qualitative multiple case study investigated the strategies entrepreneurs in import-export need to survive and compete worldwide. I used Porter's (1979) FFM model as the conceptual framework for this study to explore competitive strategies entrepreneurs use to engage and succeed in the worldwide market. Conversely, Kim and Mauborgne (2015) introduced the blue and red ocean strategies, which they claimed would make competition irrelevant. Whatever the case, the debate is still ongoing. Many business managers fail in the import-export business because they lack the knowledge of the worldwide market that importing and exporting requires. Another reason for failure is global disruptions such as natural disasters, epidemics, and financial crises that affect the flow of economic processes and destabilize economic equilibrium (Oketch, 2022). The

findings could probably be helpful to business owners in developing strategies to successfully compete in the global market in the face of such challenges.

I used open-ended interview questions to collect data from four participants. In the analysis, I developed the following four themes: (a) the variety of problems related to complex global markets, (b) the use of available resources, (c) the use of methods to promote the business, and (d) the use of resources to finance the business. Each theme is relevant to developing strategies to help entrepreneurs compete globally. I used Porter's FFM as the conceptual framework of this doctoral study.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Welcome session:

Introduction: First, I will introduce myself and my dissertation topic and explain the purpose of the meeting. Furthermore, I will present the consent form for approval.

Also, the participant could withdraw without repercussions and risks associated with the study. I will assure the interviewee that any information obtained is coded and kept confidential; after five years, I will destroy the responses and other research materials.

Finally, I will watch the body language and listen to the interviewee.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What strategic problems did you face when starting the business, and what strategies did you use to address the issues?
2. What methods contributed to the growth of your business?
3. What strategies contributed the most to your success as an entrepreneur?
4. What leadership techniques increased your ability to succeed in the global markets beyond 5 years?
5. What strategies did you use to finance the business?
6. Which method worked best to succeed in the import/export business?
7. What strategies did you implement to check the bargaining power of buyers and sellers?
8. What is your long-term plan to check the threat of new entrants in the import/export market to gain a competitive advantage?
9. Which other strategies did you recommend for entrepreneurs in the import-export business?

Finally, I will ask the participant whether I have left out any information or whether the informant has anything to add before we end the investigation. I will finish the meeting in the absence of any other credible information.

Follow-up Member Checking Interview

Introduction: I will introduce myself again before I welcome the participant. Next, I will state the purpose of the follow-up meeting and remind the participant that

participation is voluntary. Also, the participant could withdraw without repercussions and risks associated with the study. I will assure the interviewee that any information obtained is coded and kept confidential; after 5 years, I will destroy the responses and other research materials. Finally, I will watch the body language and listen to the interviewee's reactions. Finally, I will repeat the answers to the following questions for clarification or approval.

Appendix C: Invitational Email

Dear (Name of participant)

My name is Athanasius Awasom Longcha. I am a Walden University College of Management and Technology graduate research student. My research topic is about techniques entrepreneurs in the US use to succeed in the import-export business beyond 5 years of operation. You are one of the entrepreneurs requested to participate in sharing your experiences in this doctoral study voluntarily. The goal is to explore strategies that entrepreneurs in the US need to succeed in the global market. Your participation will be confidential, and any information or documents obtained are handled with extreme confidentiality and will not reflect your name or that of your company. The attached consent form contains more information about the study. If you understand the study well enough to participate and wish to volunteer, reply to this email with "I Consent." You may withdraw at any time without giving any reason. The interview will last for about sixty to ninety minutes.