

2016

# Strategies for Growing and Sustaining Successful Small Businesses

Patrick Modilim Modilim  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Patrick Modilim

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2016

Abstract

Strategies for Growing and Sustaining Successful Small Businesses

by

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MBA, University of Lagos, 1996

BS, University of Lagos, 1988

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2016

## Abstract

Small business manufacturing enterprises represent viable means of creating employment, stimulating economic growth, and accelerating development. Many newly formed small business enterprises do not continue beyond 5 years after formation. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies used by small business manufacturing leaders in Lagos, Nigeria to sustain their businesses, using general systems theory as the conceptual framework. The sample comprised 3 small business leaders who have sustained their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation in Lagos, Nigeria. The data collections were through semistructured, in-person interviews and the review of business feasibility and planning documents, handbills and contract documents. The results from computer-aided qualitative data analysis, methodological triangulation of the data sources, and Rowley's 4 step analysis led to the emergence of 10 major themes: minimizing debt and overhead expenses, proper record keeping, skills, and expertise are essential for small business success. Small business leader participants in the study achieved longer-term successes by engaging in research, strategic planning, and preparation before launching their business ideas. Applications of findings from this study might influence positive social change if future and current small business leaders' implementation of the strategies identified leads to the longer-term success of their business enterprises. Successful business enterprises provide continued employment for the business leaders and their employees, better living standards for the community by offering goods and services, and enhanced quality of life for the community because the government can now provide improved social amenities with increased tax revenues.

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## Dedication

To God Almighty, for the enablement and the successful completion of this study, in spite of the many challenges and disappointments on my journey, I am grateful and dedicate this work. To my wife, Azuka and my children Chidubem, Kenechukwu, Tochukwu, Dabeluchukwu, and Kamsiyochukwu who showed a lot of understanding and support throughout the duration of this study, I am thankful and also dedicate this study. To my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Modilim, for your support and encouragement at the beginning of the study, though you passed on to greater glory before the completion of the study, I also dedicate this study.

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## Section 1: Foundation of this Study

Small business enterprises are central to economic development and constitute a substantial proportion of business enterprises in Nigeria. Small business enterprises are viable means of creating employment, alleviating poverty, and developing entrepreneurship including indigenous technology at low investment costs (Adisa, Abdulraheem, & Mordi, 2014). Failures of small business enterprises in Nigeria have undermined the value added by these enterprises to the nation's economic growth and development (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013). It is, therefore, imperative to explore the strategies used by small business leaders to sustain their business enterprises to improve their value added to the nation's economic development. In this study, I explored strategies used by small business manufacturing leaders to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation.

### **Background of the Problem**

Growth and development of small business enterprises in Nigeria are fraught with many challenges. According to Atawodi and Ojeka (2012), 80% of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) go out of business before their fifth anniversary. The failures of small business enterprises within 5 years of existence portend financial losses to small business leaders (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013). Small business leaders require support if they are to contribute meaningfully to economic development.

There is a need for a positive change in the contribution of small business enterprises to the economic development of Nigeria. The Nigerian government, recognizing the potential of small business enterprises, established institutions such as

specialized banks, agencies, and departments to provide support to small business enterprises (Osotimehin, Jegede, Akinlabi, & Olajide, 2012). Despite these supportive measures of the government, the majority of small businesses in Nigeria fail within 5 years of formation (Adisa et al., 2014). These failures are possibly due to inadequate preparation of small business leaders for the challenges of sustaining their enterprises in the Nigerian business environment.

The successes or failures of small businesses may depend on strategies used by business leaders to sustain their enterprises. Small business leaders who have sustained their enterprises beyond 5 years after formation may have developed strategies for handling the challenges of sustaining their enterprises in Nigeria (Atawodi & Ojeka, 2012). Small business enterprises are units of a complicated system of elements that interact with each other and the business environment (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Success or failure of the small business enterprises may depend on the business leaders' ability to self-regulate or self-correct using feedback from the environment (von Bertalanffy, 1968). In this study, I explored the strategies that small business manufacturing leaders in Lagos, Nigeria used to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation.

### **Problem Statement**

High small business enterprise mortality in Nigeria leads to reduced contributions to the economic growth and stability of the nation (Gbandi & Amissah, 2014). Eighty percent of newly formed small business enterprises do not continue beyond 5 years after formation in Nigeria (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013; Atawodi & Ojeka, 2012). The general business problem is that inadequate preparation and business strategies cause some small

business manufacturing leaders to lose their investments and go out of business. The specific business problem is that some small business manufacturing enterprise leaders in Nigeria lack strategies to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the strategies that small business manufacturing leaders in Lagos, Nigeria used to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation. The population for this multiple case study included three small business manufacturing leaders in Lagos, Nigeria, who have sustained their businesses for more than 5 years after formation. The population was appropriate for this study because the majority of small business enterprises do not continue beyond 5 years after formation (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013; Atawodi & Ojeka, 2012). To achieve data triangulation, data collection sources for this study included company-related documents and semistructured interviews with small business owners. The possible positive social change implications for implementation of the recommendations from this research include improved financial performance and success rate of small businesses. These improvements may lead improved living standards, improved employment opportunities, reduction of social mistrust between the haves and the have-nots, reduction in crime rates, and improved welfare for individuals in the community.

### **Nature of the Study**

The research methods for rigorous studies include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Researchers use qualitative methods to explore how people cope in their real-world settings, using open-ended questions when predetermined answers do not exist (Yin, 2016). Researchers use a quantitative research method to examine or to explain the causal relationship between variables in a phenomenon of interest (Wingwon, 2012). A mixed or hybrid research approach combines both qualitative and quantitative methods (Padgett, 2012) and requires more time and resources than novice doctorate-level research (Patton, 2015). The intent for conducting this research was to explore the strategies that small business leaders in the Nigerian manufacturing industry used to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years after formation. The qualitative method was more appropriate than quantitative and mixed methods for this study because it allowed for exploration of the phenomenon and collection of in-depth data from a small number of participants with shared experiences that were unknown but potentially meaningful to others.

Qualitative research designs include case study, phenomenological, ethnographic, and narratives (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). In a case study design, researchers use open-ended questions in a semistructured interview to elicit information on an event or situation and to identify patterns (Yin, 2014). Case studies are suitable for answering how or why something happened or came about (Yin, 2014). Researchers use phenomenological designs to understand the universal nature of the participants' lived experiences (Englander, 2012), which was not a goal in this study. The narrative research

design allows subjects to provide their personal stories leading to contextualized, historical accounts (Petty et al., 2012), which was not the purpose of this study. Researchers use ethnography to identify, explain, and to establish the significance of the shared patterns of a group culture (Shover, 2012), which was not a focus of this study. The qualitative research designs other than a case study cannot sufficiently capture perspectives leading to an understanding of decisions and choices made in particular business environments. The selected research design was a case study design.

### **Research Question**

The overarching research question in this study was: What strategies do small business manufacturing enterprise leaders in Lagos use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years after formation?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategic analysis of the business environment did you conduct before your decision to start your business?
2. What were your key strategic objectives in starting your business?
3. What were your strategies to prepare yourself for the challenge of running your business?
4. What were your strategies to grow your business enterprise beyond 5 years after formation?
5. What were your strategies to continue the business enterprise beyond 5 years after formation?

6. What were your key strategic responses to changes in the business environment?
7. How has your business organizational structure evolved from formation to date?
8. What other experiences, not covered in this interview, would you like to share that might benefit future business leaders?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The concept of systems theory was introduced by von Bertalanffy (1968) as an underlying set of ideas and principles for the study of complicated situations holistically. Proponents of this theory emphasize holism over reductionism and organism over mechanism (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Systems theory is one of the most prominent theories applied to modern business management research. Because this theory involves the unpredictable business environments that business leaders operate in, systems theory was a suitable conceptual framework for this study.

Von Bertalanffy (1968) explained that a system is a representation of a situation or an assembly of elements joined onto one another in an organized whole. Von Bertalanffy defined an open system as a system that gives resources to and receives resources from its environment. The idea of general systems theory spread across many fields of inquiry, including business and industry (Flood & Carson, 1993). The Nigerian small business phenomenon can be the subject of exploration in an open context by focusing on the business enterprise as a whole and its interactions with the environment.

Leaders of business enterprises respond to both specific and general environmental influences (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Small businesses at formation involve the integration of different processes and components; new properties emerge as they interact with the environment in a state of continual evolution (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Small business enterprises encounter challenges as they interact with their environments; therefore, systems theory aligns well with this study. Successes or failures of these small business enterprises may depend on the flexibility and self-correction of their leaders as they interact with each other and their environments (von Bertalanffy, 1968). In this study, I explored the strategies that small business manufacturing enterprise leaders in Nigeria used to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following definitions of terms provide meaning to business terms as used in this study.

*Access to finance:* Access to finance depicts monetary accommodation offered by banks and other lending institutions (Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria [SMEDAN], 2015).

*Business leader or owner:* Business leader or owner, used interchangeably owns and manages his or her business (Adisa et al., 2014).

*Small business:* In Nigeria and this study, small business have an asset base (ignoring the value of land and building) greater than 5 million but less than 50 million Naira, having a workforce of more than 10 but fewer than 50 persons (SMEDAN, 2015).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

In this study, individual factors not within my control as a researcher constituted assumptions and limitations. I used other factors within my control as a researcher to define the scope and delimitations of this study. The review of these factors and the risks they posed to the findings of this study follow.

#### **Assumptions**

This study included several assumptions. Assumptions are facts considered correct but unverified (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). These assumptions may have posed risks to the trustworthiness of the findings of this study, so their disclosure was necessary. First, the qualitative methodology was assumed to be a suitable research methodology for this study. Second, there was an assumption that a multiple case study was an appropriate research design for this study. Third, there was an assumption that study participants would be knowledgeable, articulate about their experiences, and provide adequate answers to the interview questions. Fourth, study participants were assumed to be honest and objective, and furnished comprehensive, honest responses to the interview questions. The fifth assumption was that I would find three leaders of small business manufacturing enterprises willing to participate in this study. Sixth, I assumed that I had the mental ability to capture, understand, and to analyze the answers furnished by the study participants. The seventh assumption was that themes would appear from participants' responses to interview questions, and I had the mental ability to recognize the major themes. Finally, I assumed that facts gathered from each of the study participants would

furnish a clear understanding of the strategies used by small business manufacturing leaders to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation.

### **Limitations**

This study included limitations. Limitations are shortcomings, conditions, or influences that place restrictions on a research and include technical and potential weaknesses of the study (Madsen, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The primary limitation of a qualitative case study is the sample size of participants. I interviewed and collected documents from participants who possessed the knowledge to provide the insights necessary to help answer the research question. The potential participants' biases and abilities to accurately recollect events could have influenced the quality of the qualitative study. Any participant could have experienced discomfort about disclosing information about the success of his or her business enterprise or may not have precisely recalled experiences conducting business. Full disclosure serves to ameliorate the effect of bias (Anney, 2014). By providing reassurances and full disclosures that the information provided would remain confidential, I tried to limit participant bias, win each participant's confidence, and help each participant to relax and feel comfortable.

### **Delimitations**

This study included delimitations. Delimitations are choices made that define the parameters or boundaries of the investigation (Bartoska & Subrt, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Delimitations are the restrictions or limits that the researcher imposes to focus the scope of a study. Small business enterprise categories, as defined in the Nigerian policy document on micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises, applied to the

definition of the population of this study. The research population consisted of small business manufacturing leaders who sustained their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation. A further delimitation of this research was the study location. The study participants were leaders of small manufacturing businesses who worked and lived in Lagos, Nigeria.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study was significant because the results represent contributions to knowledge about business practices, and the applications of the recommendations may lead to positive social changes. In this study, I identified the strategies used by small business manufacturing leaders to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation. The findings also represent contributions to strategies for improving the success rate of small business manufacturing enterprises. Small business enterprises are vital to the enhancement of quality of life and alleviation of poverty in Nigeria. Therefore, helping small businesses thrive can lead to positive social change by improvements to the economy and employment in the area.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

An understanding of the strategies that small business manufacturing leaders in Nigeria used to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation is necessary because the majority of small business enterprises fail within 5 years of formation (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013). In this study, I explored the strategies used by small business manufacturing enterprise leaders to sustain their businesses for more than 5 years in Lagos, Nigeria. Small business leaders who adopt the recommendations based on

the findings of this study may be able to appropriately prepare to face the challenges of sustaining their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation. I have also provided small business leaders with insights that they can glean from this study on how to respond to and adapt to changes in the marketplace.

The goal of this study included providing useful strategies which small business leaders can use to sustain their businesses enterprises. In 2013, the total number of business enterprises in Nigeria was 37,067,416, and comprised of 36,994,578 micro business enterprises, 68,168 small business enterprises, and 4,670 medium business enterprises (SMEDAN, 2015). By classification, most businesses in Nigeria are micro- and small-scale enterprises (SMEDAN, 2015). Either micro-business enterprises operating in Nigeria are not scaling up to small business enterprises, or small business enterprises are forced to cut back to micro business enterprises to survive (SMEDAN, 2015). Small business leaders who adopt the knowledge from this study may be able to prepare appropriately to sustain their small businesses, leading to a reduction in the failure rate of new business enterprises.

The use of the knowledge gathered from this study may improve the likelihood of small businesses growing to medium-sized businesses. Leaders may be better prepared to anticipate market changes and respond appropriately, knowing the probable consequences of the choices they make. The value of this study for business practice includes the likelihood to assist and guide small business leaders to sustain their business enterprises. Furthermore, government leaders may glean insights leading to the

formulation of policies that will be supportive of small business enterprise growth and development.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Small business enterprise leaders pursue strategies to grow and compete, but some strategies they adopt in pursuit of growth may endanger their success beyond 5 years after formation. Business enterprise failures result in loss of income for both business leaders and their employees, lead to a reduction in the living standard of members of the community, and represent governmental tax revenue losses (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014). Successful business enterprises provide employment for the business leaders and employees, goods and services for customers, inputs for other businesses, and taxes to the government (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014).

The application of the findings from this study may positively affect the financial performance of small business enterprises. The possible positive social changes include improved living standards, provision of goods and services, and sustained employment opportunities. Other possible positive social changes include reduction of social tension between the haves and the have-nots, reduction of crime rates, and improved welfare (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014).

### **Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

In this study, I explored the strategies used by small business manufacturing enterprise leaders in Lagos, Nigeria to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation. I begin the literature review with a discussion of general systems theory and definitions of a small business and small business owner, followed by a consideration

of the definition of the business failures and small business failure factors. Then, I discuss the definitions of business success, small business success factors, and business environmental factors. I provide an analysis of the importance of small businesses to the development of the Nigerian economy and present challenges hampering the growth and survival of small businesses. The intent of the review of the literature was to gain an understanding of the topics of this research by identifying, summarizing, comparing, contrasting, and synthesizing credible, peer-reviewed, published studies.

The literature I reviewed included articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals, as well as texts, published research materials, and dissertations. Appendix C contains a table with a summary of the number of references considered for the entire study, references published between 2012 and 2016 and peer-reviewed references. The appendix also includes percentages of references published between 2012 and 2016 and peer-reviewed references for the entire study and the literature review. The percentages exceeded the required minimum of 85%.

For the literature review, I searched business and management sections of the Walden University Library. The majority of the peer-reviewed, full-text articles I reviewed was in the ABI/INFORM Complete database. Other databases used in the search included Science Direct, Emerald Management, Business Source Complete, SAGE Premier, ProQuest, SAGE, and Google Scholar. The keywords and phrases used in the searches included *general systems theory*, *small business definition and meaning*, *small business owners*, *business failures*, *challenges of business enterprise development*, *business success*, *business environment*, and *growth of small businesses in Nigeria*.

## **General Systems Theory**

General system theory is one of the most prominent theories applied to modern business management research involving the unpredictable business environments in which business leaders operate. The concept of systems theory, introduced by von Bertalanffy (1968), began as an underlying set of ideas and principles for the study of complicated situations holistically. Proponents of this theory emphasize holism over reductionism and organism over mechanism (von Bertalanffy, 1968).

A system is a depiction of some phenomena of the physical world (Flood & Carson, 1993). Von Bertalanffy (1968) typified a system as a set of elements joined onto one another and with the environment. Similarly, Almaney (1974) explained a system as interrelated elements forming a single unit or complex entity. Almaney incorporated dependence or influence of each element making up the system on each other. Flood and Carson (1993) characterized a system as a gathering of elements associated with an organized entity with attributes that may change. Flood and Carson introduced the concept of order and change in the quality of the elements of a system.

The application of general systems theory to the study of a phenomenon in an enterprise can lead to an understanding of the phenomenon. Flood and Carson (1993) used the concept of general systems theory in a study of some physical phenomena with attributes that may change in an organized entity or whole. Sturmberg, Martin, and Katerndahl (2014) later identified elements of systems theory in a modern environment that included complexity science, the science of network, self-organization, emergence, system dynamics, evolution, and adaptation. System theory can, therefore, be used to

gain an understanding of complex phenomena, such as small business enterprises in a modern environment.

Small business manufacturing leaders operate in a context that includes the organization and its exchanges with the environment. Von Bertalanffy (1972) introduced the idea of an open system as a system that interacts with its environment. Flood and Carson (1993) later described an open system as a system that gives resources to and receives resources from its environment across a boundary. Flood and Carson also described the relationship or dialogue between elements as the flow of material, energy, and information. Therefore, the enterprise link with the environment is the input and output of resources. A business enterprise is an open system as the enterprise receives inputs from the environment, processes them, and supplies outputs to the environment (Segatto, de Pardua, & Martinelli, 2013; von Bertalanffy, 1968). Thus, business enterprises influence and are influenced by the environments in which they operate (Segatto et al., 2013; von Bertalanffy, 1968). In this study, I explored the strategies used by Nigerian small business leaders in an open context with a focus on the positioning of the business enterprise and its interactions with the environment.

The use of system thinking in a study can lead to explanations encompassing part-to-whole and whole-to-part connections. The property of an entity depends on the properties of its individual parts, the positioning of the components, and their connections to the whole (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Flood and Carson (1993) described system thinking as a framework for thoughts that deals with complicated things holistically. Dominici (2012) agreed with Flood and Carson and highlighted the complexity of relations

between the system and the environment and the interaction and exchanges between the system and the environment. Therefore, system thinking can offer a descriptive and analytical evaluation of the inherent challenges in an enterprise.

Social and economic conditions of the business environment can initiate changes in business systems. Business systems are difficult to understand by separate consideration of individual elements because of the effect of the interaction of individual elements that make up the business system and business environment on the business systems (Dominici, 2012). A business system is a combination of subsystems, with each subsystem working together to build supporting relationships to accomplish the goals of the enterprise (Almaney, 1974). The focus of general systems theory is on the whole enterprise, including people and technology, working to achieve the objectives of the enterprise (Wilson, 2012). Walstrom (2012) supported the use of systems theory to study leadership in business enterprises and argued that systems theory can apply to the study of business enterprises to understand leadership activities and concepts. Therefore, general systems theory was applicable in the study of the business phenomenon.

Systems theory can provide a framework for exploring a business phenomenon. Von Bertalanffy (1972) initially applied general systems theory to the biological sciences. The applications of systems theory subsequently widened to encompass the study of systems in additional fields including business management as a part of the social sciences (Roche & Teague, 2012). Wilson (2012) used the concept of general systems theory to study enterprise resource planning systems. Thomas (2015) applied the concept of general systems theory to study strategies for retaining information technology

professionals, while Gandy (2015) relied upon the concept of general systems theory to study strategies for achieving continual profitability in small businesses. Rousseau (2015) noted successful applications of general systems theory and discussed the potential for additional applications in contemporary research. Therefore, system theory was appropriate to study strategies used by business leaders in this study to sustain their small business enterprises.

Small business start-ups may involve the integration of different processes and components. Evolution is a key factor in general systems theory, representing changes in subsystems that give rise to new defining features (Sturmberg et al., 2014; von Bertalanffy, 1968). Small businesses acquire new properties, interacting with the environment in a state of continual evolution (von Bertalanffy, 1968). The successes or failures of these small businesses may depend on the flexibility of the business leaders to make changes, based on feedback, as the businesses interact with their environments. General systems theory was the lens that I used in this study to explore the strategies that small business manufacturing enterprise leaders used to sustain their business enterprises. The holistic view of the general systems theory was appropriate for the study of business enterprise activities and strategies that small business manufacturing enterprise leaders used to sustain their business enterprises in their unique environments.

### **Small Business: Definition and Meaning**

Small businesses are not homogenous enterprise units. Classification criteria for business enterprises include size, sector, employee count, technology, and location (Buculescu, 2013). Fadahunsi (2012) noted that additional features of a small business

include (a) simple, flexible management structures and processes; (b) decision making limited to the business owners; and (c) limited managerial resources. Although various definitions exist, business size criteria are the most practical basis for classification of business enterprises.

The basis of categorizations of business enterprises based on size and other criteria are subjective and may vary from one country to another. The structure and size of the economy of a nation influence the classification of business enterprises (Nwankwo, Ewuim, & Asoya, 2012). Buculescu (2013) found a lack of consensus on the definition of an SME. Buculescu concluded that the differences in the level of economic thresholds and economic activity were responsible for the lack of consensus on the definition of an SME. The variation in the level of economic activity from one country to another makes it difficult to have a universally accepted definition of SME.

The definition of SMEs varies according to criteria used to classify business enterprises. The criteria employed in the classification of SMEs include turnover, employee count, paid-up capital, profit, and assets (Buculescu, 2013). The three commonly used parameters include (a) capital, (b) employee counts, and (c) business turnover (Nwankwo et al., 2012). The definition pertains to policies that govern the business sector and whether the use of these parameters applies singularly or in combination (Nwankwo et al., 2012). In the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada, definitions of SMEs are about annual turnover and employee count (Osotimehin et al., 2012). In Nigeria, criteria used in defining SMEs over time included plant and machinery, working capital, equity, and revenue (Osotimehin et al., 2012). In Nigeria, the

definition of small business enterprises is as provided in the policy document on micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME). In the policy document, Nigeria adopted the dual criteria of employee count and assets (ignoring the cost of lands and buildings) in classifying MSME (Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Investments [MITI], 2015).

However, employee count acts as an override whenever there is a conflict in classifications between the two criteria (MITI, 2015). The definition of small business enterprise is an enterprise with an asset base of between N5million and N50million (excluding lands and buildings) and an employee count of between 10 and 50 (MITI, 2015).

The dual criteria of employee count and asset base could be misleading. The asset-based criteria require adjustments periodically for inflation and local currency devaluation (Etuk, Etuk, & Baghebo, 2014). Some enterprises may be low-tech and labor-intensive, classified as large by employee count, while a high-tech enterprise may have a large asset base but few employees. However, for this study, the adopted definition was as provided in Nigeria's national policy document on MSMEs.

In Nigeria, the majority of business enterprises are micro and small business enterprises. Eighty-four percent of the total labor force in Nigeria work in the MSME sector (SMEDAN, 2015). Small business enterprises are essential to the growth, productivity, and competitiveness of the economy of a developing country like Nigeria (Osotimehin et al., 2012). Small business leaders provide employment and income for the bulk of the population (Osotimehin et al., 2012). MSMEs are the primary source of new jobs, as breeding and nurturing centers for entrepreneurs, technical skills acquisition,

technological innovativeness, and managerial skills development (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014). Micro and small business enterprises in Nigeria are the most important sources of new employment opportunities.

### **Small Business Leader or Owner**

Most small business owners or leaders in Nigeria operate as sole proprietors or in partnerships, even though they may have been registered as a limited liability company (Adisa et al., 2014). The desire to realize personal goals or to offer a source of income for the family could be the motive for business enterprise formation (Ionitã, 2012). Business owners or relatives of the owners usually manage small businesses (Adisa et al., 2014). Fadahunsi (2012) noted that the scope of duties of a small business leader might be so broad that the business owner may not be sufficiently skilled or knowledgeable to carry out the entire range of administrative function. A small business leader must have the necessary skills to perform a full range of managerial functions to be successful.

Small business leaders in Nigeria have the challenge of limited access to and use of finances to implement their growth plans. A small business leader's unwillingness to seek external funding in the form of equity limits their access to and use of financial resources (Fadahunsi, 2012). Banks are wary of lending to small business enterprises with small capital bases and may demand collateral that many small business leaders are unable to produce (Fadahunsi, 2012). The unwillingness of small business leaders to dilute ownership or to transfer the business to another person also makes it difficult for small businesses to survive the death of the business owner (Adisa et al., 2014). Financing difficulties because of a small business leader's unwillingness to dilute

ownership may limit the survival and growth of small business enterprises (Adisa et al., 2014). Most small business enterprises with owners who are willing to give up some equity holding in exchange for external financing are more likely to survive and grow than business enterprises that express a reluctance to give up some equity holding (Fadahunsi, 2012). Therefore, small business leaders who desire to be successful must expand their access to external finance to fund their growth plans.

The success of new small businesses may be dependent on the skills and experience of the business leader. Atherton (2012) found that the success of a newly formed small business depended on the founder's financial literacy, funding negotiation, and business start-up planning and launch skills. Small business leaders with limited capital, limited access to bank financing, and limited capacity to implement strategic plans may be unable to hire and retain quality staff; as such, their survival will depend on the skills and experiences of the business owners (Adisa et al., 2014). The depth and breadth of the skills and experience of the business leader are paramount for the success of a small business with limited start-up funding.

The personality and motivation of the owner of a new small business enterprise are critical for the survival of the business enterprise. Fahed-Sreih and Morin-Delerm (2012) found that small business leaders' successes coincide with their commitments to excellence. Farrington (2012) implicated the personality traits of small business leaders in low levels of job satisfaction and lack of commitments that could lead to business failures when those traits are not well-suited for or aligned with successful business ownership traits. In agreement, Shonubi and Taiwo (2013) suggested that inherent personality traits,

abilities to take risks, and entrepreneurial learning of owners are determinants of small business successes. The suitability of the character of the small business leader and the satisfaction derived from owning a business enhance commitment and hence the success of the business enterprise.

The leaders of small businesses have varied and often divergent views that may affect the growth and successes of their business enterprises (Jaouen & Lasch, 2015). A detailed account of how small business leaders have sustained their business enterprise, according to Ferguson (2012), require an understanding of the motivation of the business leaders to start and continue their business enterprises, as well as their definitions and measures of success. Messersmith and Wales (2013) argued that a healthy relationship exists between leadership practices, business philosophies, and sales growth. The motivation and measures of success by the business leaders affect the leadership practices, sales growth, and overall success of businesses.

The success of a small business enterprise is dependent on the goals and skills of the business leader. Jayawarna, Rouse, and Kitching (2013) found that convenience, economics, society, education, prestige, or control drive the small business leader to success. Though, Price, Rae, and Cini (2013) established that small business enterprise success depends on the confidence in the overall economic market condition and the instincts of owners who risk personal investment to take up business performance as personal goals. Gupta, Guha, and Krishnaswami (2013) added that small business enterprise success depends on the owners' leadership styles, managerial skills, and levels of theoretical and practical knowledge. Other critical skills of small business leaders

noted by Gupta et al. included the abilities to be innovative, creative, and risk-taking. Conversely, Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014) warned against risk-taking and competitive aggression that had negative correlations with cost-based leadership strategies, though both factors had positive relationships to different indicators of business performance.

Small business enterprise leaders frequently attribute their business enterprise successes to their efforts. Ferguson (2012) found that business leaders often take personal credit for the positive results of their business enterprises and attribute the negative results to factors outside of their control. Crilly and Sloan (2012) recognized that leaders in more autonomous environments take more risks and enhance growth through creativity. Crilly and Sloan added that, with restricted autonomy, business leaders focus more on minimizing threats. Ferguson argued that small business owners' propensities for risk-taking, openness to experiences, and their emotional stabilities influence their business' growth and performance. The level of autonomy in the environment affects a business leader's propensity for risk-taking that can lead to or undermine business enterprise success.

Small business leaders corroborate with other business leaders to achieve success. According to Proietti (2012), small business enterprises develop within the broader environment of their respective communities, locally and globally. Small business enterprises comprise the majority of business enterprises in their local communities (Besser, 2012). Building relationships with stakeholders of the business enterprises and their communities and industries are vital to small business success (Liu, Eng, & Ko,

2013). The cultivation of relationships and networking for strategic sustainability is an important aspect of small business success (Gao, Demirag, & Chen, 2012; Gibbons, 2015). Gupta et al. (2013) added that small business leaders must be flexible and professional to collaborate with other business enterprise leaders successfully.

Leaders of small businesses may develop business relationships by being supportive of other enterprises in their environments. According to Ferguson (2012), leaders of enterprises and their employees, who are supportive of other entities in their communities, are more likely to establish successful business relationships than leaders and employees who remain unsupportive. Kim and Johnson (2013) added that emotions related to the moral decision making of consumers connect decisions about supporting individual business enterprises. Gibbons (2015) accepted that small business leaders who form collaborative relationships with charities or social outlets within their communities experience increased perceptions of purpose, improved marketing opportunities, stronger customer loyalty, and higher profits. Eikenberry (2013) confirmed that one of the consequences of increased business leaders' interactions with community members is a growth in community patronage.

Memberships in industry associations and the business community represent opportunities for small business leaders to network with professionals and other business leaders. Ferguson (2012) found that networking with professional advisors and other business leaders through industry associations could significantly enhance the successes of business enterprises. Shields and Shellman (2013) added that small business leaders could develop skills and conceptual knowledge that can better help their small business

enterprises remain successful through such associations. Memberships in industry associations provide opportunities for small business leaders to share experiences with other business leaders.

### **Business Failure: Definition and Meaning**

To understand what constitutes a failed business, different academics applied various definitions and contexts to the phenomenon of business failure. According to Watson and Everett (1999), the meaning of failure to one business owner might not be the same to another business owner. Watson and Everett noted failures to include financial failures or bankruptcies and failures of the owners to continue in their roles of business leaders. However, Beaver (2003) argued that failure is not exactly cessation of trading but rather the lack of attainment of predetermined objectives that underpins the business enterprise formation. Ucbasaran, Shepherd, Lockett, and Lyon (2013) noted that business failure ranges from the cessation of ownership to end of the business due to financial collapse, such as bankruptcy. The end of a business could result from ending the owner's involvement in the business or the entire business ceasing to operate (Watson & Everett, 1999).

A broad meaning of business failure encompasses the owner's separation from the business. Discontinuity of ownership includes businesses closure, businesses sold for profit, business owners moving on to another business, or retirement (Watson & Everett, 1999). Askim-Lovseth and Feinberg (2012) claimed that failure might lead to success in the future and suggested that a failure of a business is a chapter in the life of a business owner. It is not appropriate to equate business failure with business exit because business

failure is not the only reason a business owner may exit a business enterprise (Watson & Everett, 1999).

Business failure as a result of insolvency occurs when expenses exceed revenues, and the firm is unable to raise additional funding to continue operation under the current ownership and management (Ucbasaran et al., 2013). Arasti, Zandi, and Talebi (2012) described bankruptcy proceedings as when a business ceases to operate due to financial challenges that result in losses to business creditors. Arasti et al. noted that bankruptcy is often attributable to internal problems, such as the lack of appropriate levels of knowledge, experiences, and skills of leaders. Bankruptcy applies more often to large companies with substantial assets; however, is not correct to conclude that small businesses that cease operations without losses to creditors are not failures. The use of bankruptcy as a definition confers the benefit of reliance on an observable, recorded event (Ucbasaran et al., 2013). Bankruptcy or failure to provide a reasonable or fair return for owners or investors are indicators of failing businesses and not business failures (Ucbasaran et al., 2013).

In the event of failures of businesses to thrive, some business owners may still continue operations, although others may view their businesses as failures (Watson & Everett, 1999). Watson and Everett (1999) emphasized the difficulty of arriving at an acceptable definition of an adequate return. Often, small business owners accept lower financial returns in exchange for greater autonomy and independence (Beaver, 2003). Watson and Everett described the event of business enterprise termination to prevent further losses as a disposal of business enterprises through sale or liquidation. Losses in

this context include an owner's capital; the businesses can even fail in situations when the creditors suffer no losses (Watson & Everett, 1999).

Some small business enterprise owners may not be sufficiently motivated to continue or may intentionally plan for their enterprise's limited existence (Gupta et al., 2013). Other researchers similarly claimed that, although it is commonplace to view the concept of a business exit negatively, the small business exit is not synonymous with small business failure (Wennberg & DeTienne, 2014). Arasti et al. (2013) noted that most studies focus on the exit business process associated with the failures of the businesses and neglect the idea of owners' "planned exit routes" (p. 4). Wennberg and DeTienne (2014) also claimed that most empirical studies and research models fail to explain the occurrences of planned business operation endings that many owners might describe as the attainment of their ultimate business goals. One cannot say business owners who close their business enterprises failed because a business enterprise closure is not the same as a business failure (Wennberg & DeTienne, 2014).

Business failure is the disposal or permanent end of a business enterprise as a result of bankruptcy, liquidation, receivership, or failure to meet the entrepreneur's expectations (Ucbasaran, Westhead, Wright, & Flores, 2010). This definition of failure incorporates a measure that relies on the opinion of someone associated with the business enterprise. In this study and other studies, a business failure is a discontinuation of participation in business as a consequence of a business owner's failure to meet a stipulated minimum level of economic continuity (Ucbasaran et al., 2013).

### **Small Business Failure Factors**

Business enterprises, irrespective of size and location, can fail and stakeholders may suffer adverse consequences. Beaver (2003) submitted that business enterprise start-ups that are responses to unemployment, rather than based on principle, are more likely to fail. However, Naqvi (2011) isolated inadequate capital, insufficient government support, inadequate infrastructure, and corruption as factors that cause failure of the small business enterprise. The report of the survey by the National Bureau of Statistics in association with SMEDAN (2015) indicated inadequate access to finance as a contributing factor to the poor performance of SMEs in Nigeria. The combination of the financial limitations and faulty reasoning for start-ups may jeopardize the long-term success of small businesses in Nigeria.

Inadequate infrastructural support limits the performance and growth of small businesses. Adaramola (2012) found that policy supports in technology, infrastructure, and finance affected the performance of small business enterprises in Nigeria. Blackburn, Hart, and Wainwright (2013) added that structural constraints on small business growth, combined with a plan of action and individual factors, produce different performance results. Blackburn et al. also submitted that the age, size, and sector of business enterprises may represent more influential determinants of business performance than owner-manager features and business strategies.

Small business owners encounter some challenges that may limit their businesses' levels of performance and growth. Beaver (2003) submitted that, for an enterprise to remain in business, the owner must be able to adapt to the changing situations of the

dynamic business environment. The inability of the business owner to adapt to change in the business environment limits the growth and performance of the business. Coad and Tamvada (2012) found access to raw materials, equipment, power shortages, and lack of access to and use of technical knowledge as factors that limit the growth of the small business enterprise. Adisa et al. (2014) added that the following factors may lead to small business failures: (a) poor record keeping, (b) insufficient separation of business equity and owners' funds, and (c) inadequate management skills. Structural conditions in the operating environment of business enterprises limit their performance outcomes and growth, although definitions of business success and failure, business owner characteristics, and ways of doing business are also significant (Wennberg & DeTienne, 2014).

Small business enterprises, when established, operate with strategies to compete with more established enterprises. Some owners pursue flexible strategies focused on available opportunities; other business owners pursue the competency-based strategies that other enterprises lack (Armstrong, 2013). Mokhtar (2013) added that growth strategy and enthusiasm of the business owner or manager are necessary for growth and expansion. Armstrong (2013) asserted that there is a risk to small business survival and growth when the owner pursues opportunities based on flexible strategies. Armstrong suggested that owners pursue competency-based strategies. Coad and Tamvada (2012) reported that size and age had a negative influence on the growth of small business enterprises; therefore, the strategic preferences that allow larger business enterprises to

survive and grow do not have the same effects on small business enterprises (Armstrong, 2013).

### **Business Success: Definition and Meaning**

Successful small businesses are significant contributors to a country's economic health, but the meaning of business success varies among business owners across industries and geographies (Gupta et al., 2013). According to Watson and Evert (1999), what constitutes business success in one business enterprise might not necessarily be the same in another business enterprise. Taddei and Delecolle (2012) emphasized success regarding profit margins as the small business priority. Wilburn and Wilburn (2014) stressed the importance of success that encompasses social responsibilities and economic benefits. Success could also be a reflection of compliance with legal and ethical practices (Coppa & Sriramesh, 2013). Success may relate to the achievement of goals and objectives from human endeavors (Oyeku, Oduyoye, Asikhia, Kabuoh, & Elemo, 2014). Scholars are yet to reach an agreement on what constitutes business success in the context of new business enterprises (Oyeku et al., 2014).

Performance is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon used in business studies to explain business success (Oyeku et al., 2014). Business success may encompass financial and nonfinancial measures (Gupta & Muita, 2013). The enterprise's financial performance is indicative of business success (Philip, 2011). Arasti et al. (2012) noted enterprise financial performance as a measure of business success. The leaders of small business enterprises depend on often inadequate capital and employees (Ma, 2012), but the growth of revenues over expenditures is the most frequently used standard by

scholars for determining business success (Geneste & Weber, 2011). Optimal financial management sustains the economic, business, and human resources required for growth and continued existence of the business enterprise (Arasti et al., 2012).

Those who define the success of the enterprise in financial terms, such as Geneste and Weber (2011), rely on measures of incomes and expenditures to evaluate the success of the business enterprise. Related financial indicators of business success include market shares, balance sheet sizes, and sustained employee counts (Geneste & Weber, 2011). Toledo-López, Díaz-Pichardo, Jiménez-Castañeda, and Sánchez-Medina (2012) included sales turnover, market expansion, export market share, and economic ambitions as financial indicators of small business success.

Financial measures are not the only indicators of the success of a small business enterprise (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). Price et al. (2013) emphasized the relationship between management and owner actions and small business performance in non-financial terms. Toledo-Lopez et al. identified nonfinancial indicators to include fulfillment, faithfulness to tradition, craft and methods, independence, liberty, quality of life, originality and truthfulness in dealings, and sense of duty to the public. Other reported measures of business success include continued stay in business, return on investment, satisfaction, and public opinion (Philip, 2011).

Oyeku et al. characterized performance as the firm's ability to produce satisfactory results. However, the concepts of business success, performance, and results have varied meanings for the various stakeholders in business enterprises (Ferguson, 2012). For example, Ferguson (2012) noted that governmental agencies might see small business

success as decreasing unemployment rates and increasing tax revenues collected from small businesses. According to Ferguson, banks, funding institutions, and financial investors may see small business success as the continued economic relationship associated with the enterprise's growing account balance, renewal of credit facilities, and timely repayments of matured loan obligations. The owners of the small business might interpret success to mean surpassing or meeting income targets, their access to more leisure time, or the personal gratification that stems from their individual and professional achievements (Ferguson, 2012). For this study, a successful small business enterprise continued in business for more than 5 years from start-up, achieving the goals and objectives that informed its establishment.

### **Small Business Success Factors**

Small businesses are heterogeneous units with different success factors. Small business enterprises are independent, unique entities with different characteristics, operating contexts, and objectives; therefore, there is no rigid formula for a successful enterprise (Beaver, 2003). The sector in which the business enterprise operates influences their growth (Fadahunsi, 2012). Panda (2015) found that the primary determinants of enterprise growth include enterprise size, managerial networking intensity, employees' skill development, product diversification, and market integration. The factors that influence the success of a business enterprise could be within the enterprise, in the sector in which the enterprise operates, or both.

According to published results of small business studies in the peer-reviewed literature various factors influence small business success. Philip (2011) identified

management experience, product offerings, environment, and business practice as significant factors for small business success. Uddin and Bose (2013) noted that business plan, distribution channels, and government support are vital to the success of a small business enterprise. Mohammed and Obeleagu-Nzelibe (2014) recognized entrepreneurial skills as important for business enterprise success, in addition to proper record keeping, access to financing, participation in taxation, the period of operation, and compliance with consistent government policies. Halabí and Lussier (2014) also developed a model for achieving small business success that includes working capital, record keeping, planning, skill sets of the owners and partners, business ownership history, and marketing development.

Parilla (2013) identified entrepreneurial skills, the personality of business owners, and management experience as significant success factors for a small business enterprise. Naqvi (2011) identified know-how of the business leaders and experience of managers as critical success factors. Mitchelmore and Rowley (2013) similarly reported that the knowledge of the business owners is a primary determinant of the success of small business enterprises. Orobia, Byabashaija, Munene, Sejjaaka, and Musinguzi (2013) noted that owner-managers of small businesses require experience, perceptions, attitudes, and soft skills to achieve business successes. Alese and Alimi (2014) submitted that the managers of SMEs must be visionary, entrepreneurial, creative, and willing to take risks to succeed. Ng and Kee (2012) also noted that leadership, innovation, entrepreneurial skills, image and reputation, and organizational culture are significant factors for business successes.

Business owners often establish their small businesses to pursue growth and profitability objectives. In a study oriented toward the development of a framework for analyzing growth processes of small business enterprises, Fadahunsi (2012) identified four key factors that influence the growth of small business enterprises. The factors identified by Fadahunsi include the characteristics of the business owner, the business itself, the strategies of the business owner, and the environment. The most influential of the business owners' characteristics include the founders' motivations, the level of owner education, previous managerial experience, and willingness to team up with others (Fadahunsi, 2012).

The willingness to team up should include collaborations with persons that possess complementary skills. One of the greatest determinants of business success is the business owner's ability to build a team with skills and talents that complement the business owner's qualifications and abilities (Oyeku et al., 2014). Alignment of enterprise goals with individual goals also helps individuals and business enterprises succeed (Alese & Alimi, 2014). Enterprise success results from teamwork and depends on the working environment, leadership style, available resources, and employee motivation (Jayaweera, 2015).

Employee perceptions of the work climate influence their motivation, job satisfaction, and job performance, which ultimately influence the success of the business enterprise (Jayaweera, 2015). Leadership behavior is necessary for creating an appropriate work climate; the processes and methods of developing leaders are vital to the success of a business enterprise (Mirocha, Bents, LaBrosse, & Rietow, 2013). Arham,

Boucher, and Muenjohn (2013) found that work climates with transformational and transactional leadership styles foster the trust and confidence of employees and motivate them to perform optimally to contribute to the success of the business enterprise. Mirocha et al. (2013) claimed that a business strategy encompassing a leadership development plan is necessary for success, based on study findings about differentiating factors among the top-performing enterprises. Mirocha et al. also stressed the importance of leadership development plans based on accepted principles and shared beliefs.

Studies about strategies of small business enterprises fill the peer-reviewed literature. Arasti et al. (2012) noted that the concept of strategies emerged more visibly in the 1990s, as policymakers looked at ways to help small business enterprises thrive through better strategies. Gupta and Muita (2013) described strategies as planned actions for the achievement of enterprise goals. Steyn and Niemann (2014) argued that the context for the development of strategies may be social, environmental, or economic, but each context must encompass continuity and achievement of enterprise goals.

Cordeiro (2013) examined enterprise goals in two small business enterprises, one that failed and another that was successful. Cordeiro found that small business owner-managers planned poorly. The major impediment to strategic planning was poor time management of managers who spend the majority of their workdays on the everyday demands of keeping businesses afloat (Cordeiro, 2013). Strategic business planning begins with the identification and development of a business opportunity, followed by the means to ensure survival and performance (Chwolka & Raith, 2012).

Business enterprise owners often pursue a growth strategy. Sinfield, McConnell, Calder, and Colson (2012) identified four growth strategies by which a business enterprise can pursue growth. The strategies include product development, marketing research, business acquisition or expansion, and business model experimentation (Sinfield et al., 2012). A business enterprise can pursue growth by developing new products, offering new ways of satisfying customers' needs, moving into new markets, and adopting alternative business models that create more value (Naqvi, 2011). Ng and Kee (2012) suggested business enterprises need to be transformed into highly competitive and resilient enterprises to survive globalization and changes in the business environment; the ability to adapt to change is the key to success.

Financial resources are required by business owners to launch and sustain their business ideas (Bouzahir & Chakir, 2013). The funds needed by new business owners for business survival and growth often exceed available funds, resulting in a state of need (Bouzahir & Chakir, 2013). Access to and use of financial resources are necessary for a business enterprise to survive and to pursue growth opportunities (Fadahunsi, 2012). Afolabi and Ehinomen (2015) stressed development and growth of small business enterprises through the provision of required funding from financial institutions via subsidized financing and credit schemes.

Access to and use of financial resources do not guarantee business success; however, the availability of small business financing in the right amounts enhances the probability of small business success (Bouzahir & Chakir, 2013). Daskalakis, Jarvis, and Schizas (2013) emphasized three distinct financing sources: (a) equity, (b) debt, and (c)

grants. Daskalakis et al. found small business enterprises experience challenges accessing long-term finance for capital investments. The use of quality marketing can improve the probability of small business success, though it may be financially challenging for a small business leader to maintain full compliments of marketing functions with limited access to finances (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012). The implication of these findings is small business enterprise leaders must nurture and harness all available resources to achieve long-term success.

### **Business Environmental Factors**

Business enterprises operate in various environments to produce and distribute goods and services. The business environment provides the business enterprise with resources and opportunities needed to strive and grow; at the same time, business enterprises provide its services and products to the business environment (Njanja, Ogutu, & Pellisier, 2012). Adaramola (2012) argued that a business enterprise makes a demand on the community and the community also makes a claim on the business enterprise. Similarly, Oginni and Adesanya (2013) described the business environment as the totality of all the external and internal conditions that influence the life, growth, and changes in the business enterprise, which in turn influences the environment. Therefore, the business environment is the interrelationship between the business enterprise and the society.

The business environment is a function of size and industry and varies between enterprises (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013). The business environment, according to Adaramola (2012), determines the activities of a small business enterprise while the beliefs, needs, and the attitudes in the business environment determine the business

activities. However, Fadahunsi (2012) noted that small business enterprises, because of their size and market share, have limited opportunities to sway their environments and experience greater dependence on their environment than large business enterprises. Business enterprises operate in an environment of mutual interaction of activities, networks of relationships between people, materials resources, information, and other systems (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013). The business environment presents both the lucky breaks and limitations on the business enterprise and includes individuals, institutions, and other enterprises that directly or indirectly affect the operation of the business enterprise (Adaramola, 2012).

A business environment comprises internal and external business environments (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013). The internal business environment includes factors the business owner can manipulate, such as capital, personnel, profits, procedures, policies, organizational climate, goals, and objectives (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013). The external business environments include factors beyond the control of the business owners, such as technology, politics, economic factors, socio-cultural factors, physical factors, and government legislations (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013). Similarly, Fadahunsi identified external environmental factors affecting small business enterprise as global trends and events and the associated policy responses and the socio-economic climate in the community. Another environmental factor is the task environment, consisting of the closest environmental factors with a direct influence on the business enterprise (Adeoye & Elegunde, 2012). These environmental factors include customers, suppliers, labor

unions, labor markets, competitors, financial institutions, and raw materials (Adeoye & Elegunde, 2012).

Environmental scanning analysis focusing on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats will indicate trends in the business environment (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013). To align business strategies with the trends in the business environment, business leaders need to understand the trends in the business environment and forces that shape competition (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013). Ibidunni and Ogundele (2013) explained that understanding the nature of the business environment helps in repositioning a business enterprise with the adoption of appropriate strategies. Ibidunni and Ogundele also classified the nature of the business environment in three categories: dynamic, stable, or unstable. Using similar categorizations, Adeoye and Elegunde (2012) stated that the nature of the business environment in which most business enterprises operate is dynamic.

Because the environment gives rise to the opportunities, threats, and problems encountered by business owners, business decisions often involve an analysis of the business environment (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013). Njanja, Ogutu, and Pellisier (2012) argued that the business environment influences the management strategies of the leaders of business enterprises and the performance of small businesses. Therefore, business leaders must evaluate the business environment before formulating strategies for achieving objectives of the business enterprise (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013).

Business enterprise survival depends on activities of the business in response to a challenging business environment (Akindele, Oginni, & Omoyele, 2012). The leader of a

small business enterprise must engage continually in the process of structuring and restructuring, in line with the challenges posed by the business environment, to achieve business objectives (Adeoye & Elegunde, 2012). Given these difficulties, the leaders of business enterprises must plan and develop flexible structures to maximize available resources to accomplish the objectives of their business enterprises (Akindele et al., 2012).

### **Importance of Small Businesses to the Development of Nigerian Economy**

Small businesses are catalysts for social and economic growth and development. Successful small business enterprises are essential for economic development, ongoing employment opportunities, and improved living standards (Oyeku et al., 2014). The importance of small business enterprises to the social and economic development of a country makes it imperative that the government create an enabling environment in which small businesses can compete and do well (Osotimehin et al., 2012). The study by the National Bureau of Statistics in association with SMEDAN (2015) revealed that MSMEs provided employment for 84% of the Nigerian total labor force. Small business enterprises are the mainstay of economic development, supporting generations of workers and providing important goods and services (SMEDAN, 2015). Accordingly, small business enterprises are major forces for social and economic growth and development.

The size and flexibility of small business enterprises make its establishment relatively easy in rural communities. Small business enterprises accelerate rural development through the use of local resources, curbing urban migration by providing employment opportunities in the countryside (Aminu & Shariff, 2015). The establishment

of successful small business enterprises in rural communities lead to a reduction in urban migration and, by extension, reduces pressure on urban infrastructure (Etuk et al., 2014). The small business enterprise constitutes a primary source of poverty alleviation, acceleration of development, and reduction of social tension.

In a modern economy, small business enterprises can complement large business enterprises. The roles of small businesses in an economy are often well defined and different from the roles of large businesses (Briciu, Groza, & Putan, 2012). Micro and small business enterprises influence the growth of large business enterprises and moderate regional incongruities, by their use of local resources and creation of employment opportunities in their areas of operations (Osotimehin et al., 2012). Owners, leaders, and employees of small businesses tend to possess vast amounts of collective knowledge of resources and an understanding of the dynamics of supply and demand (Etuk et al., 2014). Small business enterprises are also prominent suppliers of inputs to large business enterprises, thereby supporting industrial development through production of primary and semi-finished products for larger business enterprises.

Briciu et al. (2012) claimed that an optimal ratio of large to small business enterprises could help mitigate effects of an economic crisis because small business enterprises tend to be viable during an economic crisis. Large business enterprises can tap into largely untapped markets in developing countries by working with small businesses to build new customer bases that may be inaccessible to their systems of distributors (Etuk et al., 2014). Small businesses complement large business enterprises and serve as

the significant origins for innovation and aggressive strategies that distinguish them from other enterprises (Etuk et al., 2014).

### **Challenges of Survival and Growth of Small Business**

Business enterprises function in an environment of interconnected activities and systems of relationships (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013). The Nigerian business environment is not conducive to the survival and growth of small business enterprises (Osotimehin et al., 2011). Challenges faced by small business enterprises in Nigeria include financial and non-financial constraints (Etuk et al., 2014; Osotimehin et al., 2012). Financial and nonfinancial constraints can jeopardize the survival and growth of small business enterprises (Bamfo, 2012).

Non-financial constraints include inadequate entrepreneurial skills, poor support, underdeveloped infrastructural facilities, political and ethnoreligious conflicts, weak governance structure, and inadequate fiscal and monetary measures (Etuk et al., 2014). Okpara (2011) discussed the constraints to small business growth and survival that included the absence of fiscal and monetary support, inept management, the lack of experience, inadequate public utilities, insufficient profits, and low patronage. Mashenene and Rumanyika (2014) also stressed deficient business education, inadequate capital, and anti-entrepreneurial culture as significant limiting factors in the growth of small business. Karanja et al. (2013) asserted that challenges of small businesses can stem from personal characteristics, technical skills, management competencies, and behaviors of the entrepreneur.

Focusing on non-financial constraints, prior scholars ascribed small business success to employees' work ethics, leaders' management experiences and rapport with staff, and general compliance of the business operations with regulatory controls (Ferguson, 2012). Arasti et al. (2012) discussed regulatory burdens that included permits, registrations, taxes, export and trade rules, contracting, utility management, and employment of workers. Kitching, Hart, and Wilson (2015) similarly highlighted how regulatory burdens on small businesses may be responsible for some small business failures and constitute challenges for business owners.

Small business leaders often lack the skill sets to manage and overcome the challenges of market uncertainties and instabilities. Gibbons (2015) claimed that a business owner's lack of strategies for adapting to market changes can jeopardize the sustainability of the small business enterprise. The lack of personal or professional support and inadequate education and training were reasons noted by Arthur, Hisrich, and Cabrera (2012) for the lack of growth in some small businesses.

With an additional focus on the non-financial constraints, Arthur et al. (2012) and Arasti et al. (2012) emphasized the importance of the scope and breadth of knowledge that small business leaders should apply to their small business success efforts. Business ownership, growth, and success often relate to business owners' educational experiences (Marinova & Borza, 2013). Although educational experiences of small business leaders vary, more highly educated leaders often experience more successful business growth (Fadahunsi, 2012). Chinomona (2013) found that business owners' developed skill sets relate positively to small business performance. Shields and Shelleman (2013) similarly

revealed that small business leaders who accessed educational opportunities to build knowledge and expertise generated higher revenues, leading to business growth and long-term success.

Financial constraints include factors that limit the ability of a small business owner to access and use of funds for the realization of business ideas and expansion of an existing business (Osotimehin et al., 2012). Osotimehin et al. (2012) identified both financial and non-financial constraints that included short business history, inadequate collateral, inadequate record keeping, insufficient knowledge of the business and risks involved in the business, and weak governance structure. Bamfo (2012) added that the financial challenges of a small business enterprise include a high interest rate on borrowed funds, poor financial management structures, and high costs of doing business, as well as low patronage.

Financing is a major concern that could help small business owners overcome other challenges. Omah, Durowoju, Adeoye, and Elegunde (2012) identified related problems that limit the growth of small businesses to include limited access to finances, adverse macroeconomic environments, and weak infrastructure. Karanja et al. (2013) acknowledged the importance of marketing, accounting, finance, and human resources to the lucrativeness and financial health of small businesses. Dec and Masiukiewicz (2014) also recognized other financial barriers to the development of small businesses, such as tax systems, exporting costs, and overcoming prior bankruptcies to build capital on another opportunity. Most researchers consider financial concerns, directly or indirectly, major impediments to the growth and survival of small businesses (Omah et al., 2012).

Small business leaders operate in a dynamic business environment (Arasti et al., 2012). The dynamic nature of the environment in which small businesses operate causes some small business leaders to borrow money and ensure repayment by aggressive collections (Corluka, Radic, & Matosevic, 2013). Approximately 33% of small business leaders borrow external funds at least once per quarter to avoid bankruptcies, while missing potential means to greater fiscal stabilities (National Federation of Independent Businesses, 2013). Small business leaders can also fall prey to inappropriate loans and debt collectors, leading to poor credit that can limit future funding and negatively upset their businesses (Corluka et al., 2013). Arasti et al. (2012) agreed that many small business leaders experienced these types of problems. Corluka et al. (2013) argued that owners could be young and overly optimistic in their attempts to attract external financing from banking institutions. Limited accessibility to financial resources, including credit and the interests of investors, limits small business growth (Price et al., 2013).

Some small business leaders experience lending pitfalls and inaccessibility of ideal borrowing opportunities. Gupta et al. (2013) stressed the need for enough working capital to build new business opportunities and to successfully continue with existing business. Small business leaders may experience fewer financial problems if they have the support of banking institutions that can be sources of healthy long-term relationships and networking partners (Fraser, Bhaumik, & Wright, 2015). Previous studies revealed that business revenues generated by the support of bank loans were almost double those of similar business enterprises that operated without the backing of bank lending

(Ferguson, 2012). Although there is general support for the benefits of banking relationships and formal financial partnerships, many small business leaders obtain business funding from family members; internal borrowing reduces financial dependencies on external financial resources that may be expensive and potentially harder to access (Price et al., 2013).

Challenges are natural processes in the lives of businesses (Gupta et al., 2013). According to Gupta et al. (2013), start-up businesses go through various financial and non-financial challenges as they mature and ultimately decline. Gupta et al. established that businesses experience problems within three distinct periods: (a) growth, (b) stagnation, and (c) decline. Gupta et al. argued that the three periods could occur in no particular order. Gibbons (2015) highlighted the challenges of the three business phases identified by Gupta et al. adding the significance of strategic planning for the prevention of business failures amidst market changes in a dynamic social and political environment. The dynamic conditions faced by small business leaders require their constant attention to overcome challenges to continue to grow their businesses successfully (Gupta et al., 2013).

### **Transition**

In section 1, I provided a foundation for understanding the research problem, the purpose, and the nature of this research. I continued with the research question, the concepts from the literature that grounded this research, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study. The significance of the study and review of the literature completed section 1. The discussion of professional and academic literature review

included various research sources related to the study topic. The literature review included topics such as systems theory, small business, small business owners, business failures, small business failure factors, business success, and small business success factors. The literature review also included a review of business environmental factors, the importance of small businesses to the development of the Nigerian economy, and challenges hampering the growth and survival of small businesses.

General systems theory provided a framework for the understanding of an organized setting as a whole (Flood & Carson, 1993). Von Bertalanffy (1972) first applied general systems theory to the biological sciences. The applications of systems theory subsequently widened to encompass the study of systems in additional fields including business management as a part of the social sciences (Roche & Teague, 2012). The roles of small businesses in a free-market economy and their contributions to economic growth and prosperity of communities are critical to the development of society (Gupta & Muita, 2013). The successes of small businesses are vital to the growth, productivity, and competitiveness of the economy of a developing country like Nigeria (Osotimehin et al., 2012).

Various definitions of business successes and failures apply to small business. Adaramola (2012) described the positive influence of technological and financial support on the performance of SMEs and explained how inadequate infrastructural support negatively affects the performance of SMEs in Nigeria. For this study, I considered a business successful when the leader sustained the business enterprise past 5 years from its formation. The conclusion from the review of the literature is that organizations must

nurture and harness all available resources to their fullest potentials to achieve successes. Given various challenges expressed in the literature, specific to industry, location, environment, and workers, the leaders of business enterprises must plan and develop flexible structures to maximize resources to achieve organizational success (Akindele et al., 2012). These structures to maximize resources in a given environment are also known as strategies.

In Section 2, I present detailed discussions about my role in this research, the participants, the study methodology, and design. Section 2 continues with explanations of the study population, sampling method, and the study ethics. I collected data through semistructured in-person interviews that resulted in a record of participants' answers to eight open-ended questions. The questions were the tools used to acquire data about the strategies applied by small manufacturing business leaders to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years after formation. Discussions of data analysis, data organization, and processes to enhance reliability and validity of the research complete section 2.

In section 3, I provide a brief introduction to the purpose and objectives of the study. Section 3 continues with a discussion of the study results, the relevance of those results to businesses, and the implications for social change. Recommendations for further research, reflections, and conclusions complete section 3.

## Section 2: The Project

Small businesses constitute the majority of businesses all over the world and are crucial to the development of any economy (Adisa et al., 2014). Accordingly, knowledge of strategies to sustain small businesses beyond 5 years after formation is necessary for small business leaders' continued contributions to the economic development of their communities. In this section, I explain the research method and design, data collection, data organization, and data analysis strategies for this study. The subsections below start with the purpose, the researcher's role in this research, the participants, and elaboration of the appropriateness and suitability of the study design and methodology.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the strategies that small business manufacturing leaders in Lagos, Nigeria used to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation. The population for this multiple case study included three small business manufacturing leaders in Lagos, Nigeria, who have sustained their businesses for more than 5 years. The population was appropriate for this study because the majority of small business enterprises do not continue beyond 5 years after formation (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013; Atawodi & Ojeka, 2012). To achieve data triangulation, data collection sources for this study included company-related documents and semistructured interviews with small business owners. The possible positive social change implications for implementation of the recommendations from this research include improved financial performance and success rate of small businesses. The consequence of these improvements may include improved living standards, improved

employment opportunities, reduction of social mistrust between the haves and the have-nots, reduction in crime rates, and improved welfare for individuals in the community.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Qualitative inquiry requires both the emotional maturity and strong interpersonal skills of the researcher to listen to and comprehend the expressed experiences of participants who describe a phenomenon of interest (Collins & Copper, 2014). According to Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013), qualitative studies with interviews involve the interviewer in the role of the instrument. Peredaryenko and Krauss (2013) argued that the researcher in qualitative inquiry is the most appropriate instrument to collect data that are representative of the perspectives of participants relative to the phenomenon under study. My role in this study included selecting and justifying a suitable research method and design. I also selected the three cases, recruited study participants, gathered data, and analyzed data supplied by the participants. The data gathering involved the use of semistructured, in-person interviews and a review of documents collected from small business manufacturing leaders in Lagos, Nigeria who have sustained their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation.

I did not have an interest in any small business and was never employed by any small business leader in Lagos, Nigeria. I live in Lagos, Nigeria; therefore, some small business leaders in the area were my acquaintances. I planned to open a business consulting service to support the growth and development of small businesses in Lagos. I developed an interest in small businesses while I was supervising lending to SMEs in a Nigerian commercial bank 10 years ago.

The Belmont Report summarized acceptable standards for safeguarding the rights and protection of human subjects of research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHSBBR], 1979). The Belmont Report outlined three basic acceptable standards along with the applications of these standards to research studies involving human subjects (NCPHSBBR, 1979). I explained to the participants the purpose of this study and its potential risks, incentives, consequences, and benefits. I assured the participants of their confidentiality. I observed the three ethical standards for research involving human subjects outlined in Belmont Report in the conduct of this study.

In qualitative studies, researchers employ interviews to gather facts and gain insights and understand attitudes, experiences, procedures, values, and behaviors (Rowley, 2012). Zirima, Nyanga, Mupanti, and Chifamba (2013) suggested that semistructured, in-person interviews allow a researcher the opportunity to capture the views of the participants and further probe topics. Irvine, Drew, and Sainsbury (2012) found that, in semistructured and in-person interviews, the opportunity exists for the development of rapport and natural encounters between interviewees and the interviewer. I used semistructured, in-person interviews to collect data on the strategies that small business manufacturing leaders used to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years of formation. Eight open-ended questions (see Appendix A), asked in the same order during data collection in all the interview sessions, led to the kind of consistency in data collection as suggested by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013).

I recorded and transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews. In qualitative research studies, the researchers must endeavor to curtail unintentional mistakes and researcher influence (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). To lessen possible bias, researchers must consciously recognize and set aside their judgments in research (Anney, 2014). The use of an interview protocol (see Appendix A) helped control my reactions to the interviewees' responses and mitigated the effect of bias and any preconceived notions. I did not interview any business leaders known to me personally and avoided undue influences during the interviews. Foley and O'Connor (2013) suggested the use of an interview protocol to achieve consistency and to strengthen the validity and reliability of the study results. By following the same interview protocol (Appendix A), I covered all relevant topics, without deviation, in the same guided manner with every participant.

### **Participants**

In qualitative research, researchers develop an action plan for the research, including a strategy for selecting participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The process of recruiting and selecting participants can be challenging (Rowley, 2012). An essential requirement for multiple case studies is the recruitment of participants with experience in the subject matter (Yin, 2014). The selection criteria for participants included male or female leaders of small businesses in the manufacturing industry, located in Lagos, who were at least 18-years-old, have sustained their businesses beyond 5 years after formation, and were willing to sign the informed consent form and participate in the study.

I accessed potential participants by selecting eligible small business manufacturing enterprises from a contact list from the Lagos branch of Nigerian Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (NASME). The letter of invitation reached prospective participants through the e-mails available on the contact list obtained from the Lagos branch of NASME. The letter of invitation included an explanation of the purpose of this study, accompanied by the consent form for review by participants. In follow-up telephone conversations, each prospective participant gave their consent orally via telephone and subsequently signed the relevant portion of the form before the interviews commenced.

Selection of three cases was satisfactory for a multiple case design. Mason (2010) determined that a sample size as small as a single case could be appropriate for a doctorate-level research publication. However, Mason opined that appropriate sample size selection should stem from data saturation considerations rather than preconceived sample sizes. The first three business leaders to give their consent constituted the multiple cases for this study and precluded bias in selecting cases for this study. Next, I scheduled the interview time, date, and place that was mutually convenient with each of the selected business leaders. Participation in a qualitative study is voluntary and with informed consent (Patton, 2015). I reminded the participants before the start of the interviews that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw their participation without penalty. The interview session did not begin until I had received the signed informed consent form, in compliance with the standard ethics for research involving human subjects as suggested by Udo-Akang (2013).

Researchers can earn the trust of participants by being honest (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To build relationships and earn participants' trusts, I gave an honest explanation of the purpose of this study, answered queries and addressed concerns of participants, and assured participants of their confidentiality; these ethical strategies were in line with published recommendations for ethical research as described by Ferreira, Buttell, and Ferreira (2015). Consent forms disclosed the relevant information that allowed the participants to confirm the authenticity of this study, in compliance with published standards of ethical research (Check, Wolf, Dame, & Beskow, 2014; Tam et al., 2015).

### **Research Method and Design**

In this study, the purpose was to explore the strategies that small business manufacturing leaders in Lagos, Nigeria used to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation. I interviewed three small business manufacturing leaders and reviewed documents related to the business enterprise that supported and augmented interview data. Following a thorough review of research designs, I selected a qualitative multiple case study design as an appropriate research approach to address the research question.

### **Research Method**

Qualitative research, quantitative research, and mixed research approaches are the three types of research methods used for rigorous studies (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Yin (2014) suggested the use of qualitative research methods with open-ended questions for exploring a subject matter of interest when predetermined answers do not exist. Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013) recommended the use of qualitative research

methods for studying, in a holistic manner, reality as constructed by individuals in the contexts of their worlds. Rowley (2012) described qualitative research methods as a useful means to gather facts; gain insights; and understand attitudes, experiences, procedures, and behaviors.

Wingwon (2012) maintained that quantitative research methods can be used to examine or to explain the causal relationship between variables about a phenomenon of interest. Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013) described quantitative methods as reliant upon measurable knowledge reported numerically. A quantitative method in combination with qualitative method becomes a mixed method or hybrid research (Padgett, 2012). The mixed method involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative data in the study (Patton, 2015) that can require more time and resources than novice doctorate-level research have.

Qualitative methods best capture the lived experiences of entrepreneurs, including their perceptions and challenges faced during the development of their business enterprises (Zirima et al., 2013). Quantitative and mixed approaches were inappropriate for this study, as the purpose of this study did not pertain to cause-and-effect, statistical evaluations, or comparisons of variables using statistically appropriate sample sizes. I selected the qualitative research method for this study because, relative to a quantitative method, a qualitative method allowed for more detailed data about business strategies that a small number of business leaders used to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation.

Qualitative research includes data from interviews, focus groups, observations, and written materials (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013; Petty et al., 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The qualitative method presented an opportunity to interview some successful small business leaders and to review written communications about their companies, resulting in the type of data triangulation recommended by Patton (2015). The use of a qualitative research method allowed for the development of an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research designs include narrative inquiry, phenomenological, ethnographic, and case study (Petty et al., 2012). Researchers use narrative research designs for the recording of single events or a series of historical events told by a small number of individuals (Petty et al., 2012), which was not the focus of this study. The phenomenological design is used by researchers to explore the essence of participants' lived experiences (Englander, 2012; Petty et al., 2012), which was not the purpose of this study. Researchers use ethnographic research to identify, depict, and explain common behavioral patterns, beliefs, and language within an ethnic group (Petty et al., 2012; Shover, 2012), which was beyond the scope of this study.

Case studies are suitable for answering research questions that revolve around a current situation involving how or why something occurs rather than a historical perspective on a phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Researchers use case study research for exploration of contemporary physical systems, using several sources of proof in circumstances where the demarcation between phenomenon and context may not be

distinct (Petty et al., 2012; Yin, 2014). A case study is appropriate for scholarly research situated in a business environment, facilitating the collection of different data for methodological triangulation to arrive at a truthful answer to the research question (Baškarada, 2014). The qualitative research designs, other than a case study, would not allow me to capture the perspectives and experiences leading to an understanding of what decisions and choices business leaders make and how they make them in particular environments (Yin, 2014). Therefore, the selected research design was a case study.

A multiple case study design was the selected research design. A multiple case study may be more compelling and more robust than a single case study, and it involves the description of more than one entity, including the nature, circumstances, and characteristics of the inhabitants of those entities (Yin, 2014). A case study design includes the use of open-ended questions in semistructured interviews and document analysis to obtain an understanding of a single event or multiple situations from the identification of patterns of behaviors (Yin, 2014). I collected data using open-ended questions in semistructured, in-person interviews with the three leaders of the three small business manufacturing enterprises. At the end of the meetings, I also obtained documents related to the business enterprise that supported and augmented interview data from the business leaders. The use of more than one entity, multiple informants, and the collection of company documents were the strengths of this multiple case study leading to data saturation and methodological triangulation. Data saturation and the application of methodological triangulation techniques during the analysis process of a multiple case study increases the trustworthiness of the case study findings (Petty et al., 2012; Verner

& Abdullah, 2012; Yin, 2014). The corroboration of evidence from multiple sources lowers the risk of single sources of data skewing results towards one perspective (Denzin, 2012; Verner & Abdullah, 2012). A multiple case study was the appropriate design for this study to help deepen my understanding of the strategies used by small business leaders to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years of formation.

In this qualitative research, the purpose was to explore the strategies used by small business manufacturing leaders to sustain their business enterprises; sampling concerns pertained to appropriateness and adequacy of the informants in answering the research question. For a qualitative case study, data saturation relates to the depth and breadth of information collected through interviews and documents (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Data stems from engaging those most knowledgeable about the subject matter of the research (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). All three business leaders of the three study cases participated in interviews that led to data saturation. Data saturation occurred with the depth and breadth of data from the three business leaders. Dworkin (2012) claimed that data saturation happens when no new data emerges from repeated interview or data collection efforts in case study research. This research relied upon the three study cases, using methodological triangulation, and member checking to achieve data saturation, leading to conclusive study findings. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) claimed that data saturation could be difficult for a novice researcher to determine; however, data saturation was possible to detect through attention to the quality and meaning of data. I was attentive to the quality and meaning of data to detect data saturation when no new data emerged from ongoing data collection efforts.

Case studies can be multiple or single in design and may be descriptive, explanatory, or exploratory in nature (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) asserted that descriptive case studies are appropriate when describing a phenomenon in a particular context. An explanatory case study design is suitable for explaining how or why some sequence of events occurred or did not happen (Yin, 2014). Exploratory case studies are relevant when researchers seek to define the research problem more precisely for a later research study (Yin, 2014). The selection of a descriptive multiple case study represented the exploration of strategies used by small business manufacturing leaders to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation.

### **Population and Sampling**

This multiple case study involved a population of three small business manufacturing leaders, in Lagos, who had sustained their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation. Lagos state is one of 36 states of Nigeria. Lagos was the choice for the geographical setting of this study because it has the highest concentration of small businesses in Nigeria (SMEDAN, 2015).

Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, and Nigam (2013) suggested that sampling for case study designs is less expensive than random sampling and more likely to result in having informed participants who are able and willing to provide relevant data for answering the research question related to particular population. Random sampling may not yield informed or willing participants who meet specific criteria (Acharya et al., 2013). Sampling methods available for selecting participants include convenience, census, and snowball sampling (Petty et al., 2012). Census sampling involves data collection from all

individuals in a target population (Daniel, 2012). I used census sampling method to select all three business leaders for the selected case study. Census sampling can result in interviews of participants who have information and knowledge about the problem under investigation (Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2013). Snowball sampling involves the help of others (Babbie, 2014), unnecessary for this study. Convenience sampling involves a larger number of volunteers who may or may not have information about a particular phenomenon (Babbie, 2014), not ideal for this study.

Sampling applied to the selection of three small manufacturing business leaders that have sustained their business enterprises beyond 5 years of formation. I accessed business leaders by selecting enterprises from a list of contact information from the National Association of Small and Medium Enterprises, Lagos branch. In this sampling approach, researchers use their judgment to provide boundaries for the case study and participants, based on the study selection criteria (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The criteria for selecting participants included men or women who owned a small business manufacturing enterprise in Lagos state and who sustained their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation. Prospective participants were at least 18-years-old, willing to give consent by signing the informed consent form, and available and willing to participate in this study. No vulnerable individuals were targeted as participants. I ensured all participants met these requirements through their self-report of eligibility and consent to participate in the study.

An essential part of a rigorous research design is to establish the appropriate sample size (Rao, 2012). Sample size decision involved an educated estimation of a

suitable number of research subjects for the selected study method and design (Rao, 2012). Dworkin (2012) stressed that for qualitative research methods, sample size often reflects some research subjects required to reach data saturation (the point at which data become repetitive). Yin (2014) suggested a sample size of three as sufficient for a case study research. Three small business manufacturing leaders were participants for the multiple case study, based on the timing of receipt of their consent. The leaders of the first three enterprises that gave consent were the selected participants for this study.

I used a multiple case study approach in this quest for understanding the participants' strategies for sustaining their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation. A multiple case design allows the researcher to develop more comprehensive, in-depth themes than a single case design (Yin, 2014). Trustworthy findings from this multiple case study stemmed from methodological triangulation, member checking, and data saturation. Reliance upon saturation, member checking, and the use of within-method data triangulation added rigor to the data collection and analysis procedures by enriching data; according to qualitative research experts, these steps enhance the trustworthiness of findings (Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2013).

I conducted the interviews at places suitable to the participants; two of the interviews were in private rooms and the third was in a restaurant. Turner (2010) described a conducive interview environment as a private and comfortable place free from distractions so that study participants can freely share focused, comprehensive, and honest information. I scheduled each interview for 60 minutes; all but one finished within an hour.

### **Ethical Research**

Ethical standards in scholarly research involving human subjects guide the researcher in ensuring the protection of the participants (Udo-Akang, 2013). I obtained the approval of the Walden University Institution Review Board (IRB) before the field research thereby ensured compliance with the ethical standard for the protection of human participants in research. The IRB approval number for the conduct of this study is 05-24-16-0406667 and expires on 27, May 2017. Also, I observed and applied in this study the three ethical standards of respect, beneficence, and justice in dealing with the human subjects of this research, as suggested in Belmont Report (NCPHSBBR, 1979). Each participant received a letter of invitation to participate in this study through email; the letter of invitation included an explanation of the purpose and objectives of this study and the consent form for participants to read and give consent. Participants had opportunities to ask questions or discuss concerns about the study or the informed consent form. Participants appended their signature on the consent form, and I collected the form in person. The informed consent form included the interview questions and a statement indicating recording of the interview session would occur along with the collection of documents that supported and augmented interview data at the end of the interview session.

For research involving human subjects, researchers must observe the ethical standards and obtain informed consent from participants (Yin, 2014). I called and spoke with participants by phone to arrange meeting date, time, and place and reconfirmed a day ahead of schedule. I reminded each participant before the start of each interview that

their participation was voluntary and availed an opportunity for questions or concerns. The informed consent form included contact information, sponsoring institution, the objective of this research, any probable risks, a statement that participation in this study was voluntary, and an explanation that any participant could withdraw at any time from this study. There was little or no psychological, legal, relationship, or other physical factors that posed a risk to the safety or well-being of any participant, based on the nature of the study and interview questions. The risks in this study were the participants taking the time to attend the meeting and the little discomfort or fatigue that participants might have experienced while providing answers to the eight questions in the hour long interviews. These components of an informed consent form comply with the recommendations for ethical research involving human participants (Udo-Akang, 2013) and the requirements for informed consent (Check et al., 2014).

A participant could withdraw from this study by giving notice of intention to withdraw in person or by completing and signing the withdrawal form (see Appendix B) without penalty. Although no participants discontinued after the start of data collection, I planned to exclude and immediately destroy data collected from any participant who did wish to withdraw. There were no payments to participants, based on the reports by Downey and Chang (2013) that payments could introduce sampling bias. I planned to send a two to four page summary of the results and findings of this study to participants by e-mail upon the conclusion of this study.

I applied utmost care throughout all stages of the study to protect and preserve the rights and the privacy of participants, as recommended by Yin (2012). To protect the

privacy rights of participants and to exercise acceptable standards for the confidentiality procedures for human subjects recommended by Beskow, Check, and Ammarell (2014), all data collected were confidential and not used for any purposes outside of this research. All electronic data will remain on a drive with a restricted access code and deleted permanently after 5 years. I stored all written data including the invitation to participants containing contact information of the participants in a physically secured cupboard with restricted access and will shred these documents after 5 years. The explanations to participants included protection of the confidentiality of the individuals and their businesses. Consistent with the published recommendations for confidentiality procedures noted by Wolf et al. (2012), I ensured that published documents did not contain names or any other identifiable information about the participants or their business enterprises. Not publishing names protects the confidentiality of participants (Beskow et al., 2014). The written representations of the participants were through the labels P1, P2, and P3 while business enterprises were through the labels E1, E2, and E3.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

I was the data gathering instrument in the semistructured in-person interviews and collection of company documents that supported and augmented interview data. When the researcher is the research instrument, the researcher must exercise the sensitivity, apply knowledge, and skills that will yield quality data (Rowley, 2012). In qualitative research, researchers can introduce other data collection instruments, as may be required (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Data sources for case studies include archival records, observations, documents, interviews, and physical artifacts. The use of any two data

sources is acceptable (Yin, 2012). I collected data through semistructured interviews using open-ended questions and corroborating company documents such as written business plans, feasibility reports, and strategy documents. Data sources for this study included semistructured in-person interviews and company related documents.

To enhance the usefulness of the instrument, I presented the interview questions to experts for their opinions, as suggested by Ekekwe (2013), for expert validation. Semistructured interviews involve the use of prepared open-ended questions to provide guidance in a consistent and systematic manner, with additional probing techniques that keep conversations focused and productive, leading to in-depth, detailed data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview protocol and the interview questions are in Appendix A. A detailed, well-reviewed, relevant interview protocol is an important tool in qualitative research involving interviews, to enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Yin, 2014). Interview protocols include brief details of the case study, main features of the data collection routine, the precise wording of the interview inquiry, and a study report guide (Yin, 2014).

Researchers use member checking to improve the accuracy, credibility, and verifiability of data collected and analyzed throughout a research (Harper & Cole, 2012). Data cleansing includes deleting all irrelevant data and correcting dirty data (Gschwandtner, Gärtner, Aigner, & Miksch, 2012). I cleaned data by detecting and removing inconsistent data, erroneous data, or unusable data. Cleaned interview data, notes, and data from the review of enterprise documents became inputs for analysis using computer-assisted software such as NVivo, Excel, and Microsoft Word, as recommended

by Yin (2014) for coding, word frequencies analysis, and the output used to determine emerging patterns and themes. After initial interpretations from the data analysis process, I sent each participant a copy of the preliminary findings for review, subsequently discussed the findings with each participant on the phone, and welcomed their new viewpoints.

### **Data Collection Technique**

The data collection in this research involved semistructured interviews and the review of documents related to the business enterprise that supported and augmented interview data. In semistructured interviews, participants express their views and lived experiences about planned items that relate to the research question, at length and in detail (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researchers conduct semistructured interviews based on an interview schedule of open-ended questions delivered in a particular order (Rowley, 2012). Researchers tend to focus narrowly on a particular topic but may introduce probative follow-up questions during the interview for clarity and precision (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In this study, I carried out the semistructured in-person interviews following the interview protocol detailed in Appendix A.

Interviews as a source of data for qualitative research can be time-consuming and involve tedious transcription processes of typically large amounts of recorded data (Doody & Noonan, 2013). However, interviews can lead to in-depth, relevant data with high levels of clarity and meaning that can help provide answers to important, sensitive research questions (Englander, 2012). In this study, I scheduled semistructured in-person interviews at times, dates, and locations that were mutually acceptable and suitable. The

interview sites were two meeting rooms with doors for privacy to avoid distractions and a third interview in a restaurant. The expected duration of each interview was 45 minutes; however, the scheduled time was 1 hour to account for disruptions and to provide an opportunity for the participant to seek any further clarifications on the study or the informed consent form. I spoke with each of the participants to reconfirm meeting dates and times a day before by phone.

Disadvantages of interviews are that they take longer and may be more expensive to conduct than surveys or questionnaires; interviews may lead to extensive data that can be difficult to manage and analyze (Yin, 2012). However, information obtained from interviews has more depth and can result in thorough, meaningful study findings (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). In an in-person interview, developing a personal rapport with an interviewee is important, because the lack of personal rapport may result in the withholding of some personal information by the respondent (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). In-person interviews afford the interviewer the benefit of observing nonverbal communications (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). According to Comi, Bischof, and Eppler (2014), nonverbal communication and suggestive comments are essential to understanding the interview data. Accordingly, nonverbal communication cues and suggestive remarks were documented observations in the research journal, in addition to the audio recording of each interview session. The approach combined verbal and nonverbal expressions, recommended by Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014) in qualitative research.

The review of company documents to support and augment the interview data is a standard approach in data collection involving methodological triangulation in case study research (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Researchers engaged in case study research collect data from two or more sources (Baškarada, 2014), including interviews and documents to establish converging lines of evidence for robust findings (Yin, 2012). Disadvantages of relying upon documents as data include the possibility they may be outdated, irrelevant, incomplete, unavailable, or in some way biased (Yin, 2014). Denzin (2012) claimed that documents relied upon by others in a process are inherently reliable sources of corroborating evidence. I asked for supporting documents after the interview sessions and ensured confidentiality by masking the names of companies and officials, following the recommendations for confidentiality procedures suggested by Check et al. (2014).

To ensure that data collection turned out well using the interview protocol, I tested the recording instrument and interview questions before the main study interviews to refine the interview questions and practice interviewing techniques. Use of the following techniques recommended by Turner (2010) ensured successful interviews. Turner suggested checking the recording device intermittently to make sure it is recording, putting a question at a time to the participant, keeping neutral expressions, taking notes of key points, maintaining the focus of the interview on the subject matter, and managing interview time.

Approval from Walden University IRB is a requirement before the commencement of the field aspect of proposed research. Receipt of Walden University

IRB approval marked the beginning of field work. I obtained contact information of probable participants by getting in touch with the National Association of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises, Lagos branch. I contacted potential study participants by telephone before sending the informed consent form by email. I provided truthful answers to questions about the study and informed consent form and clarified concerns expressed by potential participants about the study. I documented the consent of study participant who indicated a willingness to participate. The collection of the informed consent was in person. Participants' consents showed voluntary agreement to participate in this study and understanding of the terms of the informed consent form. I scheduled interviews with the study participants on dates, at times, and in places suitable for both the study participants and the researcher. I concluded the interviews within 3 weeks and the transcriptions of the recordings of the interviews within 2 weeks of the conclusion of the interviews.

I cleaned data by removing all the visible irrelevant data and correcting dirty data, as suggested by Gschwandtner et al. (2012). I analyzed the cleaned interview data with the aid of CAQDAS for coding and analysis, identifying word frequencies, and searching for emergent themes. I analyzed data as suggested by Rowley (2012). After the initial data analysis phase, I engaged participants in member checking that involved a review of the initial findings and interpretations. Member checking ensures reliable capture of meaning and word choice in the analysis process by giving participants opportunities to offer explanations for the findings, refute findings, or question interpretations (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

### **Data Organization Technique**

Upon arrival at the interview site, I noted the time, date, and meeting venue in a research journal. Before the start of the interview, I reminded the participants that their participation was voluntary. All those involved in the study had opportunities to read the consent form and gave their consents before the interviews started. I recorded the interview sessions with the smart voice recorder option on my Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1. Moreover, handheld LG Smartphone audio recorder served as a backup. I tested both devices before the meeting with the participants and ensured they were in satisfactory working condition. The casual conversation before asking the first interview question served to get the participants in relaxed moods to share their personal experiences, as suggested by Leedy and Ormrod (2013).

Immediately following the interviews, I collected from participants documents about the business enterprise, feasibility report, handbills, and write ups on the company that supported and augmented the interview data. I transcribed the recorded interview answers verbatim by replaying the recordings as many times as was necessary to accurately transcribe the recorded interviews. I cleaned data by removing all irrelevant data, as suggested by Terjesen and Sullivan (2011). Later, after my initial interpretations of data, I engaged each participant in a member checking process. Member checking enhances accuracy in the meaning and word choice in the interpretation process (Houghton et al., 2013).

The use of labels in place of the names of participants, as suggested by Gibson, Benson, and Brand (2013), preserved their confidentiality. The gathering and retention of

data accorded with the IRB requirements of Walden University. I maintained folders containing the transcripts for each study participant, as recommended by Jacob and Furgerson (2012). For this study, I assigned labels *P1*, *P2*, and *P3* to the study participants to mask their identities even though another document would have their names and their assigned labels. The business enterprise documents collected had similar labels, starting with *D1*, continuing to a number that represents the total number of documents received from the business enterprise, along with an Enterprise label of *E1* through *E3*. I maintained sole and exclusive access to all data, aligned with the promise to participants of the safeguarding of their confidentiality as suggested by Check et al. (2014). The electronic data will remain on a drive with a restricted access code and deleted after 5 years. I stored all written representations in a physically secured cupboard with limited access and will shred the written documents after 5 years.

### **Data Analysis**

In this multiple case study, results of the data analysis from the methodological triangulation recommended by Denzin (2012) led to a framework for understanding the strategies used by small business manufacturing leaders to sustain their businesses. Data analysis in qualitative research involves review of data to discover meaningful patterns that lead to thematic answers to the central research questions of a study (Yin, 2012). Methodological triangulation is the most common type of triangulation used in case studies (Anney, 2014) and was an important part of the data analysis process for this study. Methodological triangulation consists of two types: across method and a within method (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Heale & Forbes, 2013). Within method

triangulation involves the use of more than one set of data collected from different sources within one data collection method (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Across method triangulation involves the use of two different data collection methods, such as qualitative and quantitative (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Yin (2012) recommended using multiple rather than single sources of evidence, because of the opportunity to check and recheck consistency of findings from different as well as the same sources. Heale and Forbes (2013) supported the use of multiple sources of evidence leading to methodological triangulation that adds richness and depth to a research inquiry. In this qualitative study, I used within methodological triangulation that included interview data and data from the review of company documents that supported interview data including business plans, feasibility reports, and strategy documents.

In this study, I analyzed data using the four steps recommended by Rowley (2012), which shared some similarities to the five steps noted by Yin (2012). Yin discussed (a) collecting data, (b) grouping data, (c) regrouping data based on themes, (d) evaluating the information, and (e) recognizing emergent themes. Rowley offered four similar steps to the data analysis, as follows. The first step of the Rowley analysis method is organizing the data set. The second step recommended by Rowley involves getting acquainted with data. The third step of Rowley's method includes processes to classify, code, and interpret data. According to Rowley, the last step is to present write-up of the findings.

To organize the dataset, I imported the cleaned interview textual transcript data into NVivo from Microsoft Word. Transcript cleaning includes removal of data that are

not relevant to the topic of the research (Terjesen & Sullivan, 2011). After data cleaning, I gained a thorough knowledge and understanding of data by reading, rereading, and organizing the collected data into categories, based on findings from the literature review and obvious strategies for growing and sustaining small manufacturing businesses. After thorough knowledge and understanding of data, I grouped and coded data. Coding involves labeling sections of data by group names or classifying words and arranging data in groups (Wilson, 2012). Data coding aids recognition of patterns and themes (Baskarada, 2014). The coding features in NVivo software helped expedite the identification of similarities in data.

Following classifications and coding, I searched for major themes among the expressed behavioral patterns, common perspectives, and shared experiences of the participants. The next step involved interpretation of data. Data interpretation included building reliable judgment from data (Turner, 2010). Member checking allowed for validation of findings and interpretation whereby participants offered additional perspective about the interpretation of data and possible reasons for the results (Houghton et al., 2013). I validated my findings and analysis by engaging participants in member checking.

I did the write up of the findings as part of the last stage of data analysis, in light of the conceptual framework and literature reviewed for this study. The conceptual framework was used to ascribe meaning to the research findings as suggested by Borrego, Foster, and Froyd (2014). The holistic perspective of general systems theory was used as the framework to explain the organizational activities of small business leaders to sustain

their businesses beyond 5 years after formation. I compared results to the prior literature findings, with emphasis on themes that helped answer the central research question in comparison to the viewpoints of von Bertalanffy's general systems theory.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Research quality depends on the validity and reliability of the research methodology (Street & Ward, 2012). Reliability and validity connote different senses in qualitative and quantitative research approaches (Anney, 2014). Qualitative research depends on semistructured interview format to strengthen validity and reliability (Foley & O'Connor, 2013). Over time, qualitative researchers addressed dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability as components of trustworthy qualitative research (Anney, 2014). The equivalent of the twin concept of dependability and credibility is reliability and internal validity in qualitative research and quantitative research respectively (Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). Houghton et al. (2013) stressed four critical components (dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability) as criteria for assessing the rigor of qualitative research. I addressed dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability in the study, as described in the following subsections.

#### **Reliability**

The notion of dependability is similar in some ways to reliability in the quantitative study (Munn et al., 2014). The trustworthiness of qualitative research findings derives from dependability and credibility of the qualitative research (Munn et al., 2014). I used the procedure outlined in the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to

enhance the reliability of data gathering process. After completion of each interview, I transcribed verbatim the audio recording of each interview to ensure accurate capture of the views and experiences expressed during the interview (Kornbluh, 2015). I also engaged participants in member checking. Member checking is a recommendation by research experts to enhance the trustworthiness of the reports and the dependability of the results of qualitative studies (Eno & Dammak, 2014). Use of a case study database and computer-assisted analytic software like NVivo further enhanced the dependability of the study, because both help maintains data in ethical, unbiased, and confidential manners (Bailey, Dittrich, & Kenneally, 2013; Yazan, 2015).

### **Validity**

Quantitative research validity is different from qualitative research validity, and some researchers suggested *credibility*, *trustworthiness*, *confirmability*, and *validation* in place of validity in qualitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Credibility concerns the match of source data with researchers' interpretations (Munn et al., 2014). Use of an adequate sample size, methodological triangulation, and member checking heightens the credibility of the study (Harvey, 2014). The credibility of qualitative study is dependent on the interview protocols, data gathering procedures, and skills and knowledge of the researcher being the data collection instrument (Houghton et al., 2013). I collected documents from participants to support and augment the interview data. The use of interview data and data from document review enhanced the credibility of this study. Data saturation occurred when no new information emerges from ongoing data collection effort (Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2013). I engaged participants in the member checking after

the initial analysis of data. Mero-Jaffe (2011) described member checking as engaging participants in the assessment of the first interpretations and inviting their added thoughts, clarifications, concerns, and related remarks about the preliminary interpretations of data.

The qualitative notion of validity pertains to dependability, trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability (Houghton et al., 2013). Transferability involves probing and assessing the qualitative findings regarding generalization outside the context of the study (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). However, transferability depends on the prudent judgments of readers (Anney, 2014). This report includes the detailed descriptions of the context, population, sample, method, and steps applied to help readers make informed assessments.

Houghton et al. (2013) explained that the series of actions for establishing confirmability and dependability are similar. Confirmability encompasses neutrality, the absence of bias, and accuracy of the data collection and analysis procedures (Houghton et al., 2013). The confirmability of the study was improved by triangulation and use of NVivo to mitigate the effect of researcher bias. Admission of limitations, assumptions, and possible sources of bias through in-depth descriptions within the final report allow others to scrutinize the integrity of the research process (Anney, 2014).

### **Transition and Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the strategies that small business leaders in Lagos, Nigeria used to sustain their manufacturing enterprises beyond 5 years after formation. Within-method data triangulation used in this

study included the use of interview data and data from a review of company documents. Census sampling led to the selection of the three small manufacturing business leaders in Lagos Nigeria. I obtained approval from Walden University IRB to collect field data before commencement of data collection. I recorded and transcribed in-person interviews. I analyzed data after data cleaning, with the aid of NVivo software to expedite the identification of similarities in data.

In Section 2, I reiterated the research objective, discussed details of my function as the researcher, the participants, and the elected research methodology and design with justifications for the choices made. Section 2 continued with a portrayal of the population, the sampling method, and the research ethics. Next, I explained data collection and analysis techniques and concluded section 2 with an explanation of the methods and techniques for ensuring the reliability and validity of the study findings.

In Section 3, I start with a brief presentation of the study topic, including the research question. The section continues with an explanation of study findings, its applications to business practice, and implications for societal change. Recommendations based on results of research, suggestions for further research and my reflections conclude section 3.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the strategies used by small business manufacturing enterprise leaders in Lagos, Nigeria to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation. I posed eight open-ended interview questions, in the same order, to my three business leaders based in Lagos, Nigeria. I used within-methodological triangulation of data that included interview data and data from the review of company documents as recommended by Heale and Forbes (2013). Ten major themes emerged from my analysis of data.

The major themes pertained to (a) focus, determination, and perseverance of business leaders; (b) minimizing debts and overhead expenses; (c) high quality products; (d) strategic planning and preparation; (e) family support and encouragement; (f) quality staff; and (g) record keeping. I compared the results of my analysis and interpretation to the prior literature findings, with an emphasis on themes that helped to answer the central research question in comparison to the viewpoints of von Bertalanffy's general systems theory.

I found that small business leaders' success strategies, like minimizing debt and overhead expenses, good record keeping, skills, and expertise are essential for small business success. Additionally, small business leaders can achieve success by engaging in research, strategic planning and preparation before launching their business idea which should reflect the needs and tastes of their customers. Small business leaders must also select the appropriate marketing promotion and markets for their products and services.

### **Presentation of Findings**

In this study, I used data from the interviews of the study participants and data from a review of company written communications, including the feasibility study, business plan, hand bills, and executed contracts to achieve data triangulation, as recommended by Patton (2015). The collection and analysis of interview data and document reviews helped to answer the following overarching research question that guided this study: What strategies do small business manufacturing leaders in Lagos, Nigeria use to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years after formation? The interview data constituted the bulk of the data garnered for this study. I achieved data saturation with the depth and breadth of data from the three business leaders, using methodological triangulation and member checking, as suggested by O'Reilly and Parker (2012).

My analysis involved reading and rereading the verbatim transcriptions of interview data to better understand participants' reports of their experiences. While taking notes and reviewing documents collected from participants, I strove to identify potentially significant concepts. Inspecting individual interview notes and data led me to develop a summary of participants' unique experiences, as well as identification of the shared concepts, word patterns, and phrases.

After transcribing recorded interviews, I entered textual data into a qualitative data analysis software program. I used the program to identify overarching categories and important words and phrases related to the research questions that were prominent in the data. I was able to generate word, concept, and phrase counts. The manual inspection of codes and categories led me to group together like terms and phrases, which allowed me

to identify larger patterns within data. The results from the computer-aided qualitative data analysis and Rowley's 4 step analysis led to the emergence of 10 major themes. Table 1 is a summary of the 10 major themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis process.

Table 1

*Summary of Emergent Themes*

Theme	Description of Major Theme
1	Minimizing costs and indebtedness.
2	High-quality products and consistently high-performance standards.
3	Research for strategic planning and preparation.
4	Meeting the needs and personal tastes of local consumers.
5	Marketing and promotions involving distributors and competition with importers.
6	Education and training through school, college, books, and ongoing study.
7	Objective-oriented focus, determination, and perseverance.
8	Competent, committed, and trained staff.
9	Relatives as sources of support, motivation, and encouragement.
10	Essential recordkeeping to comply with law, policy, protocol, regulations, tax, and documentation requirements.

The following subsections include descriptions of the study participants and their small business enterprises. Also included are descriptions of each major theme, along with explanations of the supporting document findings and the words, phrases, and

participant quotes that provided support for each major theme. The subsections include the comparison of the thematic findings with published peer-reviewed literature, also tying the findings to general system theory, the conceptual framework for this study.

### **Study Participants**

Participant 1 (P1) led a small business enterprise (E1) and provided me with a copy of the business feasibility study report (D1E1) strictly for research purposes. P1 also allowed me to review documents that provided an overview of the enterprise's business for potential equity investors (D2E1). The enterprise had been in business for over 16 years. It distributed packaged Gari to more than 40 third-party supermarkets in Lagos and also sold directly to end users. P1 was 48-years-old. P1 held a postgraduate degree (MSc) in agricultural economics and was a chartered accountant.

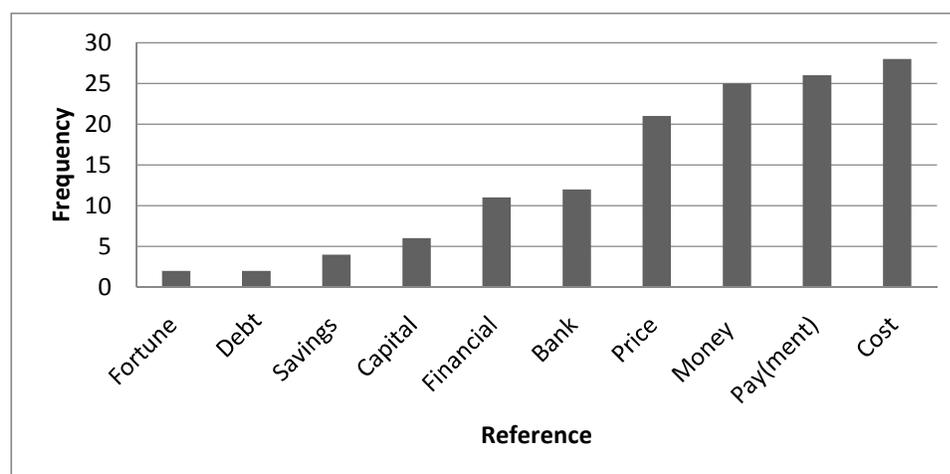
Participant 2 (P2) led a small business enterprise (E2) and did not have a documented feasibility study report or business plan. P2 did make available to me copies of handbills used in the marketing of the enterprise's products, recent contract agreements with its clients, and purchase orders executed by the enterprise. The enterprise had been in business for more than 5 years. It produced and distributed its brand of paints and offered residential and commercial painting services. The enterprise distributed its paints through paint dealers, sold directly to end users, and used its brand of paints to execute residential and commercial painting services. P2 was 52-years-old and held a higher national diploma in purchasing and supply.

Participant 3 (P3) led a small business enterprise (E3) and granted me a supervised review of the enterprise's feasibility report (D3E3) on a computer laptop in

the business office. P3 also gave me access to copies of handbills used in the marketing of the enterprise's products. The enterprise had been in commercial production and distribution of shower gel and multipurpose liquid soap for more than 5 years. The enterprise distributed its products through supermarkets and sold directly to end-users through its retail shops. P3 was 58-years-old and holds a bachelor's degree in business administration.

### **Theme 1: Minimizing Costs and Indebtedness**

Minimizing costs and indebtedness, according to all of the participants in the study, led to their small business successes. Each participant discussed the financial responsibilities of owning his or her business. Figure 1 includes a summary of participants' references to financial terms during their interview sessions. The more frequently discussed terms included costs, money, capital, prices, payments, and banks. My findings from the review of the feasibility reports (D1E1, D3E3) indicated preference for equity and internally generated funds as sources of finance, consistent with the experiences shared by P1 and P3. Participants referenced finances 11 times while discussing income, expenses, and debts. Regarding debts, their concerns were about capital, banking institutions, high debts, and escalating interest rates.



*Figure 1.* Participants' references to financial terms.

About bank loans, P3 explained, “I put my personal savings, money from my wife, and my children together to establish...it was not an easy effort. We struggled through it... I was able to start, but up till now, we are still managing.” Similarly, P1 said, “for finance; we were able to fund it from our savings.” P1 also added, “People have shown interest to put money in the business ... not bank loans – equity, trusted friends - people that have shown interest in the business and that will prepare us for the long haul.” P1 further added, “be ready to take care of that business ... do not take money from your business, keep putting money in ... especially when the business is new, try as much as possible to put money in the business.” Like P1 and P3, P2 also relied on personal savings to finance the business start-up; he said: “I had a little fund to start the business.” The three participants preferred using personal and family savings as equity instead of bank loans to launch and sustain their business ideas. P1's willingness to give up equity holding in exchange for external financing confirmed Fadahunsi's (2012) finding that

small businesses with owners who are more willing to give up some equity holding in exchange for external finance are more likely to survive and grow.

Figure 2 includes a summary of participants' concerns about expenses. They expressed concerns about overhead, salaries, many payments associated with the production of products, and other costs. Specific payments and costs mentioned included facilities, outsourcing, technology, training, product manufacturing, marketing, and distribution expenses. P2 said, "you are using the money to produce ... as time goes on the money I am losing I will still gain it back at the end of the day." P1 explained, "Over the years we keep our cost low which is also very important. We do much outsourcing... we outsource so that we can focus on our core business." P1 added, "Sustaining your business you must keep your cost low, and that is why I have been talking about outsourcing ... look for people who are more skilled and can do it better." P3 similarly spoke about the need to "keep our cost low to ensure that we grow the business ... We also have outsourced all forms of transportation including delivery... buying agents ... people who help us with packing which we will pay on a contract basis."

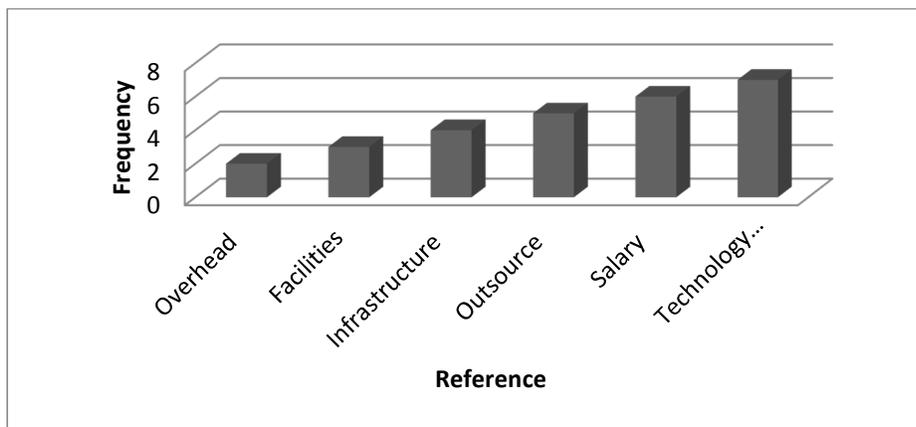
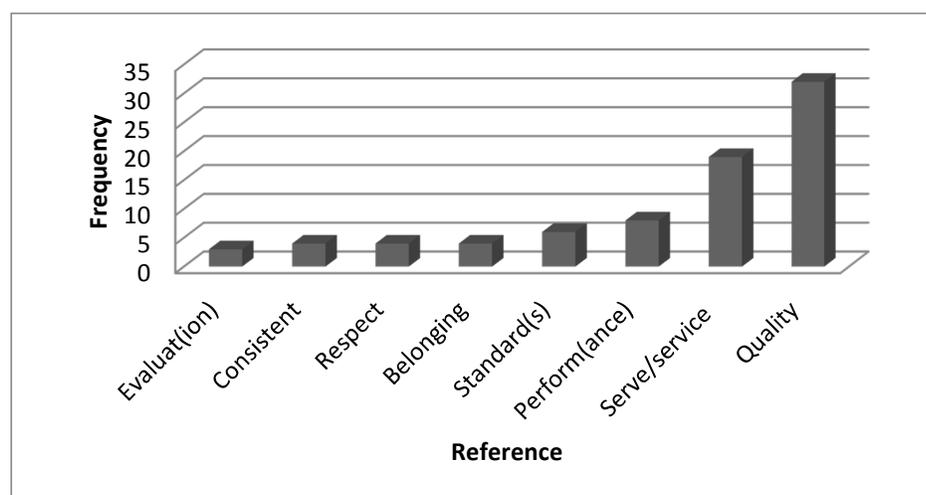


Figure 2. Participants' references to expenses.

The strategy of monitoring and keeping costs low, used by the participants, confirmed the findings in the literature that leaders of successful enterprises continually restructure their operations in response to business challenges (Adeoye & Elegunde, 2012). General systems theory relates to the theme of minimizing costs and debts because it affects the whole activities of the enterprise. The strategy of minimizing costs and debts affects the enterprise as a whole and cannot be viewed separately but in the context of the whole activities of the enterprise in achieving its objectives (Almaney, 1974; von Bertalanffy, 1968). All three participants expressed an awareness and understanding that their business decisions were dependent upon an analysis of environment; the environment creates the opportunities, threats, and problems for the business enterprises (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013). The environment influences the strategies adopted and performances of the business enterprises (Njanja, Ogutu, & Pellisier, 2012).

### **Theme 2: High Quality Products and Consistently High Performance Standards**

High quality products and consistently high performance standards are requirements for Nigerian small business success, according to the participants in the study. As shown in Figure 3, performance pertains to product and service consistency and conforming to high standards. Evidenced in business planning documents, there is emphasis in the business plans on high quality products and performance. Participants described how high quality, service consistency, and conforming to high standards garner consumer respect, which increases their sense of belonging in the community.



*Figure 3.* Participants' references to quality, service, and performance.

About quality, P2 said, “we have to know the different qualities ... what will speak for your paint product is one the quality, two the price, so you have to examine the quality.” P2 added, “The first objective is quality ... better quality than most .... People do not know it, but you have to come out and tell them that you have a better quality.” P3 said, “we have quality ... we are trying to improve.” P1 talked about the “scarcity of quality” and claimed, “quality is very key... we felt that quality was very important, so that was very key to us... approach the market with that kind of orientation ... make sure the quality is very good.” P1 added, “About our quality, we go beyond ourselves to ensure that we win.... Word of mouth is paramount to us.” The participants confirmed the dependency of sound business decisions on an analysis of the environment because the opportunities, pressures, and challenges of business enterprises stem from their environments (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013).

About service, performance, and evaluations, P3 said, “Encourage those that perform, performance appraisal is necessary. Build your team, the people you can relate

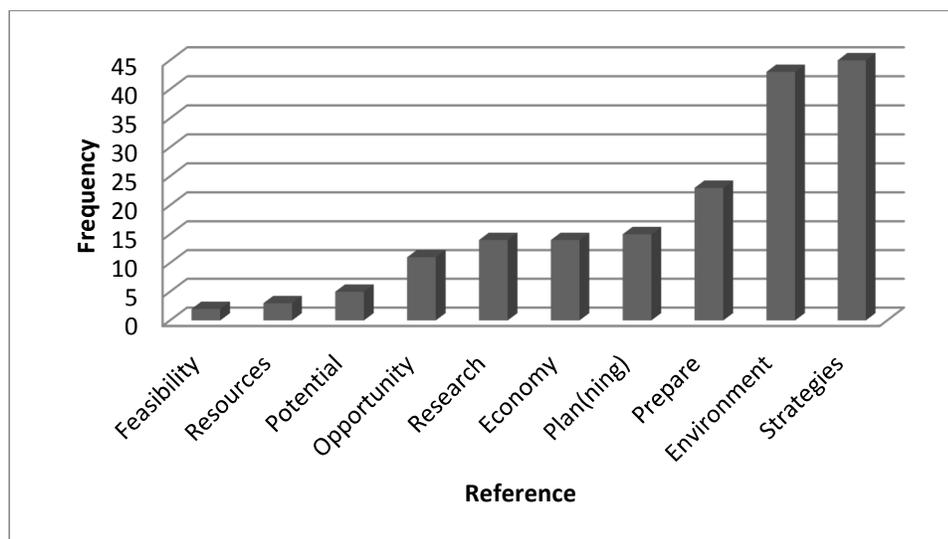
with properly. Build the culture of the business. Reputation matters.” P3 elaborated, “I tell you bad reputations could bring down businesses. Good communication, good customer services, training of staff on how to deal with clients is critical.” P2 advised, “be consistent...consistency matters.” P3 said, “you are running the business you have to be formal in your dealings with your staff, though you may be friendly, you have to be serious, organize properly...dress appropriately, speak official language... make sure your staff wears are corporate... standards.” P3 claimed that as a result of these measures, “people will respect you.”

Business success is dependent on the ability of business leaders to build teams with skills and talents that complement their skills and talents (Oyeku et al., 2014). Business success results from teamwork; teamwork is a product of working environment, leadership style, and employee motivation, which influences product quality and consistent high performance standard (Jayaweera, 2015). The theme of high quality products and consistent high performance standards that emerged from my data analysis aligned with concepts of the general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968). The quality and the consistent high performance standard is a product of interactions between the elements of the business enterprises and the environment (Segatto et al., 2013; von Bertalanffy, 1968).

### **Theme 3: Research for Strategic Planning and Preparation**

As shown in Figure 4, participants’ research for strategic planning and preparation involved feasibility studies and investigation into the economy, environment, resources, and potential opportunities. Although not all of the participants referred specifically to a

“feasibility” study, one participant provided feasibility study documents and another granted a supervised review of similar materials. All of the participants discussed the research they conducted to determine the most appropriate strategies for identifying potential opportunities in the environments in which they intended to operate their businesses before they committed their resources to the business. Planning strategies included an emphasis on preparation and an understanding of the economy and the resources available in the environment. Business planning is the key to the success of a small business enterprise (Uddin & Bose, 2013).



*Figure 4.* References to strategic planning and preparation.

P3 explained, “We conducted research through opinion sampling, leaflet distribution, and personal contact with the age group and class of people that may patronize us, or patronize our products and services.” P3 elaborated, “We put into consideration the physical environment, the media, the economy of the country, the available technology that could help; infrastructures, especially power and roads, and the

economy in general.” P2 talked about the “changes in business environment ...two different types of environment... controllable and uncontrollable environment.” About the “environment that is controllable” P2 elaborated, “that is your cost price... the method of distribution ...marketing management ... product life cycle... notice that ... in your environment.” P1 advised, “Don’t dabble into what you do not know Investigate! Investigate! Investigate!”

Use of local resources appeared to vary by type of products offered. Findings from the review of D3E3 indicated that local sourcing of raw materials was identified as a key strategic imperative for survival of the enterprise. About resources, P3 said, “We have short term and long term plans... some adjustments here and there because of vagaries of the economy, vagaries of the exchange rate, we adopted the idea of using local resources, local materials... the cheapest, though quality ...raw material.” However, P2 said, “We import most of the materials we use [so] the cost of production will determine the selling price.” About resources, P3 said, “avoid waste...take inventory; inventory is necessary... when you do not take inventory, when you do not take stock, you will short chain yourself.”

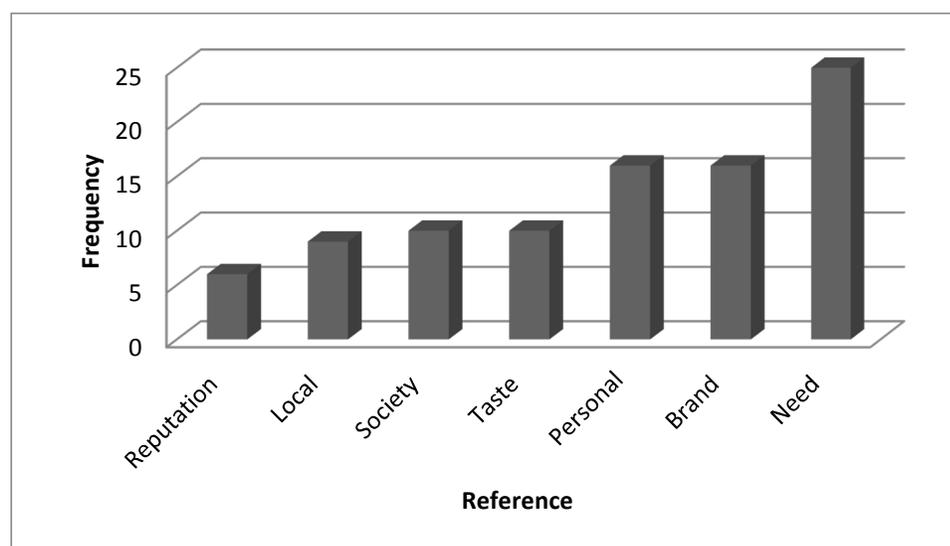
P3 also offered, “I examined myself as well, my SWOT analysis, strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, of myself, of the environment... if a country is not developing economically, you can hardly find businesses that will prosper financially, properly.” P1 said, “Lagos is a metropolitan city--if we do it properly we can target the middle and the top end of the market... that was how we started.” P1 added, “We did that

analysis looking at the opportunities in the market and realized that there is a supply gap; we tried to fill that supply gap.”

As pointed out by Chwolka and Raith (2012), strategic business planning begins with the identification and development of a business opportunity, followed by the means to ensure survival and performance. The emergent theme of research for strategic planning and preparation aligned with the general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968). The strategy of research for planning and preparation involved the study of how the activities of the enterprises will influence and be influenced by the environment in which the enterprise will operate (Segatto et al., 2013; von Bertalanffy, 1968).

#### **Theme 4: Meeting the Needs and Personal Tastes of Local Consumers**

According to participants in the study, small business success depends on meeting the needs and personal tastes of local consumers, building a customer base through the brand reputation that appeal to the people. All of the participants emphasized the importance of understanding the needs of their customers, which they claimed led to their business success. Regarding product appeal, as reflected in Figure 5, the participants in the study stressed the need to build strong positive reputations based on their abilities to offer products that catered to the personal tastes of the people in their local communities.



*Figure 5.* References to personal tastes and needs of consumers.

This theme confirmed the finding by Oginni and Adesanya (2013) that business leaders need to understand the trends in the business environment and forces that shape competition to align their business strategy with the trends in the business environment. This finding also confirmed the finding by Beaver (2003) that for a firm to remain in business, the owners must adapt to changing circumstances of the business environment. While the discussion of “products” occurred 89 times in the interviews, references to the people served by the business owners occurred 83 times. The ability to cater to the personal tastes of local consumers was a reported tactic for competing successfully with their competitors, including importers. The participants emphasized building a positive brand reputation through researching, listening, and responding to the needs of the costumers (which participants also called consumers and patrons).

P1 claimed, “Our core objectives starting a business... is to serve society and meet certain needs that demand attention, to put the interest of people at heart, and meet

their needs... to innovate products that could be useful to the society.” P1 elaborated, “we have built a reputation ...that is critical to us because that is the feedback from the market and we are always listening to our customers for improvements in the business... responding to changes in the market.” P2 also claimed, “You cannot produce without carrying the users along. You know what they want. You know what the environment wants, and you use your capability to produce what they want. It is there, and then they accept it immediately.” P2 added, “I have to study the consumer behavior income wise ... people around this environment are not comparable to people around Ajah, Lekki or Victoria Island ... you have to consider their income because their income will determine their taste.” P3 said, “Increase market share through branding, good reputation, truthfulness to customers, diversification... study the situation... be aware of the economic situation, the environment, what is going on.” P3 added, “when your reputation is high, the word of mouth... you please your customers... interacting with customers... know where lapses are to improve.”

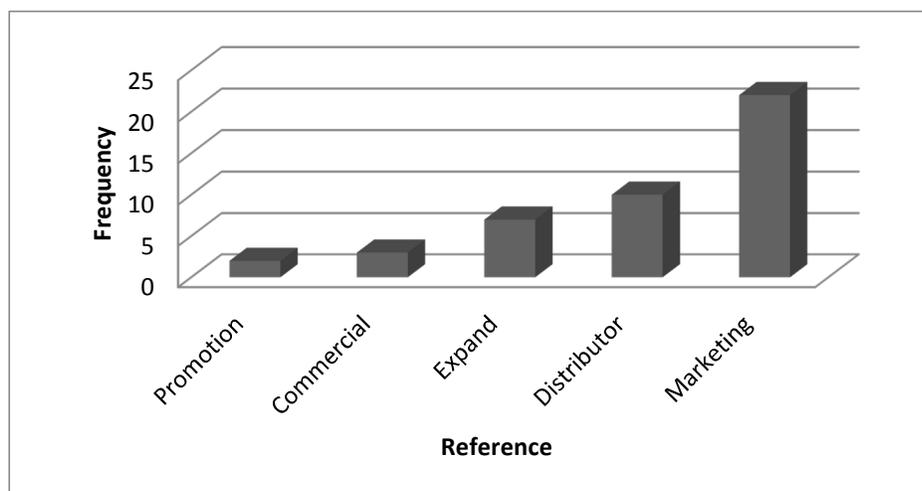
The strategy of tailoring product offerings with quality and price considerations aligned with the findings of Beaver (2003) that for a firm to remain in business, the owners must be able to adapt to changing circumstances of a dynamic business environment. This strategy also confirmed the finding of Philip (2011) that product offerings and environment are significant factors for small business success. The emergent theme of matching product offerings with the requirements of the environment aligned with general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968). The strategy of matching product offerings with tastes and needs of the market reflects the complexity of the

interactions and exchanges between the enterprise and the environment, viewable in the context of the whole activities of the enterprise (Dominici, 2012).

### **Theme 5: Marketing and Promotions Involving Distributors and Competition with Importers**

Marketing and promotions to help businesses expand include distributors and competition with importers. All of the participants in the study sample discussed marketing and the importance of reaching their target market, concepts that together were in the interview data 84 times. Added documentation pertaining to marketing included handbills that provided support for the interview data offered for this study. The idea of marketing and reaching out to the target market involved the concepts of “promotions” and “commercials.” However, the more frequently cited concept about marketing involved product distributors, discussed seven times through all of the interviews.

Marketing, using promotions, commercials, and distributors were ways that the business leaders in the study used to expand their small businesses in Nigeria. This finding confirmed the finding by Cronin-Gilmore (2012) that the use of quality marketing can improve the probability of small business success. Similarly, the importance of marketing to the survival and development of small businesses was emphasized by Karanja et al. (2013).



*Figure 6.* References to marketing and promotions.

P3 focused on “the marketing ... we intend to build...having studied our competitors, suppliers, and customers, in line with international best practices.” P2 said, “There is what we call sale concept and marketing concept. What I did then was a kind of marketing concept... when you go into the market that is when you commercialize your product, we call it product commercialization.” P2 also talked about the importance of “marketing, purchasing, and supply...production experience... marketing experience... procurement experience ...to get recognition.” P1 said, “You have a product you are selling, so there was more of marketing and sales.” However, P1 also described a marketing approach more focused on word of mouth than on paid commercials, claiming, “people do much marketing for us, and it is also a deliberate policy, I mean strategy, using the word of mouth keeping your cost low to grow the business.”

About product distributions, P2 said, “to come and compete the strategy used was to run production and start distributing free ...to everybody around this place... you will go and collect it because you are not paying anything ...people started using it” and say,

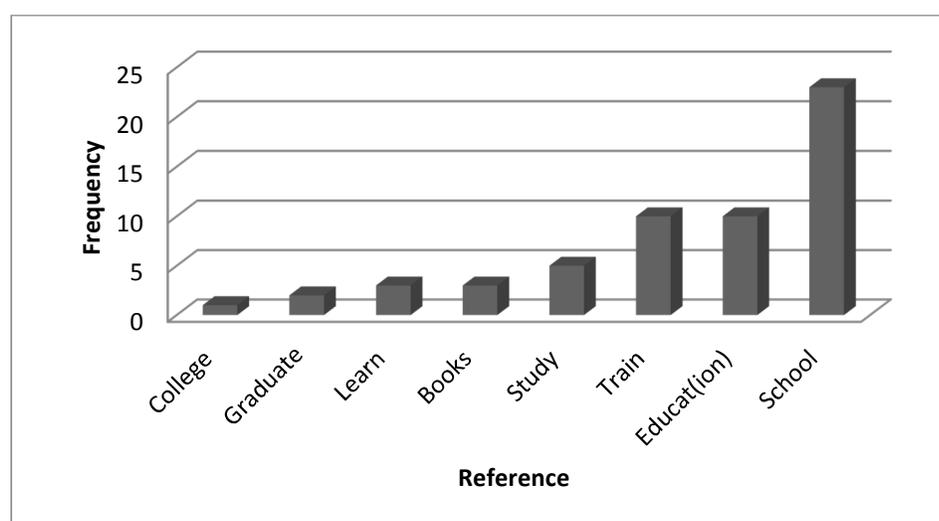
“whoa this thing is super.” P2 added, “To grow the business I will continue to grow the retail business through distributors as well as the direct sales in my immediate environment and beyond using direct marketing efforts as well as the Internet.” P1 also shared, “we said to ourselves we have to rely on third parties... sales we must be making sales, so from day one, we focused on using third party outlets.” P3 discussed the key roles of staff in the distribution and sales roles, offering, “We endeavor to expand our sales... We have key staffs that help ... moreover, our goods are doing fine in the market; people patronize us, and we are trying to build our brand... we are trying.”

The emergent theme of marketing and promotions involving distributors and competition with importers aligned with the concept of general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968). For small business enterprises to survive, the leaders must reach-out to the stakeholders in the business environment. The enterprise must demonstrate that their product offering is a better alternative to imported brands, through efforts in traditional and technology-based marketing schemes. General systems theory focus is on the whole enterprise, including the people and technology put to work to achieve the objectives of the enterprise (Wilson, 2012).

### **Theme 6: Education and Training through School, College, Books, and Ongoing Study**

Education and training involving school, college, books, and ongoing study are critical to small business success, according to the small business owners who contributed to this study in Lagos, Nigeria. As shown in Figure 7, all of the participants discussed the different forms of education they accessed to prepare themselves for small

business ownership in Lagos, Nigeria. Education was important to the small business owners, to build knowledge and skills required for small business success. Documents provided in support of this theme included seminar materials on recently-attended training seminars. The importance of education to the success of a small business is consistent with the findings in the published literature; for example, Fadahunsi (2012) found that typically, the more educated small business leaders experience more successful business growth.



*Figure 7.* References to education and training.

According to participants in the study, education and training are also important for staff members. While undergraduate and graduate college programs were relevant to some of the participants, others stressed additional avenues of learning for leaders and staff, including reading related books and literature obtained from the library, engaging in independent study, and attending seminars. This theme confirmed the finding by Mitchelmore and Rowley (2013) that the knowledge of the business leaders and their staff were the primary determinants of the success of small business enterprises. The

emergent theme of education and training aligns with the concept of general systems theory (Sturmberg et al., 2014; von Bertalanffy, 1968). Small businesses acquire new properties, including intellectual capital as property, heightening informed interactions with the environment, building upon a state of continual evolution (von Bertalanffy, 1968).

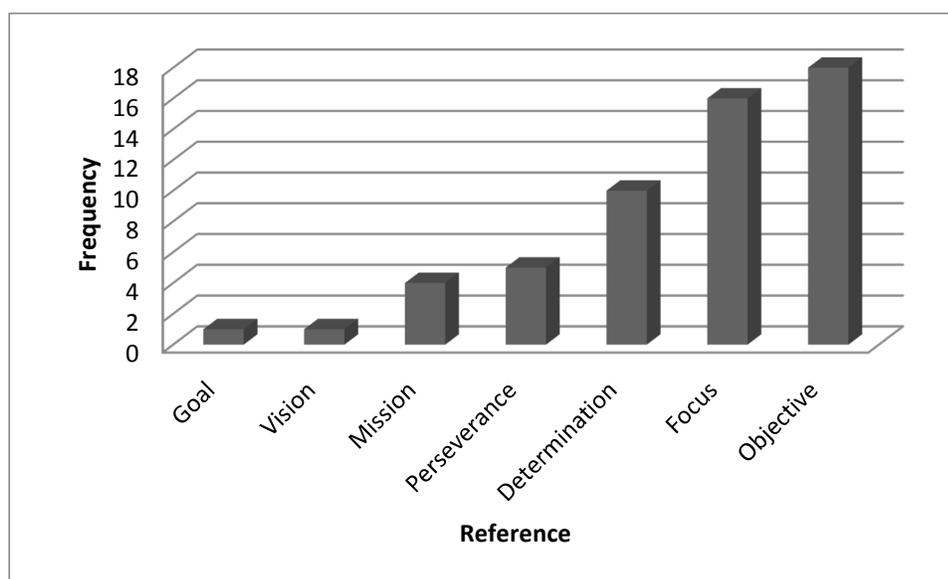
P3 described experiences, “I trained myself and with the help of others...through training... educational background... business MBA as well... through training, attending various seminars... reading relevant literature ... going to libraries and researching.” P3 added, “Improve our experiences... moreover, train our workers- we have key staffs that help ... we train our staffs as well so that they will be able to improve and expand the business in future.” P1 emphasized, “Continuous research and training... stagnation will bring the business down.” P2 advised, “Sit down from time to time to think of different ways; you can learn something from somebody.” P2 explained, “You may sit down and bring in another idea that if you add that idea to what you have learned you make your own better than the one that taught you that thing - that is innovation.” All the participants benefited from educational programs because they either graduated from a university or polytechnic program that helped them develop the skills and conceptual knowledge that augmented the experience acquired from working to run a successful small business.

Through member checking, a participant (P3) identified the importance of the strategy of cultivating of relationship, networking, and professional support for survival and growth of business enterprises. The importance of professional support for the

growth of the small business was confirmed by the finding of Arthur et al. (2012) that lack of professional support accounts for the lack of growth in some small businesses. The importance of the strategy of cultivating relationships, networking, and professional support was confirmed by the finding of Gao et al. (2012) that the cultivation of relationships and networking for strategic sustainability was critical to small business success. Ferguson (2012) also found that education occurs through networking with professional advisors and other business leaders through membership in industry associations that enhance the success of business enterprises. This strategy aligned with general system theory because the success of small business enterprises may depend on the ability of their leaders to self-correct based on feedback obtained from interactions with each other and their environments (von Bertalanffy, 1968).

#### **Theme 7: Objective-oriented Focus, Determination, and Perseverance**

Figure 8 is a summary of the terms that small business owners used to emphasize their descriptions of the focus, determination, and perseverance needed to meet specific objectives, missions, visions, and goals. Additional documentation in support of this theme included correspondences with regulatory bodies and their demands, which reflected challenges and how they managed those challenges while growing their businesses. Of these qualities, focus and determination were the most frequently cited by participants in this study. Objectives were important to the small business owners who completed the interviews for this study, who also discussed their missions more than goals or vision.



*Figure 8.* References to objectives, focus, determination, and perseverance.

P2 said, “What I used was low price, high quality - that was my objective ...the first objective is that I am going to that market to be the market leader.” P3 said, “The primary objective may be financial objectives...key strategic objectives...objectives like creating employment.” P1 added, “There is also family objective...so that you will have time for the home if that count as objective - those were some of the things we set out to achieve.”

About focus, P3 said, “You know the economy is so bad that, if you cannot find your way, and work hard, and focus, you will not be able to achieve anything in the country.” P1 said, “We kept pushing ... because we were focused.” P2 shared, “here in Nigeria, for somebody to remain in business for a very long time that person needs to be focused, needs to have focus, then must be dedicated to whatever he or she is doing.” P2 added, “Focus, determination, and perseverance have been my key strategy to sustain my business.”

Related to this theme is the finding in the literature by Fahed-Sreh and Morin-Delerm (2012) that small business leaders' successes stem from their commitment to excellence. Also consistent with this theme is the finding of Shonubi and Taiwo (2013) that inherent personality traits, such as the ability to undertake risks and the satisfaction derived from owning a business, drive the commitment of business leaders, leading to the success of their business enterprises. The theme pertaining to focus, determination, and perseverance to meet objectives, missions, visions, and goals aligned with general systems theory. The success or failure of a small business enterprise may depend on the flexibility of the business leaders to sustain commitment and make changes based on feedback or challenges as the business interacts with the environment (von Bertalanffy, 1968).

#### **Theme 8: Competent, Committed, and Trained Staff**

All the participants in this study agreed that competent, committed, trained staff was essential to small business success. Participants referred to their staff and their roles as employers a total of 54 times throughout their interviews. In addition, documents reviewed for this study included an emphasis on staff training and support. The study by Cordeiro (2013) underscored the importance of having competent and trained staff so that business leaders may devote more time to strategic matters. As shown in Figure 9, during their discussions about the importance of staff and their roles as employers, participants also referred to their employees as "workers" and one participant emphasized the significance of the employment of youth in the area.



*Figure 9.* References to staff, training, and workers.

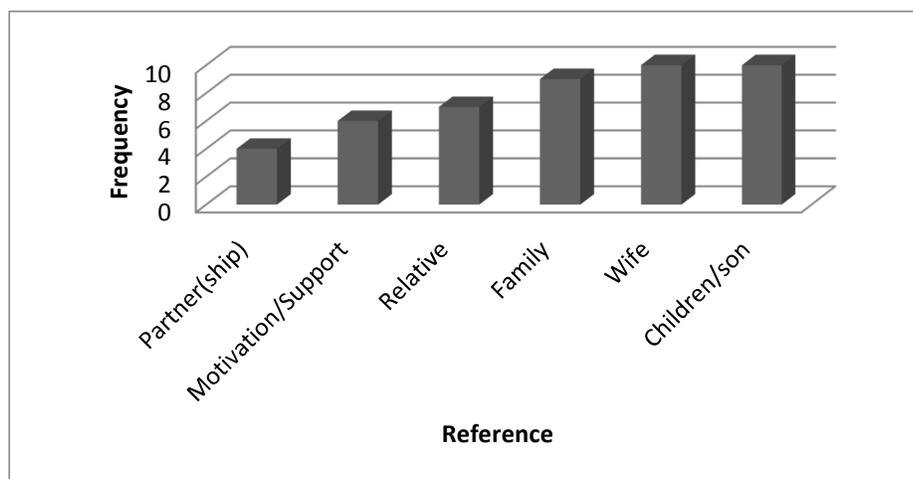
P1 said, “We also have people... permanent staff over time- we now have to employ some permanent staff because the level of the business has grown... evolved from one or two people [to]... 12 to 15 people.” P1 added, “Still a small business, but from where we started from I mean based on where we started from it has evolved.” P2 said, “With your staff... you have to be serious, organize properly... caution them. Even after cautioning them, they will still make mistakes. If you know, they are good, advise them again.” P3 said, “The staff is on the line, you cannot breach the rules... I do not delay with my staff salary. ... I will be honest, foresight, proactive. You have to treat your staff well ... You have to motivate them.” P3 also shared, “We train our staffs as well... creating employment for youths is very important to us... bring them together ... and they are useful to the society now.” P3 elaborated on the “training of staffs” and claimed the “best you could have in business is not the raw material, not the machinery” and instead is “trustworthy, well-trained, well-equipped staffs. Invest in people trusted

ones... you must have your key staffs. It is hard to get in this country.” P3 emphasized, “Participatory management, brainstorm, and unlock the potential of responsible staff... nurture them, mentor them, and train them.”

This theme was consistent with the findings in the research literature by Jayaweera (2015) that leadership practices positively influence employee perceptions of work climate, employee motivation, and job performance, and so, contribute to the success of the business enterprise. Alese and Alimi (2014) also found the alignment of enterprise goals with individual goals helps individuals and business enterprises succeed. The wholeness view of system theory aligned with this theme because the success of the enterprises not only depends on the leaders but also upon the quality of staff that collectively influences the whole organization (von Bertalanffy, 1968).

#### **Theme 9: Relatives as Sources of Support, Motivation, and Encouragement**

As shown in Figure 10, immediate family members and other relatives are sources of small business owner trust, support, motivation, and encouragement. Although specific documents reviewed did not refer specifically to family members, references to family, which included family relative, wife, son, and children, occurred 36 times in the data. While those participants who mentioned partners did not do so favorably, all of the participants discussed the involvement of various family members are necessary forms of motivation and support.



*Figure 10.* References to family, motivation, trust, and support.

P1 said, “When you go into business, is not just to make money- you are meeting a need and for my wife who was not in paid employment, she was able to meet more people she was getting non-financial benefits.” Those non-financial benefits P1 described included, “the opportunity even to go out, market, talk to people and then generally be satisfied with running the business.” P3 explained, “You cannot do everything, but you cannot ... start a business and leave it to people, unless you are sure, they are your children, fine. They are your family, fine.” The participants’ motivation for starting a business was consistent with the findings by Ionitã (2012) that the desire to realize personal goals or to offer a source of income for the family could be the motives for business enterprise formation. Family support and encouragement for small business leaders was also the focus of Adisa et al. (2014) who found that business owners or their relatives usually manage small businesses.

P3 warned, “Do not go into partnership anyhow; your partner could be the one to undo you ... trustworthy people, you will know after about a year... gradually you will

start to entrust... before you get there, do not let them finish you.” P3 said, “Those you can take as your family, as everything successor- plan for succession - successor you must have it.” P2 similarly said, “Children should have something they will inherit.” P3 claimed, “You can only entrust these things on your children... you have got be careful, make your investigation very well, before you bring people on board, because they could undo you.”

Although participants’ motivations for going into business included the provision of self-employment, the motives beyond the provision of self-employment may have contributed to the successes of their business enterprises. This theme was consistent with findings of Beaver (2003) that small business enterprises were more likely to fail if the primary motivation for their set up was to provide employment for the owner, rather than principles which may include greater autonomy and independence.

#### **Theme 10: Essential Recordkeeping to Comply with Law, Policy, Protocol, Regulations, Tax, and Documentation Requirements**

Figure 11 is a summary of how different participants offered their experiences with Nigerian laws, regulations, and taxes. Although not all the participants discussed laws, policies, or protocols, all of the participants in the study did discuss the role of the government, regulations, and taxes. Supporting documents reflected an extensive commitment to compliance with laws, policies, regulations, taxation, and related documentation requirements. All of the participants also stressed the importance of documents, documentation, and recordkeeping to their small business success.

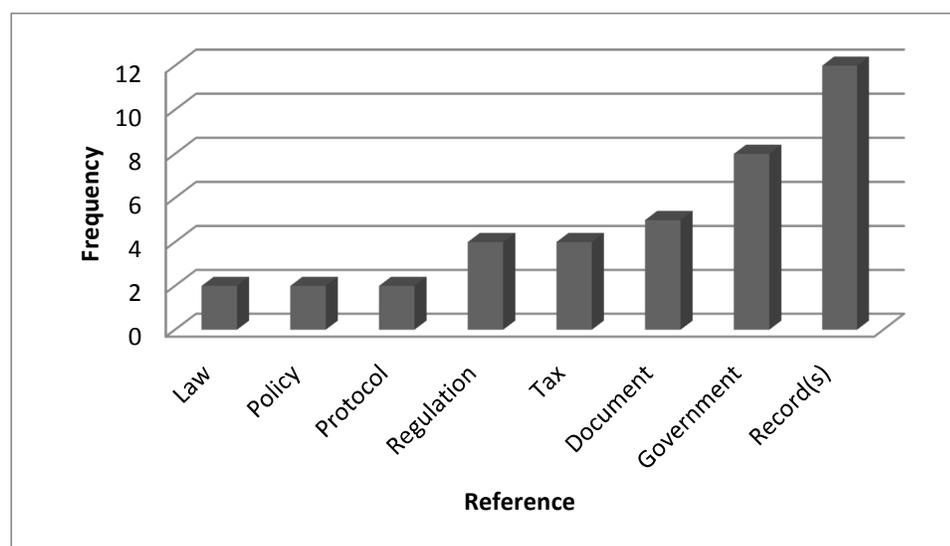


Figure 11. References to records, laws, taxes, and regulations.

P3 shared, “You have to follow the law.” P3 added, “Those that govern thinks the country belongs to them and others are secondary citizens...take all the advantage, take all the opportunities and push others to the wall... Businesses will hardly prosper in that type of environment...All these are challenges.” P3 continued to claim, “If we have to follow all the protocols laid down, the cumbersome rules set by the government, we will not be able to do anything in this country.” About regulation, P2 discussed, “government regulation you have to dance to -whatever they ask you to do, you understand there is nothing we can do much about that than to dance to their tune.” P2 added, “as far as government regulation is concerned we prepare ourselves.”

Kitching et al. (2015) averred that regulatory burdens on small businesses constituted challenges for owners, leading to some small business failures. The strategy adopted by the participants aligned with the findings by Beaver (2003) that for a firm to remain in business, the owners must be able to adapt to changing circumstances of a

dynamic business environment. Regulatory burden is a limitation to the performance and growth of small business, subject to governmental policy change.

About documents and recordkeeping, P3 said, “organize properly...have files for every document... keeping records of all goods sold, records of real customers.” P1 shared, “managing a business gets you into all aspects relationship management, logistics, distribution, record keeping.” P1 elaborated on recordkeeping, stating, “You have to keep records ... if you are not careful, you will think you are making money meanwhile you are eating into your capital, keeping records help us know what profit is and what is not profit.” Financial records were especially relevant to P1, who said, “I want to emphasize the need to keep financial records... there is no end to what you can do once you have financial information. So we keep good records that have helped us.” The practice of proper recordkeeping was confirmed by the findings of Mohammed and Obeleagu-Nzelibe (2014) that proper recordkeeping was a significant factor in business enterprise success. Proper record keeping helps garner financial support and leads to the provision of information needed to reposition or restructure the business in the face of changes in the business environment.

### **Application to Professional Practice**

This study involved the understanding the strategies used by three small business manufacturing enterprise leaders in Lagos, Nigeria to sustain their business enterprise beyond 5 years after formation. MSMEs provided employment for 84% of the Nigerian total labor force (SMEDAN, 2015). This study addressed some of the problem of small business enterprises in Nigeria that fail to continue beyond 5 years after formation

(Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013). The syntheses and analysis of data from participants' interviews and company documents led to the identification of strategies used to sustain small business manufacturing enterprises, which can assist future and current small business leaders. In this study, I identified 10 major themes pertaining to strategies used by small business manufacturing leaders in Lagos, Nigeria to sustain their business enterprises.

Findings relevant to professional business practice include focus, determination, and perseverance of the business leader; keeping debts and overhead expenses low; providing high quality products and consistently high performance standards; and preparation and strategic planning. Other findings relevant to successful small business practice include relationship management; quality marketing; knowledge and skills; family support and encouragement; and record keeping. Small business enterprises are essential for development and employment creation, but their high mortality rates limit their contribution to the Nigerian economy (Oyeku et al., 2014). The findings from this study offer ways to improve small business practice by providing current and future small business leaders with knowledge of strategies for sustaining their small business enterprises.

Small business leaders who are more likely to sustain their business enterprises may be those who are focused and determined, keep debt and overhead expenses low, maintain high quality and consistently high performance standards, and embark on strategic planning and preparation. Furthermore, small business leaders who recognize the importance of relationship management, quality marketing, knowledge and skills,

family support and encouragement, and record keeping in their business enterprises may also be more likely to sustain their business enterprises. The leaders of successful business enterprises engage continually in the process of structuring and restructuring, in line with the challenges posed by the business environment, to achieve the objectives of their businesses (Adeoye & Elegunde, 2012). The current business enterprise leaders may apply the findings of this study to determine if their present practices and policies are the optimal strategies to sustain their business enterprises.

The implementation of recommendations based on the findings of this study is likely to lead to improvement in the success rate of small business manufacturing enterprises and reduction in financial losses suffered by business leaders as a consequence of business failures. The use of the knowledge garnered from this study may improve the likelihood of small-sized business enterprises growing to medium-sized business enterprises. Leaders may be better prepared to anticipate market changes and respond appropriately, knowing the probable consequences of the choices they make. The value of this study for business practice includes the probable assistance and guidance the knowledge may provide small business leaders in sustaining their businesses. Kitching et al. (2015) identified regulatory burdens on small businesses as significant challenges for small business owners and responsible for some small businesses failures. Therefore, further value to small business practice may be in the form of a reduced regulatory burden if government leaders can glean some insights from this study, leading to the formulation of policies that may be more supportive of small business enterprise growth and development.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Failures of small business enterprises affect all sectors of the economy. In Nigeria, small business enterprises are fundamental to the realization of all-encompassing socio-economic goals of reducing poverty and creating employment opportunities (SMEDAN, 2015). Business enterprise failures result in loss of income for both business leaders and their employees, including a reduction in living standard of members of the community and loss of tax revenue to the government (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014). Loss of tax revenue to the government as a result of business failure will adversely affect government developmental projects for the community.

The findings from this study might influence social change if the small business manufacturing leaders' implementation of the strategies identified leads to the long-term success of their business enterprises in Lagos, Nigeria. Successful business enterprises provide employment for the business leader and employees; provide goods and services for other businesses and the community, and payments of taxes to the government (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014). Successful small businesses not only provide goods and services for the community, but they can also enhance the quality of life in their environment by empowering the government to provide social amenities by payment of taxes.

This study may benefit small business leaders if its findings help the government to formulate policies that support the growth of small businesses. Knowledge of strategies for sustaining small business manufacturing may improve leadership capabilities and improve the financial performance of enterprises, thereby reducing the

risks of failure. The consequence of improved performances of small businesses is more tax revenues to the government. More tax revenue to the government may lead to more developmental projects for the benefit of the community.

The implementation of recommendations based on findings of this study by business leaders may positively affect the survival and financial performance of the small businesses. Understanding the strategies for growing successful small businesses may encourage the army of unemployed youths to decide to change their economic status by starting their own business enterprises. The possible positive social change includes improved living standard for the community, alleviation of poverty, and provision of employment opportunities. Other possible positive social change includes reduction of social tension between the haves and the have-nots, reduction of crime rates, and improved welfare of the people (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014).

### **Recommendations for Action**

The findings of this study may help future small business leaders handle the challenges of starting and sustaining small businesses in Lagos, Nigeria. Based on the research results, I recommend future and current small business leaders keep in mind that their financial responsibilities of owning their businesses include minimizing costs and indebtedness without sacrificing quality. I urge small business leaders always to seek out alternative more efficient and cheaper ways of delivering their products and services to sustain their business enterprises.

As indicated, small business leaders in the study achieved longer-term successes by engaging in research, preparation and strategic planning before launching their

business ideas, which reflected the needs and tastes of their local consumers. The strategy of engaging in research, planning and preparation involves the study of how the activities of the enterprises will influence and be influenced by the operating environment (Segatto et al., 2013; von Bertalanffy, 1968). I suggest to new business leaders to always engage in research, strategic planning, and preparation before launching their business ideas which should reflect the available resources and opportunities in the business environment.

The findings from this study also indicated that education and training for the business leaders and staff members are necessary for the sustainable growth of a small business. Fadahunsi (2012) noted that the more the educational experience of small business leader, the more they experience successful business growth. I urge future small business leaders to acquire education as part preparation to start their business enterprises. I also urge existing business leaders to continue with their professional training and development through conferences and seminars and reading of relevant literature to ensure they remain informed about their professional development.

This study might be beneficial to current small business leaders, associations of small businesses, and organizations established to support the growth and development of small businesses. I will share the results of this study with participants, business associations like NASME, SMEDAN and Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry. My aim is to make the results widely available to future and current small business leaders using the most effective and suitable channels. For the future business leaders, I recommended an appraisal of the information in this study with the objective of

incorporating some of the strategies identified in business start-up processes. I encourage the NASME Lagos branch and the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry to share the results of the findings of this study with future and existing small business leaders through conferences and seminars. I will offer to present the results of my study at such conferences, if required. I will also provide the participants with a brief summary of the results and findings of this study.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The first limitation of this study was the number of participants. I recommend that further research on this topic include a higher number of participants. The second limitation of this study was the geographical location of the study, which may limit the application of the findings in other geographies. I recommend that further study on this topic involve a geographical location in Nigeria outside of Lagos. The third limitation of this study was that the study focused on small business manufacturing and a study based on a specific industry of small business manufacturing leaders is recommended for further study. The fourth limitation of this study was the adoption of the qualitative research method and a case study design instead of other methods and designs. I recommend the use of other methodologies and designs for further research. The fifth limitation of this study was the condition of Nigerian economy which was in recession at the time of this study. I recommend a further study at a time of economic boom in Nigeria.

## Reflections

In a challenging business environment, small business leaders must formulate strategies for sustaining their enterprises. Understanding of the nature of the business environment can help small business leaders make better decisions, which could determine their directions of activities. In this study, three Lagos-based small business manufacturing leaders shared their experiences on strategies for sustaining their business enterprises.

My experience within the DBA Doctoral study was a challenging, enriching, and fulfilling learning experience. Recruiting and scheduling interviews with participants were more challenging than I anticipated in terms of the amount of time required to recruit willing participants. Some small business leaders were accommodating and willing to participate, while others expressed interest in taking part in the study but were unwilling to identify a time for the interviews. Some small business leaders were apprehensive and declined participation. Some participants wanted to interview on the telephone, while one opted for a restaurant. In the end, I secured the consent of three business leaders willing to participate in the study in an in-person interview.

I had no preconceived notion regarding my study topic. I approached my study with the intent to learn from the participants whom I believed are experts in their fields. I maintained an open mind throughout the research proceedings to avoid research bias (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). I followed the interview protocol, and none of the participants were personally known to me before the interview. The participants responded to all the

questions asked during the interview and were eager to share their personal lived experiences and insights about strategies they used to achieve success in their businesses.

The conversation with the participants revealed their wealth of experience, passion, and commitment to the success of their businesses. It was instructive hearing each participant narrate their individual experiences, and the findings provided a better understanding of the answer to the research question. I have a better grasp of challenges of owning and running a small business manufacturing. I identified 10 major themes that aided the participants in sustaining their enterprises for the long term. I consider the information valuable to start-ups and current business leaders. The participants expressed an interest in receiving a report of the findings of this study.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

Small business enterprises are central to economic development and constitute a substantial proportion of business enterprises in Nigeria. Small business enterprises represent viable means of creating employment, alleviating poverty, and developing entrepreneurship (Adisa et al., 2014). Eighty percent of newly formed small business enterprises do not continue beyond 5 years after formation in Nigeria (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013; Atawodi & Ojeka, 2012). Sustaining a small business in Nigeria beyond 5 years is challenging and requires a vision and focus. Small business enterprise leaders in Nigeria need a strategy to navigate their way in the challenging business environment. Small business leaders require support to contribute meaningfully to economic development.

In this study, I explored strategies small business manufacturing leaders in Lagos, Nigeria used to sustain their business enterprises beyond 5 years after formation. I used

data collected through semistructured interviews and relevant enterprise documents to appreciate the strategies employed by small business manufacturing enterprise leaders in Lagos, Nigeria to sustain their business enterprises. I achieved methodological triangulation using the interview data and data collected from review of company related documents, as suggested Patton (2015). The findings from this study formed the basis for recommendations for action and future research.

The applications of findings from this study may positively influence the performance of small business enterprises. The possible positive social changes include improved living standard, the provision of goods and services, and employment opportunities. Other possible positive social changes are the reduction of social tension between the haves and the have-nots, reduction of crime rates, and improved welfare of the people (Eniola & Ektebang, 2014). Ten major themes emerged from the data analysis. The emergent themes aligned with the concept of general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968). The strategies identified affect the enterprise as a whole and as such cannot be viewed alone (Almaney, 1974). All the participants expressed an awareness and understanding that their business decisions stem from an analysis of their environments because their business opportunities, pressures, and challenges are products of their environments (Oginni & Adesanya, 2013). Njanja et al. (2012) found that external environments influence the strategies adopted and performance of the business enterprises.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

<b>Participant Pseudonym:</b> _____ <b>Participant</b>	
<b>Code</b> _____	
<b>Interview Date</b> _____	<b>Total Time</b> _____
What you will do	What you will say—script
1. Introduce the interview session with salutations and introduce self to the research participant, 2. Present consent form, go over contents, and answer questions and concerns of participant 3. Give participant copy of consent form.	A. Good afternoon Mr/Mrs xxxx, My name is Patrick Modilim, a doctoral student of Walden University, conducting a study on strategies used by small manufacturing business leaders to grow and sustain their businesses. B. Thank you for taking the time to respond to the invitation to participate in this study, here is a copy of your signed consent form for your record C. I want to believe you have read, understood and in agreement with the content of the informed consent form but should you have any questions or concerns, I would like to take address it before we commence with the interview.
4. Turn on recording device. 5. Follow procedure to introduce participant(s) with coded identification; note the date and time. 6. Begin interview with question #1; follow through to final question. 7. Follow up with additional questions. 8. End interview sequence; discuss member-checking with participant(s). 9. Thank the participant(s) for their part in this study. Reiterate contact numbers for follow up questions and concerns from participants.	1. What strategic analysis of the business environment did you conduct prior to your decision to start your business? 2. What were your key strategic objectives, in starting your business? 3. What were your strategies to prepare yourself for the challenge of running your business? 4. What were your strategies to grow your business beyond 5 years of formation? 5. What were your strategies to continue the business past 5 years from its formation? 6. What were your key strategic responses to changes in the business environment? 7. How has your business organizational structure evolved from its formation to date? 8. What other experiences, not covered in this interview would you like to share that might benefit future

*Watch for non-verbal cues *Paraphrase as needed *Ask follow-up probing questions for more depth	business leaders?
Wrap up interview, thanking participant	Thanks for taking out time to share your experiences with me on the topic, I will transcribe the interview data and return to you for transcript review to ensure the correctness of the interview data within the next 2 days.
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	I would like to agree a time to meet with you to review the result of my analysis and interpretation of the findings of the interview for about 30 minutes or less.

### **Follow-up Member Checking Interview**

Introduce follow-up interview and set the stage	Good afternoon sir thanks for your participation in this study. This is a follow-up to our previous interview on the strategies used by business owners to grow and sustain their businesses. I would like your permission to record this follow-up interviews, so that I may accurately document the information you share with me
Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question. Bring in probing questions related to other information you may have found—note the information must be related so you are probing and adhering to the IRB approval. Walk through each question, read the interpretation and ask: Did I miss anything? Or, What would you like to add?	<p>I would like to share my interpretation of your experiences shared during our previous interview for validation I wrote down each question and have a succinct synthesis of the interpretation. Here is a printed copy of the succinct synthesis for each question you answered.</p> <p>I am going to read each question and each synthesis. Please inform me if the synthesis represents your answers or if there is any additional information I missed.</p> <p>1. What strategic analysis of the business environment did you conduct prior to your decision to start your business? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation in one paragraph or as needed</p> <p>2. What were your key strategic objectives, when you started your own business? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation in one paragraph or as needed</p> <p>3. What strategies did you use to prepare yourself for the challenge of running your own business? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation in one paragraph or as needed</p>

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4. What were your strategies to grow your business beyond 5 years of formation? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation in one paragraph or as needed

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6. What key strategies did you use to respond to challenges in the business environment? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation in one paragraph or as needed

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7. How has your business organizational structure evolved from its formation to date? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation in one paragraph or as needed

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8. What other experiences, not covered in this interview would you like to share that might benefit future business leaders? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation in one paragraph or as needed

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## Appendix B: Right to Withdraw from Research and Destroy Data and Documents

I Mr. / Mrs. / Ms. ...., am a participant in this study conducted by Patrick Modilim. Hereby request the right to withdraw the consent earlier given and request that any data relating to my participation be destroyed. I declare my wish to refuse / withdraw my prior consent to:

- Store and use my leftover material.
- Store and use my data up to 5 years.
- Use my data for research purposes.

I request that you proceed to destroy the documents, and/or the non-anonymized data associated with my participation that have been collected until now.

Sincerely yours,

Signature

Date:

## Appendix C: Reference Counts and Percentages

Table C1

*Reference Counts and Percentages*

	Number of References used	References Published 2012 -2016	Peer- reviewed	Percentage- published 2012-2016	Percentage peer- reviewed,
Entire document	175	160	154	91.4	88.0 %
Literature review	106	95	97	89.6	91.5%