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# Strategies for Success and Sustainability in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Beyond the First 5 years

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Atem Emmanuel Ndeisieh

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Strategies for Success and Sustainability in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Beyond  
the First 5 years

by

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MBA, Edinburgh Business School, Heriot Watt University, 2013

BS, University of Buea, 2005

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

Walden University

August 2018

## Abstract

According to the Cameroon Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Regional Development, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) employ over 70% of the active population and contribute significantly to economic growth and development, yet the failure rate of SMEs in the region within the first 5 years remains at 72%. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies that SME owners used to sustain their businesses for longer than the first 5 years. With the resource-based view as the conceptual framework, purposive sampling was used to select 5 owners of small food-processing enterprises in Cameroon who demonstrated successful sustainability strategies. Data were collected using semistructured, open-ended interviews and review of business documents. Data were analyzed using member checking and methodological triangulation. Yin's 5-step process for data analysis revealed 9 themes including education, technical experience, and skills; entrepreneurial and business management skills; access to external support; bookkeeping and working capital management; human resource management; owners' dedication and commitment; research and development and marketing strategies; resource-based strategic planning; and owners' understanding of the business ecosystem, regulations, and taxation. The results may contribute to positive social change by increasing the survival rate for SMEs leading to job creation and improvement of the living standards in local communities.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this academic milestone to my dear wife, Sandra Ajong Atem for her unending support, perseverance, prayers, especially for her endurance during moments of my unavoidable absences when she and my children always needed me. Secondly, to my late sister, Caroline Atem, you were just a victim of an illness that took you away so young. Though young and intelligent, Caroline did not have the opportunity to complete her primary education due to ill health that incapacitated her. For over 18 years of illness, Caroline remained kind and supportive in very simple ways, but also compassionate too. Caroline's sufferings has translated into success in the remembrance of her love and kindness to us whom God gave the opportunity to continue this life journey. Caroline would have been a better scholar, but God knows best and I thank God for his Grace. Finally, I dedicate it to the Almighty for I can't mention all his spiritual direction and the strength and sound health that God blessed me and my family with to support me complete this study with focus.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Entrepreneurship is an important driver of economic growth globally (Matejovsky, Mohapatra, & Steiner, 2014; Ribeiro-Soriano & Mas-Verdu, 2015). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Cameroon are the engine for economic growth and development (Piabuo, Baye, & Tieguhong, 2015). Small and Medium-Size enterprises offer the highest potential for job creation and employment growth (Ayyagari, Demirguc-Kunt, & Maksimovic, 2014; Omri, Frikha, & Bouraoui, 2015), and sustainable wealth creation and economic growth (Eniola & Entebang, 2015; Gupta, Wilson, Gregorian, & Healy, 2015; Memili, Fang, Christman, & Massis, 2015; Omri et al., 2015). SMEs are a source of innovation in many countries (Mazzarol, Clark, & Reboud, 2014). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) indicated that SMEs around the world constitute over 95% of all businesses, and account for 60% to 70% of employment globally, and provide a significant share of new jobs in different countries. Less than 61.5% of SMEs survive beyond their first 3 years, while the survival rate of SMEs beyond the first 5 years remain below 42% (Gray & Saunders, 2016).

Researchers have suggested some of the factors that affect the success and survival of SMEs include access to finance (Kumar & Rao, 2015), availability of business skills, technical skills, managerial skills, and staff experience (Macheke & Smith, 2013), education (William, Shahid, & Martinez, 2016), and planning (Karadag, 2015). My aim in this study was to explore success and sustainability strategies that owners and managers of SMEs used to achieve success and survival in their businesses beyond the first 5 years. This section includes subsections on (a) the background of the

problem; (b) the problem and purpose statements; (c) the nature of the study; (d) the research and interview questions; (e) the conceptual framework; (f) operational definitions; (g) assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; (h) the significance of the study; and (i) a review of the academic and professional literature.

### **Background of the Problem**

Over 99.7% of employers in the United States operate in the small business sector, but only 32% of small businesses survive beyond the first 2 years (SBA, 2015). According to Cameroon's Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Regional Development (MINEPAT, 2016), less than 27.7% of SMEs in Cameroon survive beyond the first 5 years. The Cameroon government registered 49,881 SMEs between 2010 and 2016 as a part of government deregulation efforts. Less than 13,817 of these SMEs were still in operation at the end of 2016 (MINEPAT, 2016). Purves, Niblock, and Sloan (2016) asserted that the high failure rate of nascent SMEs result from a lack of management skills, strategic planning, educational knowledge, and experience of the entrepreneurs. Some owners and managers of SMEs do not use new IT resources for innovation to secure a sustainable competitive advantage (Woschke, Haase, & Kratzer, 2017). Small and Medium-Sized enterprises do not often develop a business plan or have a clear strategy for success, resulting in high failure rates (Chi, 2016). In general, researchers have attributed SME failure to a lack of access to finance (Kumar & Rao, 2015) and inadequate financial management strategies (Karadag, 2015).

In 2016, over 10,555 new SMEs were registered in Cameroon, up from 712 in 2010. Individuals without a secondary school degree own over 46% of newly registered

companies (Cameroon National Institute of Statistics [CNIS], 2013). There has been a general call for entrepreneurship as a source of economic and social growth in several countries, which has spurred interest in many unprepared individuals who long saw the creation of small businesses as a way to sustain life, only to discover that managing a business requires more than just starting it. Providing successful strategies for survival of SMEs may help support many SMEs and provide learning opportunities to owners and managers of SMEs in Cameroon and around the world.

### **Problem Statement**

Small and medium-sized enterprises in Cameroon constitute over 94% of businesses, employ above 70% of the working population, and account for over 30% of GDP (MINEPAT, 2016). While over 50% of nascent SMEs in Sub-Saharan Africa are not sustainable beyond the first 5 years (Worku, 2014), less than 27.7% of SMEs in Cameroon survived the first 5 years (MINEPAT, 2016). A national survey by The National Institute of Statistics, Cameroon (2015) showed that over 75% of newly created SMEs in Cameroon did not survive beyond 3 years. The general business problem was that small business owners in Cameroon were unsuccessful in sustaining their businesses beyond 5 years. The specific business problem was that some owners of small food processing enterprises in Cameroon lacked strategies to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of operation.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study was to explore strategies that owners of small food processing enterprises in Cameroon used to sustain

their businesses beyond the first 5 years of operation. The population for the study comprised 5 owners of small food-processing enterprises located in Cameroon who successfully developed and implemented strategies that sustained their business over the first 5 years. The implications for positive social change include the potential for small business owners to develop skills and strategies for successful business operations, support new job creation, and spur positive economic growth for their local communities.

### **Nature of the Study**

Quantitative, qualitative, and multi-strategy or mixed methods are the three research methods researchers can select from (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Researchers use qualitative research methods because they can ask semistructured questions with participants to gain an in-depth understanding of a given phenomenon in its natural environment and context (Yin, 2014). Yin noted that qualitative research also includes data collected from artifacts such as internal and external documents. Researchers use quantitative methods to collect numerical data from measurable variables for hypothesis testing about the variables' relationships (Park & Park, 2016).

Scholars use mixed methods to draw inferences from data collected and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods in an integrated manner (Johnson, 2015). To explore successful strategies used by SMEs, I did not examine relationships, neither did I carry out hypothesis testing; hence, the quantitative or mixed methods were not suitable. I used semistructured open-ended questions for interviewing participants to explore the strategies they used for sustainability as well as analyzed internal documents. Consequently, I selected the qualitative method, which was suitable for this study.



Common designs in qualitative research include case study, phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative design (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I selected an exploratory multiple case study design for this study because multiple case study research enhanced data collection from a small number of small business owners or managers about their experiences through open-ended interviews and provided an in-depth and meaningful understanding of successful strategies used to achieve growth and sustainability of small businesses.

Researchers use multiple case study design to explore empirical evidence from several cases and ensure integration of objective and persuasive data (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). Researchers use the phenomenological design to study lived experiences of individuals to develop emerging themes (Chan, Walker, & Gleaves, 2015). Phenomenological study includes getting a rich description of a process or phenomenon through verbal exposition by someone who has experienced the reality (Matua, 2015). Phenomenological design was not suitable for this research because its limitations on the ability of a researcher to gather information from multiple sources, since the focus was on understanding the phenomenon through the live experiences of the participants (Mayoh & Onwiegbuzie, 2015). Baskerville and Myers (2015) noted that ethnographers seek to understand a phenomenon within a group's socio-cultural setting to interpret shared patterns of behavior and cultural trends. However, participants may not share similar cultural beliefs or traditions and therefore may not provide a deep understanding of meaning. A narrative research design would have involved studying the life stories of some successful owners of SMEs (Garud & Giuliani, 2013). Life stories may not be

relevant to improve current business practices because such strategies may not add value to SMEs successful strategies.

### **Research Question**

The central overarching research question for this study was, what strategies do owners of small food processing enterprises in Cameroon use to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of operation?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies did you use to achieve success in your business during the first 5 years?
2. What strategies did you find worked best in identifying, managing, and maximizing your tangible and intangible resources to improve business success?
3. What strategies did you use to secure and manage startup capital for your business success?
4. What did you find worked best to attract, retain, and satisfy new customers for your business?
5. What role did strategic planning play in developing your initial business strategies for success during this startup period?
6. How did you overcome barriers that threatened your progress during the first 5 years?
7. How did outside professional advice, education, training, and experience contribute to your business performance?

8. What impact did tax management have on the initial success of your business?
9. What other successful strategies and experiences would you like to share?
10. What additional information would you like to share?

### **Conceptual Framework**

I used the resource-based view (RBV) developed by Wernerfelt in 1984 as the conceptual framework for this study. Wernerfelt (1984) developed the RBV from the work of Penrose (1959). Penrose (1959) suggested that the resources of a firm influence growth as well as form constraints to growth if resources are inadequate. Wernerfelt used the RBV to show how managers could seamlessly model a firm's resources, made up of tangible and intangible assets, to achieve sustained competitive advantage and improve growth and profitability. Wernerfelt also provided more insight about the applicability of the RBV including, (a) the use of the RBV at the smallest business unit for a firm's strategy (Wernerfelt, 2005), (b) firms should compete in the industries in which their resources are valued and important (Wernerfelt, 2005), and (c) that firms should focus on what it can do relatively better than others to enhance their competitive advantage in the marketplace, e.g. product design (Wernerfelt, 2014).

Kozlenkova, Samaha, and Palmatier (2014) used the RBV to develop a framework for explaining how small firms used resources to achieve competitive advantage and improve long-term performance. Yallwe and Buscemi (2014) used the RBV to study how a firm's intangible resources may impact value improvement. Wernerfelt (1989) emphasized on business strategy formulation using a firm's critical or unique resources through a three-stage process: resource identification, positioning, and

growth. Business strategies which are not *resource-based* may not succeed in today's competitive environments (Wernerfelt, 1995).

Researchers used the RBV to explore the growth strategies of small businesses based on how the SMEs build, access, control, and leverage firm-specific resources which are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Kazlauskaitė, Autio, Gelbūda, & Šarapovas, 2015). The RBV is relevant to explore strategies used by a small firm to achieve business sustainability because sustainable competitive advantage reflects a long-term strategic orientation of successful business, and uniqueness of resources advance the long-term survival of SMEs (Alonso, Bressan, & Sakellarios, 2016).

### **Operational Definitions**

*Business success*: The maintenance of business in the marketplace with economic and financial progress over an extended period (Silva de Souza, Freire Dos Santos, Cessar Lima, Tavares Da Cruz, & Rojas Lezana, 2016). The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA, 2014) defined business success as the ability of an enterprise to sustain activities and performance beyond 5 years and longer.

*Firm resources*: Barney (1991) defined firm resources as assets, capabilities, processes, firm attributes, information, and knowledge under the firm's ownership and control capable of enabling the firm to develop and implement strategies to enhance performance.

*Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)*: In this study, an SME was defined to include any business employing up to 100 workers, with revenue below 3 billion

francs CFA or \$5 million (Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises [MSME], 2015).

*Small business:* For the purpose of this study, a small business is the same as an SME, defined as any business employing up to 100 workers, with revenue below 3 billion francs CFA or \$5 million (MSME, 2015).

*VRIN resources:* Unique resources that are valuable, rare, imitable, and non-substitutable and which can help a firm achieve sustainable competitive advantage over rivals (Barney, 1991).

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

Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations affect any research work was an intrinsic part of this study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Demonstrating an understanding of and identifying specific assumptions, limitations, and delimitations to the research was relevant to address the reliability and validity of this study (Simon & Geos, 2013).

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions include facts, ideas, or beliefs, which could not be verified as factual but were treated as such even with little or no substantial evidence (Simon & Geos, 2013). Although assumptions come from the researcher's view point, they are often necessary to conduct research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The first assumption I made for this study was that the participants will provide accurate, complete, and honest responses during the interviews. The second assumption I made was that the sample population was an appropriate representation of small businesses in West and Central Africa. The third assumption was that the owners or managers selected had the

knowledge and understanding of business strategies they claimed to have and that their experiences and successful business strategies could be generalized.

### **Limitations**

External uncontrollable conditions may make it less possible for findings from a qualitative study to be generalized. Therefore acknowledging these weaknesses and explaining their boundaries supports the degree of validity and transferability (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), consequently allowing readers of the research to determine the extent to which the findings can be justifiably generalized (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). Four essential limitations were evident in this study. First, the use of multiple case study design required that I collect data from individuals, groups, or organizations whose characteristics and behaviors may have included restrictions beyond my control. Second, there was limited data regarding the rate of success or failure of small businesses in West and Central Africa. Previous researchers in Cameroon emphasized the development of new business with very little concentration on the long-term sustainability of small businesses. In West and Central Africa, the agricultural sector in general, and the food processing industry in particular, has limited data and documentation. My access to relevant data for SMEs in Cameroon was thus generally limited. Finally, participants' educational levels in the field of entrepreneurship may have affected their ability to interpret interview questions and properly explain their responses in a comprehensive manner.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitation of the study provided self-imposed boundaries intentionally set out

by the researcher regarding the scope and design of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Simon & Goes, 2013; Snelson, 2016), which enabled the researcher to maintain control over the study. The main delimitations of this study included the sample size, population, and the geographical location of West and Central Africa. Due to anticipated resource constraint (time and finance) in the use of a single case study, the researcher gave preference to a multiple case study with a focus on interviewing participants about sustainability strategies used by small businesses which had sustained growth and profitability over 5 years. Finally, the last delimitation was that the researcher only interviewed small business owners and/or executive managers who had successfully developed and used strategies that led to success and sustainability over a period of at least 5 years and who had demonstrated that they were able to articulate or explain their successful strategies coherently.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Professional managers and small business owners might use the results of this study to develop new business practices relating to implementing business strategies. This study may also be of value to small business owners looking to improve their management practices and develop long-term sustainability strategies. Many SMEs and entrepreneurs in Cameroon have experienced obstacles in maintaining long-term sustainability for their businesses (Neneh, 2014). Moreover, owners and managers of SMEs may use the results of this study to formulate successful business strategies based on their unique resources that are valuable, rare, non-substitutable, and inimitable, which

might support the long-term growth and sustainability of their businesses.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The knowledge of some survival strategies and techniques may help owners and managers of SMEs in their decision-making processes and improve their managerial abilities and business performance. The implications for positive social change include creating additional jobs in local communities. Community stakeholders might benefit from new job creation and positive economic growth. The rate of unemployment, especially for young people, may reduce, resulting in an improvement of the living standards of local communities.

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

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study was to explore strategies that owners of small food processing enterprises in Cameroon used to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of operation. In this literature review, began by discussing and analyzing how the RBV is appropriate for SMEs as well as how some SMEs have used resources to develop successful strategies for sustainability beyond the first 5 years. In this first section, I analyze the central concepts of the RBV in detail while addressing their relevance to this study. Next, I present and analyze some alternative theories that were potentially useful, but that I did not use for this study. Finally, I discuss conditions relating to long-term sustainability, including specific issues associated with small businesses in West and Central Africa.

I used several academic resources and tools to search for relevant material including journal articles, books, and websites. These resources and tools included



Google scholar and databases I accessed via the Walden University library including ProQuest, ABI/INFORM, and Business Source Complete. The search terms used included *RBV, small business, SMEs, small business success, small business failure, entrepreneurship and small business, small business growth, sustainability, small business management, tax management and small business success, strategic planning and small business success, and small business and organizational culture*. I selected a total of 205 articles and studied for this literature review; 188 (94%) of these were peer-reviewed or governmental sources, and 181 (88%) were published with 5 years of my expected date of graduation. Table 1 below shows the literature review sources.

Table 1

*Literature Review Sources*

Literature type	Above 5 years	Within 5 years	Percentage within 5 years (%)	Percentage above 5 years (%)	Total no.
Peer-reviewed articles	11	186	86	5	197
Non-peer-reviewed articles	0	6	3	0	6
Books	2	6	3	1	8
Other gov't sources	0	4	2	0	4
Total	13	190	94	6	215

**Small Businesses**

Researchers have defined small businesses or SMEs using different standards, mostly related to number of employees and revenue. While the United States defines

small business to include businesses with fewer than 500 employees (SBA, 2015), the E.U. defines them as enterprises with fewer than 250 employees (OECD, 2000). The Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Social Economy, and Handicrafts in Cameroon, through Law No. 2010/001 of April 13, 2010, prescribed the definition of SMEs, classifying SMEs into three distinct subgroups: very small enterprises (VSE), small enterprises (SE), and medium-sized enterprises (ME). Very small enterprises are small businesses that employ fewer than 6 persons with revenue less than XAF 15 million (\$30,000). Small enterprises are small businesses that hire between 6 to 20 persons with income less than XAF 100 million (\$200,000). Medium enterprises are small businesses with between 21 and 100 employees and revenue from XAF 100 million to XAF 1 billion (\$2 million), which was extended to XAF 3 billion (\$6 million) in 2015.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) indicated that SMEs around the world constitute over 95% of all businesses, account for 60% to 70% of employment globally, and provide a significant share of new jobs in various countries. Researchers have concurred that SMEs are key for job creation, sustainable wealth creation, and economic growth of every country (Omri et al., 2015; Eniola & Entebang, 2015; Memili et al., 2015; Gupta et al., 2015). SMEs are a source of innovation in most countries (Mazzarol et al., 2014). In other parts of the world such as the U.K., less than 61.5% of SMEs survive beyond the first 3 years, with a survival rate of SMEs beyond the first 5 years below 42% (Gray & Saunders, 2016). Despite the high propensity towards failure inherent in SMEs across the developed and less developed economies, there has been wide agreement about their significant contribution to

economic development in all countries.

### **The Resource-Based View and the Resource-Based Theory**

The RBV is a framework in strategic management that considers organizational management from the perspective of how well a small firm utilizes the resources under its control to achieve its objectives and attain competitive advantage and sustainable growth (Wernerfelt, 1984). One of Wernerfelt's (1984) goals was to establish a positive relationship between a firm's resources and its profitability. The RBV provides a lens through which both small and large firms can build successful business strategies. The tenets include identifying resources and the manager's ability to model various resources across business units; systems and structures as a necessary condition for strategy implementation, including how the small firms use her technological knowledge to leverage strategic advantage over rivals and to achieve sustainable growth. Penrose (1959) defined a firm as "a set of resources" and contended that resources have an influence on a firm's growth. This relationship is positive when resources are adequate, and growth is constrained when the resources are inadequate. Penrose further described the optimal growth of a firm as involving the exploitation of existing resources alongside the development of new resources, and the concurrent use of the firm's internal and external resources. This definition aligns with that of Locket and Wild (2014) who described a firm under the RBV as a *unique bundle of productive resources* that managers can use to meet their desired business objectives.

To achieve competitive advantage, SMEs need to accumulate resources that follow the VRIN criteria as prescribed by the RBV and non-substitutable (Barney, 1986,

2001; Xie & Suh, 2014). Resources which are VRIN form the foundation for generating firm performance as indicated by Lin and Wu (2014) who posited that "VRIN resources enhances firm's performance whereas non-VRIN do not." Resources are more beneficial to the growth or success of any business if they are heterogeneous and difficult to imitate (Pergelova & Angulo-Ruiz, 2014). Other scholars have criticized the proponents of the RBV for their persistent focus on VRIN resources while ignoring the aspect of resource immobility (Andersén, Jansson, & Ljungkvist, 2016). Andersén et al. (2016) found that use of the VRIN resources only led to a temporal attainment of firm performance and that when VRIN resources were immobile, the firm was more able to ensure sustainable competitive and advantage and performance over the long-term. The core of the RBV in relation to sustainable competitive advantage and sustained performance will, therefore, include the aspects of resource substitutability, mobility, and imitability.

Examples of resources that SMEs can use to attain competitive advantage include brand names, in-house knowledge of technology, skilled personnel, trade contacts, machinery, efficient production procedures, and finance or capital (Wernerfelt, 1984). Greene, Brush, and Brown (2015) summarized this list into five categories, including physical resources, financial resources, technological resources, human resources, and organizational resources. In another study, Zhao and Ha-Brookshire (2014) defined resources to include all forms of assets, including capabilities, organizational processes, firm attributes, information, and knowledge controlled by a small business that enables the firm to conceive and implement strategies for improvement of firm efficiency and effectiveness.

The RBV and the resource-based theory (RBT) are similar frameworks with similar tenets, except that one is an extension of the other. Both the RBV and the RBT agree on the definition of a firm as collection tangible and intangible resources and underscore the criteria of ownership and control of the firm's resources (Lassinhong, 2014). Barney (2014) argued that the RBV excluded creativity and entrepreneurial orientation as a resource that can enhance the firm's ability to improve competitive advantage. Defining a list of resources under the RBV could be an endless activity as new resources continue to surface and some nullify those previously considered as influential contributors to strategic business models. Campbell and Park (2017) extended the list of resources for SMEs to include social capital, entrepreneurial orientation, and intellectual capital, and suggested that the presence of these resources helps to improve performance and sustainability. Moreover, Stam, Arzlanian, and Elfring (2014) posited that social capital fosters business performance.

Scholarly consensus on the strength of the RBV as a tool to build organizational strategy continues has continued to grown (De-Gruyter, 2014). Jacobson (2013) found that there was a positive relationship between a firm's resources, capabilities, and competitive advantage, thus further validating the RBV as a framework for exploring the strategies that owners and managers of SMEs used to achieve success beyond their first 5 years. Somsuk and Laosirihongthong (2014) used the RBV as a framework to identify the enabling factors for success in small university incubators and new technology-based startups, validating its use as an approach to exploring success strategies in SMEs. The RBV, therefore, can be used to assess a firm's internal capabilities as well as to gain

deeper understanding of how small businesses can use their resources to overcome the influences of the external environment on their competitiveness, efficiency, and effectiveness (Barney, 1991), which is an integral part of the strategy development process of any business.

Though the RBV is somewhat prevalent in studies of strategy and operations management, some scholars have criticized its usefulness in the development of a sound business strategy. Bromiley and Rau (2016) stated that the justification provided by the proponents of the RBV as a basis for sustainable competitive advantage is that of RVIN resources helps a firm to achieve and sustain competitive advantage. Bromiley and Rau argued that the RBV is not suitable for operations management because few firms have been demonstrated to secure sustainable competitive advantage using RVIN resources.

Moreover, the aspect of imitability may be misleading because any resource used by one firm for strategic development can well be used by another in a competitive marketplace (Bromiley & Rau, 2016). Bromiley and Rau further asserted that firms do not necessarily need to achieve competitive advantage in order to become sustainable. Bromiley and Rau's criticism of the RBV does not invalidate it as a framework used by many firms to develop sustainable business strategy. Hitt, Carnes, and Xu (2016) conducted a study based on Bromiley and Rau's criticism of the RBV and concluded that Bromiley and Rau's study was limited to the works of Barney, making the criticism fall short of strong evidence to support a contrary point. Hitt et al. concluded that the RBV is a valid framework for business strategy and suggested that complementary frameworks have been developed to strengthen the use of the RBV in strategic management,

including the knowledge-based view and the dynamic capability view.

Hitt et al. (2016) challenged Bromiley and Rau's assertion that firms operating in the same competing environment could use the same strategic resources, making them less unique. Hitt et al. noted that firms could implement strategies using the same resources but achieve varied outcomes due to differentiation in the capabilities of the firms. Uniqueness of resources and a firm's achievement of competitive advantage does not therefore rest only on imitability, but more importantly rests on the combination of capabilities mediating the implementation of business strategies with the use of unique resources (Lin & Wu, 2014). Alternative theories (frameworks) that could have formed the conceptual framework for this study, but not considered for use in this study include, systems theory and entrepreneurial orientation, well prevalent in several doctoral studies at Walden and dynamic capabilities view (DC)

### **Systems Theory and Entrepreneurial Orientation**

System theory provides a worldview of an organization as an assembly of elements joined to each other in an organized fashion to form a single whole (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Small businesses operate and interact seamlessly with their environment and other components that determine how the organization functions or carry out their business activities vis-à-vis their environment and this is what Almaney (1974) postulated his expansion of the system theory as a functional inter-relationship of elements forming a single unit. Systems theory also focuses on processes, relationships, and interconnections within the business and with the environment (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). I consider entrepreneurial orientation (EO) as a firm-level strategic orientation

embodying the strategic practices, management philosophies, and behaviors held by businesses and which are supposed to be entrepreneurial. EO has as its essential constructs innovation, reactivity, and risk-taking (Civelek, Rahman, & Kozubikova, 2016). Moreover, sustaining entrepreneurial behavior through decision-making practices, management philosophies, and strategic behaviors have been considered as a primary condition for enduring EO (Anderson, Kreiser, Kuratko, Hornsby, & Eshima, 2015).

Although systems theory remains a valuable theory for studying small business success, it does not capture the aspect of resources as a primary tool that SMEs can use to build their sustainable business strategies. Moreover, even though EO has been found to have a direct relationship with the performance of SMEs (Semrau, Ambos, & Kraus, 2016; Shirokova, Bogatyreva, Beliaeva, & Puffer, 2016), the interaction with the environment remains an important aspect of its use. My research was on how SMEs use internal resources to develop sustainable business strategy for success beyond the first 5 years. This study was thus more about the internal strengths of the resources owned, controlled, and managed by owners and managers of SMEs for use in strategy development to achieve business sustainability beyond the first 5 years.

### **Dynamic Capabilities**

Scholars have used the concept of dynamic capabilities (DC) in strategic management and described DC as an extension of the RBV. DC helps a business to "integrate, build, reconfigure internal and external competencies to enhance performance in unstable business environments (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). The ability of a firm to continually assemble specific resources (which are VRIN) and develop in-house



routines to handle unforeseen events, thus providing an organization with the risk resilience and acumen to survive in unpredictable environments is the hallmark of DC (Bogodistov & Wohlgemuth, 2017). Also, the concept of dynamic capabilities help firms to always refocus and continuously reassess the impact of specific resources on their success. Makkonen, Pohjola, Olkkonen, and Koponen (2014) concluded that firms used dynamic capabilities to identify opportunities and threats and reconfigure their resources to exploit opportunities and avoid threats. Dynamic capabilities are therefore a complimentary framework for the RBV because small business owners need capabilities which are dynamic to enable them transform resources through successful strategies, into highly sustainable enterprises.

Owners and managers of SMEs need to develop distinctive competencies to enable them to drive business success and gain competitive edge over rivals. Moreover, DC acts as a mediating factor between VRIN resources and firm positive performance (Lin & Wu, 2014). Arend (2015) posited that building a higher order DC can help a company to achieve competitive advantage. The RBV assertions concurs with the sustainability of competitive advantage due to the VRIN of resources (Arend, 2015). Arend's position suggests that view the difficulties faced by nascent small firms, focusing on a few strategic resources may help small businesses to achieve competitive advantage and increase survival opportunities.

Jurksiene and Pundziene (2016) suggested that small firms' prioritization of ICT capabilities can be a good source of dynamic capabilities and support survival in turbulent business environments. Furthermore, Pezeshkan, Fainshmidt, Nair, Frazier,

and Markowski (2016) concluded that there is a direct positive relationship between dynamic capabilities and firm performance in SMEs. Since SMEs face scarcity of financial resources, developing their winning strategy may most likely require them to focus on their internal resources such as human capital through skilled employees so that they can harness such skilled to build DC (Nieves & Haller, 2014).

### **The Resource-Based View and SMEs**

SMEs, especially startups are often commercial activities initiated by individuals or a small group of persons with limited amount of resources in the form of tangible and intangible assets. During the startup period of an SME, the ability of owners and managers to develop strategies based on owned resources (human capital, knowledge, skills, competencies, and material assets) to enable them to achieve competitive advantage is important for their initial success (Szymaniec-Mlicka, 2014). A focus on resources that are owned and controlled by the Small business owner, which valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable as a tool for Small business strategy development is the hallmark of sustainable competitive advantage and business growth (Shafeey & Trott, 2014). Alonso et al. (2016) argued that meeting the conditions primary grounded in the RBV (VRIN resources) is not a guarantee for the success of a Small business. Small enterprises with VRIN resources were found to still be susceptible to failure due to poor financial infrastructure, inadequate commercialization resources, and the strength of the competitor's resources in the marketplace (Alonso et al., 2016).

Entrepreneurs often engage in business activities based on the available resources around their environment and these resources need to be accessible and affordable for the

new startup. Researchers found that the positional advantage of a small business owner remains a critical resource that have contributed to improved their performance and sustainability (Lonial & Carter, 2015). Positional advantage includes three facets of intangible resources; entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation, and learning orientation. Lonial and Carter further explained what these three orientations mean and show how they influence firm performance, interacting with each other. *Entrepreneurial orientation* represents the firm's risk-taking attitude, resilience, and innovation used for strategic decision-making to develop, achieve, and sustain the firm's purpose and vision (Shirokova et al., 2016). *Learning orientation* is a process whereby a business learns from its environment to enable it to adapt to changes in the business situations for the improvement of service and product quality (Shirokova et al., 2016). *Market orientation* involves the process of gathering market intelligence through decision support and information systems and market research and the sharing of this result across the organization for use in strategic decision-making at all levels (Shirokova et al., 2016).

Gutiérrez, Fuentes, and Ariza (2014) posited that availability of the three orientations; entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation, and learning orientations facilitate the achievement of competitive advantage and superior performance in Small businesses. Though the acquisition of resources remains a primary instrument for strategy development, which in turn supports the growth and sustainability of SMEs around the world, owners and managers of Small businesses still face challenges to access various types of resources including financial resources, human resources, material (physical) resources, organizational resources, and technological resources (Greene et al., 2015).

Another vital resource considered for this study but which may not have been considered important for Small business success is the organizational culture, which is explained later in this literature.

### **Financial Resources and SME Success**

Every business, old or new, need financial resources in the form of capital and operating cash flows to enable it to achieve its vision and mission. Financial resources remain an essential asset that contributes to the growth and survival of Small businesses (Mohamad Radzi et al., 2017). Starting a new business require the purchase of assets and payment of some types of expenses such as registration fees, employees' expenses, and other recurrent expenditures during the initial period of existence of the business. This makes financial resources a pivotal asset because it is with it that several other resources such as material and human resources are acquired. Small businesses, however, face challenges of securing both startup and operating capital (Neneh, 2014).

The International Finance Cooperation (IFC) and McKinsey suggested that there was an estimated credit gap for SMEs in emerging markets of over US\$ One trillion (Gamser, 2014). This assertion goes further to confirm that the most common challenge facing the growth and survival of SMEs and that remains a significant obstacle is financing (Hommes, Khan, Gerber, Kipnis, & Hamm, 2014). Small business owners use a variety of methods to raise their initial capital including funds from personal savings, family and friends' contributions, and from external sources such as loans from financial institutions, informal sources, as well as from the sale of their private assets (Khan, 2015). Kumar and Rao (2015) suggested that many Small businesses acquire financial

capital from bank loans, informal financial institutions; through their social networks, and also using their social capital. Without collateral security and business history, small entrepreneurs and new startups will have to depend solely on informal sources of finance.

Fouda and Pene (2015) noted that entrepreneurs in Cameroon use predominantly informal means to raise capital, through family assistance, personal assistance and more often from small microfinance institutions in small amounts not enough to cover any expansion of their business operations. Mandiefe and Bafon (2015) posited that Small businesses in Cameroon consider internal financing as their principal source of capital, especially because several of these small firms are family own and family structures do not always favor bank financing. Banks only provide limited support to few Small businesses due to lack of collateral securities to guarantee finance (Fouda & Pene, 2015). Business managers have repeatedly called for an alternative method, which Small businesses could use to raise finance to sustain their business and ensure long term survival (Bruton, Khavul, Siegel, & Wright, 2015).

The method of capital acquisition preferred by any small business depends on the level of accessibility of that source and the ability of the owners of the SMEs to be able to meet up with the conditions of the lenders (Wamba, Hikkerova, Sahut, & Braune, 2017). Outside financing from banks is not always the preferred choice for owners of Small businesses because the conditions are often hard for the new startups to meet up with. The size of a firm, size or loan requested, the value of the collateral security, the term of the credit, and the legal form of the Small business is also a source of financial constrain (Piabuo et al., 2015).

Some entrepreneurs, managers, and owner-managers of Small businesses may not fully understand the different sources of capital which their businesses can take advantage of to raise finance, coupled with the reluctance of many financial institutions to finance Small businesses remains a significant constraint to accessing finance (Kumar & Rao, 2015). Moreover, the capital structure of a small business may influence the extent of its accessibility to finance (Alipour, Mohammadi, & Derakhshan, 2015). The capital structure of Small businesses may expand the sources of finance such as short-term loans that are also very necessary for startups and easy to access (Alipour et al., 2015). Wamba et al. (2017) reported that access to bank loan within the startup periods of the firm before 5 years is positively related to the survival of the business, thus guaranteeing finance remains critical for the survival of any small firm.

New sources of finance have recently emerged in the marketplace as a remedy for poor access to finance (or the finance gap) facing many Small businesses. These include sources such as from microfinance institutions (MFIs), credit unions, and crowdfunding (Harrison & Baldock, 2015). Microfinance institutions provide easier access for debt finance to Small businesses than commercial banks (Harrison & Baldock, 2015), managers of MFI usually focus on creating personal relationships with owners of Small businesses as a way to compete with commercial banks and this intimate relationship provide them with better understanding of the Small businesses and facilitate the process of giving loans. MFIs offer mostly small, short-term loans, and this makes it difficult for the small business to plan for long-term investment projects to sustain growth in the long run (Harrison & Baldock, 2015). In some cases, the amount of loan applied is not always

granted, making it difficult for an SME to raise capital to fund projects fully and compete in the marketplace as well as to improve on productivity because their financial need is not met (Piabuo et al., 2015). The finance gap that is one leading cause of poor business performance in SMEs sector; therefore, parasite challenge that continues to plague the life of a small business and their owners.

External financing in the form of long-term loans from banks have been found to enhance business growth and profitability and thus survival (Kachlami & Yazdanfar, 2016). Also, firm size, legal form, age, and the owners or manager's relationship with the bank influences bank decisions for granting loans to SMEs (Boateng & Abdulrahman, 2013; Kachlami & Yazdanfar, 2016). The result of Kachlami and Yazdanfar (2016) study suggested that access to bank loans for new businesses difficult since these companies are yet to create the necessary relationships and social networks required to gain access to such more considerable finance. Some SMEs operate as informal businesses, and though they contribute to the growth of the economy and provide jobs and income to families, they remain inexistent in the face of formal financial institutions that offer loans only to formal businesses (Hommes et al., 2014). Some microfinance establishes relationship with SMEs in differentiated sector and has been able to provide credits to very small enterprises (VSE) because of their ability to understand their clients and provide tailored financial service and products to VSE in the formal and informal sector (Hishigsuren et al., 2014).

Much has been said and written about lack of finance as a significant cause of failure in SMEs, but less attention has been put on the impact of the business owners and

managers on failure of their firm due to poor financial management. Poor financial management is undoubtedly one primary cause of failure in SMEs in emerging economies (Karadag, 2015). Poor financial management includes poor strategic financial planning, lack of strategic working capital management, strategic fixed assets management (capital budgeting), and lack of strategic financial reporting and control (Karadag, 2015). Karadag suggested that owners of SMEs need a level of understanding of financial management to enable them to develop appropriate financial strategies and method of acquiring and managing financial resources. The sources of finance affect the performance of any firm. For example, informal sources of funding have been found to have a negative impact on the growth of the company (Khan, 2015). The reason Khan advanced was that the loans from informal sources do not always provide explicit terms, leaving the business owner to face the dangers ahead when lender alter the agreement without the consent of the small business borrower. Khan also found that internal sources of finance provide an even more significant positive effect on the growth of SMEs due to very high cost of borrowing and uncertainty about availability because the lender could call back his money at any time.

Internal sources of finance may include strategies known as bootstrapping finance, which underscores the management of scarce resources when financial sources are constrained, such as credit from suppliers through extended payment period, customer advances and better payment terms (Fatoki, 2014; Malmström, 2014). Bootstrapping is a way of securing finance after personal saving is exhausted when the business operations still need funds (Van Auken, 1996). The entrepreneur employs his creativity, ingenuity,



and innovative mindset to be able to develop and exploit new opportunities, allowing for the creation of new value in the marketplace (Gundry, Ofstein, & Monllor, 2016). The strategy may include loans from friends and relatives, credit card usage, home equity loans, life insurance, credit supplies, and advance payment from customers (Van Auken, 1996). Other ways could be the use of volunteers and interns as a strategy under human resource section, specialized leasing agreements, sharing office space, and operating under the umbrella of an incubator.

Also, entrepreneurs and SMEs have developed new fundraising strategies such as crowdfunding and peer-to-peer lending (Bruton et al., 2015). Crowdfunding is most often used by newly established small entrepreneurial businesses at their early stages to acquire finance in small amounts in the form of debt or equity, thus allowing a higher number of people to contribute to the success of the small enterprise (Eniola & Entebang, 2015; Lehner, Grahmann, & Ennsgraber, 2015). The success of this strategy to raise finance depends on the entrepreneur's network and relationships and the ability to deliver project goals within agreed deadlines (Belleflamme, Lambert, & Schwienbacher, 2014; Mollick, 2014). Understanding the various ways that SMEs have used to raise or acquire finance for the success of the small business remain a necessary responsibility of the business owners or managers because without financial resources several other resources may not be acquired and ultimately leading the small business to failure.

### **Human Capital**

Human capital is undoubtedly one of the critical resources for every organization, whether large or small. Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016) posited that there is a direct

positive relationship between human resources and organizational performance in small and large businesses. Moreover, in their expansion and analysis of the definition of resources under the RBV, Ogunyomi, and Bruning (2016) concurred that human resources offer the closest description of rareness, inimitability, uniqueness, and valuable, which the RBV emphasize as a condition for achieving sustainable competitive advantage. SMEs often have few number of employees, and this puts the onus on owners and managers of SMEs to employ careful strategies to manage their human resource function to optimize productivity and performance through actions that increase employee job satisfaction, reduces labor turnover, absenteeism, and eventually cut cost (Latorre, Guest, Ramos, & Gracia, 2016; Ogunyomi and Bruning, 2016).

Highly qualified employees are usually self-motivated and empowered, committed, and are more adapted to understanding the organizational goals and objectives of the SME, thereby enhancing the probability of success (Rauch & Hatak, 2016). This assertion is congruent to that of Wu, Hoque, Bacon, and Bou Llusar (2015) who concluded that SMEs that hired individuals with specialized managerial skills were more likely to improve on labor productivity and performance. Also, Miller, Xu, and Mehrotra (2015) added that human capital in the form of knowledge, skills, talent of individuals contributed to the sustainability of rents (returns). Hiring qualified staff requires increasing spending to attract such skills, which is not always possible for SMEs already facing financial constraints (Miller et al., 2015). Further still, human capital as resources has several ingredients, composition or facets that provide support for SMEs growth, including business knowledge, skills, and education (Robinson, 2015). The

important aspect of human resources and their contribution towards small business growth, success, and sustainability include Business knowledge and skills, as well as education of the owner or manager.

### **Business Knowledge and Skills**

Owners and managers of SMEs need to develop or hold some level of business knowledge and skills to enable them to succeed in their small business ventures. Knowledge of business and skills help an individual managing a company to develop plans and understand the risk he/she is about to embark. Cleeve and Ndhlovu (2015) posited that formal training and education, work experience, and skill development is an important requirement for the growth of small businesses. To improve on their efficiency and capacity, owner-managers of SMEs need both conceptual and technical skills (Visser, Chodokufa, Amadi-Echendu, & Philips, 2016). Moreover, capacity building and employee knowledge help an organization to improve on the business owner's ability to understand the business environment in which they operate, develop appropriate strategies that can help them overcome the many obstacles inherent in managing small businesses such as lack of efficient and effective resource allocation.

A well-skilled workforce is important for the success of an SME. Owners and managers of SMEs are responsible for finding people with skills to enable them to enhance the growth of their business. Different skill sets exist, and a combination of them remain vital for a company to use and pursue growth and sustainability and these skills include business skills, technical skills, managerial skills, and staff experience (Macheke & Smith, 2013). Sachpazidu-Wojcicka (2014) concluded that business knowledge, skills,

and experience of employees are essential assets that SMEs have used as ingredients to achieving sustainable competitive advantage. Moreover, skills, experience, and knowledge can be described as intangible assets and fit the prescription of the RBV of resources; in this case, intangibles because individuals have some uniqueness in the way they accumulate and used their skills, experience, and knowledge and they remain inimitable.

The importance of skills and their contribution to small business success is no longer an issue of debate. Skill shortages influence the growth and survival of a small business, thus developing strategies to anticipate and resolve skill shortages is important for small business owners and managers (Healy, Mavromaras, & Sloane, 2015). Belas and Kljucnikov (2016) found that successful entrepreneurs considered expertise, responsibility, and perseverance as their valuable attributes, as well as their skills, risk propensity, and decisiveness was put secondary contributor for their success. Mutandwa, Teramwa, and Tubanambazi (2015) concluded that marketing and entrepreneurial skills of an entrepreneur or business owner were key factors that determine the performance of an SME. Marketing skill is needed by every business, big or small because products and services must be sold or exchanged for income or revenue (Asah, Fatoki, & Rungani, 2015). The absence of appropriate marketing skills was found to be a cause of failure in SMEs (Van Scheers, 2011).

Successful entrepreneurs possess skills that enable them to identify and seize opportunities, assemble the required resources to exploit such opportunities for their gains (Hayes, Chawla, & Kathawala, 2015). Many entrepreneurs failed due to lack of

skills (Asah et al., 2015). Worku (2014) concluded that about 54% of new businesses failed due to lack of entrepreneurial skills, supervisory support, and absence of relevant vocational training skills. Business skills will remain and continue to be an important tool for strategic development and growth in new businesses in every country in the world, and both new and existing companies will continuously seek to acquire better skills to enable them to compete in an ever-changing marketplace (Lekhanya, & Mason, 2014). Moreover, Raven and Le (2015) found that entrepreneurs who attended training on business skills had higher motivation, improved success, and witnessed an increase in public perception of their businesses.

### **Education and Small Business Success**

Over 46% of SMEs in Cameroon are formed by individuals who do not have a secondary school degree (MINPAT, 2013). Lack of education partly explains the low survival rate for newly created SMEs in Cameroon, which is present at less than 27.7% (MINPAT, 2016). Moreover, 80% of small business owners in Cameroon are not aware of government procedures and incentives for SMEs. Studies have shown positive relationships between the level of education of the small business owner and success (Akinboade, 2015). Akinboade (2015) posited that increased level of education of an entrepreneur resulted in an improvement in turn overgrowth of Small businesses. Researchers such as Banwo, Du, and Onokala (2015) and Obeng, Robson, and Haugh (2014) found a positive relationship between the founder's education and the growth rate of a small business. Also, learning helps to improve flexibility, which contributes towards innovation through intelligence gathering, thereby resulting in business growth and

sustainability (Hourenaton & Victor, 2014).

Training also facilitates the decision-making process of a manager. While management know-how and experience support firm survival, education of the founders or managers provides support towards both growth and survival (Miettinen & Littunen, 2013). Growing evidence exists to prove that increase education does not only improve the chances of survival of SMEs but also increases entrepreneurial intentions among young people as they become more confident about their propensity to succeed (Neneh, 2014). Many governments around the world have come to conclude that entrepreneurship is a remedy for unemployment and the pursuit of economic growth through job creation (Glaeser, Kerr, & Kerr, 2015). Researchers found that there was a high rate of entrepreneurial intentions among graduates in Cameroon (Neneh, 2014; Valliere, 2015), which explains the positive impact of education towards entrepreneurial orientation and success.

Furthermore, learning orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, and market orientation were found to facilitate small firm positional advantage and thereby to provide the businesses with unique skills (intangible assets) and resources to create barriers and hinder imitation by competitors (Lonial & Carter, 2015). Continuous education and learning improve the chances of survival of an SME over the long term. Education helps an SME to learn from its environment and provide management or owners with the ability to adapt to changing business scenarios (Akinboade, 2014). Firms with educated managers have a better market focus and are able to gather market intelligence through research and further use the feedback to improve systems and

procedures across the organization (Lonial & Carter, 2015). The positional advantage derived from the three orientations (Learning orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, and market orientation) has a direct relationship with the performance of SMEs (Lonial & Carter, 2015).

### **Technological Resources and SMEs Success**

Technological advancement or its adoption has been considered an essential resource for large and small enterprises. Technological resources include both tangible (e.g., computer hardware) and intangible (e.g., software applications and systems) assets and have significant contributions towards improving management systems and business processes (Ruivo, Oliveira, & Neto, 2014; Coman, Horga, & Coman, 2016) and marketing (Choshin & Ghaffari, 2017) in large enterprises, as well as SMEs. Afolayan, Plant, White, Jones, and Beynon-Davies (2015) asserted that SMEs use IT to achieve high operational improvement in their management processes and systems thereby reducing errors and waste. The focus of this study is on how SMEs use these resources to achieve competitive advantage and sustainable growth over the first 5 years of the business life.

Technological resources in itself do not contribute to competitive advantage or improve business performance in SMEs; instead, it is the strategic use of IT in business processes that are found to strengthen SMEs performance (Yang, Xun, & He, 2015). Competitors can purchase most forms of IT resources such as computer hard wares and software without constraints, making IT resources failing to meet the definition of resources under RBV framework considered for this study (Yang et al., 2015). Moreover,

it is the SME's internal and external IT capabilities (in case of outsourced services) and know-how and firm readiness to adopt IT in their organization-wide strategies that can create the necessary impact towards performance through revenue growth and profitability that provide competitive advantage over rivals and improve sustainability (Neirotti & Raguseo, 2017; Nguyen, Newby, & Macaulay, 2015).

In the aspect of business processes, IT resources help SMEs towards developing innovative ways to gain access to other scarce resources such as using crowdfunding strategies to raise capital and also in the use of innovation to upgrade systems and processes which is necessary for sustaining competitive advantage and success (Woschke et al., 2017). Crowdfunding helps SMEs to improve their opportunities to access funding which is considered a fundamental factor affecting business success since other resources depend on finance (Allison, Davis, Short, & Webb, 2015; Bruton, et al., 2015; Meyskens, & Bird, 2015). The ability to use IT to gain access to finance is a significant advantage for SMEs with such knowledge because IT breaks the boundaries that limit access to finance and create the opportunities for investors and innovators in the SMEs to meet and negotiate funding opportunities directly (Baptista, & Oliveira, 2015).

ICT has been proven to be a powerful resource for SMEs to achieve increase marketing successes through e-marketing and e-commerce, giving managers and owners of SMEs the opportunities that traditional communication channels would not typically be able to accomplish in the past (Eid & El-Gohary, 2013; Soto-Acosta, Popa, & Palacios-Marqués, 2016; Yang et al., 2015). The use of ICT in SMEs can provide some other advantages. Technological resources such as e-commerce enhance the process of



managing relationship between the SME, suppliers, distributors, and customers at the same time, thus reducing process costs and improving customer satisfaction and business success (Choshin & Ghaffari, 2017).

Osorio-Gallego, Lonono-Metaute, and Lopez-Zapata (2016) found that SMEs that include ICT in their communication and business strategy was able to gain access and compete in markets which were only accessible by larger companies. Thus, ICT provides SMEs with the opportunity to have access to new markets, information, and new business opportunities and also help the small business to effectively communicate with her clients (Osorio-Gallego et al., 2016). Moreover, IT resources to support a small business to improve visibility through website, attracts and communicates with new clients at very low cost (Otero, Gallego, & Pratt, 2014). In addition, SMEs have adopted social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter as a marketing strategy and this has been shown to improve both non-financial and financial performance through improvement of customer relationship management and significant reductions on marketing and customer service costs (Ainin, Parveen, Moghavvemi, Jaafar, & Shuib, 2015).

Social media allows a small business to engage directly with current and prospective customers on real-time basis giving the opportunity to gather market intelligence, monitor customers' needs, and even anticipate their future needs and tailor products and services to meet these needs (Atanassova & Clark, 2015). Social media applications also provide opportunity to learn and implement changes in product development in innovative ways and improve business-to-business communication and performance (Wang, Pauleen, & Zhang, 2016).

## **Resources and Small Business Failure**

Many small businesses fail during their early stages of startup. Defining small business failure remain a matter of judgment because there are several possible ways that a company may be considered failed including discontinuance of activities, cease to exist and the exit of the founding entrepreneur (Rocha, Carneiro, & Varum, 2015). As Jenkins and McKelvie (2016) described it, a firm may be forced to close down due to insolvency (when there is significant fall in revenue with an increase expenses to the extent that the firm can no longer operate under the same conditions), or the exit of an entrepreneur for the purpose of redeeming his/her investment to pursue new business direction. Small business failure can occur as a result of poor financial performance known as insolvency or in some cases, bankruptcy (Jenkins & McKelvie, 2016). Voluntary cessation of a business whose primary purpose of creation has been achieved and completed is not necessarily considered a failure of the company (DeTienne, McKelvie, & Chandler, 2014). Moreover, a business can also fail or close down if the founder who is the primary source or the human capital decides to exit by divesting from the business (DeTienne et al., 2014). Wilson, Wright, and Altanlar (2014) concurred that founding early-stage directors bring human capital in the form of education, business and functional experience, social capital (reputation and networks), and this diversity influence business failure in the event of their immediate exit.

Davila, Foster, He, and Shimizu (2015) posited that new startups grow at the expense of existing growing startups. New creative startups perpetuate the market space created by other existing SMEs creating tense competition and eventually leading to

failure of some of the less competitive small enterprises (Davila, et al., 2015). Changes in government regulations and macroeconomic conditions may render small enterprises in some sectors that were once successful to become collateral damage as they suffer rapid and unexpected decline in revenue (Davila et al., 2015). Small business owners use family ties and other familiar relationship to understand government regulations and modify their strategies to be able to reduce possible negative consequences of government regulations on their business (Chen, Chang, & Lee, 2015). The pursuit of new opportunities in the marketplace has also caused SMEs to fail when such opportunities quickly fade out.

Many other causes of failure in SMEs have been revealed in different studies. Limited access to financial resources remains a fundamental cause of failure in SMEs in both the developed and developing economies since other vital resources are partly dependent on financial resources (Lekhanya & Mason, 2014; Neneh, 2014). Lack of resources has been seen as a prevalent and significant cause of failure in SMEs (Karadag, 2015). Scheers (2011) concluded that over 40% of new SMEs fail during their first year, 60% during the second year, whereas 90% fail within their first 10 years. Failure in SMEs has been attributed to many other causes directly linked to the way small business owners carry out decision-making on day-to-day operations (Chhabra & Pattanayak, 2014). Information for management decision-making is the unit of analysis for better planning and successful management (Chhabra & Pattanayak, 2014). Owners of Small businesses do not often keep complete records of their financial transactions for cost avoidance reasons and sometimes due to a lack of education, resulting to inadequate

bookkeeping, incomplete records, and poor strategic planning (Chhabra & Pattanayak, 2014).

Over 60% of Small businesses only keep manual accounting information systems, while 40% do not hold any format of accounting record (Allah et al., 2013). Poor record keeping was concluded to be the cause of a very high rate of failure of 90% of the companies studied within their first 5 years (Allah et al., 2013). Using management accounting information for decision-making has been found to improve managerial performance and also as an important growth strategy in Small businesses (Odar, Kavcic, & Jerman, 2015). Owners and managers of Small businesses, therefore, need to understand how to build and implement a good system to collect this relevant management accounting information and also appreciate their use to be able to improve on their organizational performance (Odar et al., 2015). Also, small businesses need to put in place the right structures and galvanize skill set to achieve success (Williams, 2014). Purves et al. (2016) suggested that small business failure was a result of inappropriate organizational structure, lack of management skills, inadequate strategic formulation and implementation as well as lack of experience of the CEO in management system and industry knowledge. Others such as Justino and Tengeh (2015) pointed out that SMEs' failure is often caused by insufficient knowledge in business systems, insufficient skills in financial accounting and also the result of negligence by owners to plan and control business resources.

Williams (2014) on some selected failed Small businesses revealed that the main factors that influenced the profitability or failure included in location, governance

structure, industry sector, and size. Firm location (product positioning) remains an important resource because it influences customers' access to products and services (Parsa et al., 2015). Furthermore, the ownership structure is an important factor for business success or failure (Williams, 2014). Family owns SMEs investment in R&D was found to be influenced by their orientation regarding long-term or short-term wealth creation goals (Sciascia, Nordqvist, Mazzolo, & DeMassis, 2015). Family owned businesses are often created for their own purposes, usually to sustain livelihood with a clear planning for long-term performance (Sciascia et al., 2015). Also, many small business owners do not even know their environment or policies in place that government has put to support SME's growth (MINPAT, 2016). The Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Regional Development Cameroon (2013) found that only 52% of startups commenced business with a business plan, while a staggering 80% of small business owners did not know about various government supports for SMEs. The result is that many SMEs already put themselves in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis their counterparts in the market. Other failure causes relate to the inability of SME owners and managers to comply with government regulations in their business sector, which often result in high cost of compliance and some cases business closure.

Akinboade (2015) contended that one leading cause of Small businesses failure in Cameroon is the cost of tax compliance and corruption. Even though corruption is a social issue while tax regulations is a government policy instrument for revenue collection, an understanding of owners and managers of SMEs about these two aspects remains key to mitigating the impact of both elements on their performance (Borchers,

Deskins, & Ross, 2016; Vorley, & Williams, 2015). While owners and managers of SMEs in Cameroon do not master the tax laws and changes in related government regulations, tax officials forced them into bribery using arbitrary assessments (Akinboade, 2015). Akinboade noted that such corruption, which is merely imposed for non-compliance, could be avoided by simple compliance that is far less expensive to the small business and legal. The SME, therefore, can control their expenses if their executives understand and comply with relevant regulations and avoid payments of excessive charges in the form of penalties and bribes.

### **Strategy and Small Business Success**

The concept of strategy emanated from a military background (perspective) where generals laid out plans on how to organize their forces to defeat the adversary army. Scholars define strategy as an enterprise plan design with the aim to achieve and sustain competitive advantage over rivals in a specific marketplace (HBR, 2005). Like every other business with a quest for survival, SMEs as well as entrepreneurs have come to the understanding that strategy development is essential for the success of their business (Ting, 2015). Surprisingly, some SMEs are still new to the aspect of developing a clear written plan for the activities of their business (Alstete, 2014). An organization's strategy enables the owners and managers to state clearly where the business is and where it wants to be at a particular time in the future. When organization clearly define strategy, and communicate to their employees across the organization, behavior alignment for optimum strategic implementation is easily achieved (Dobni, Klassen, & Sands, 2016). A

define strategy help facilitate the alignment of the organization's structure to be able to implement the strategy flexibly.

Chi (2016) contended that lack of a clear plan in SMEs is one cause of low performance. Choosing amongst the different strategic alternatives is an important decision that small business owners commit to ensuring their survival and growth. The drive behind the decision to start up a business may influence the strategic choices of small business owners or entrepreneurs and their definition of success (Porter, 1980). Two groups of startups may include necessity-based startup and skilled-based (opportunity-based) entrepreneurs who decide to get into business activity after thoughtful decision-making process (Baptista, Karaöz, & Mendonça, 2014). While necessity-based entrepreneurs make entry into business to satisfy their employment needs, skilled-based or opportunity-based entrepreneurs are individuals who leave their job with experience to start a new business for many difference reasons (Baptista, Karaöz, & Mendonça, 2014). Many governments have adopted the strategy of providing access to capital to unemployed graduates as a means to reduce unemployment, this creating opportunity for the creation of small businesses (Caliendo, Hogenacker, Kunn, & Wienbner, 2015). The rate of success in small businesses is higher for individuals with previous employment experience that those who received capital through government support to start a new business (Caliendo et al., 2015).

Michael Porter (1980) proposed three generic strategies for use in organization to achieve competitive advantage, including cost leadership, market focus, and differentiation. Porter set the foundation for strategy development in the management

small and large organizations that have resulted to most organizational strategies orientated towards the same set of principles tested over time (Dobni et al., 2016). Dobni et al. (2016) argued that competitive advantage cannot be derived from an organization's effort to reinforce their strategic position, but rather from their ability to timely manage unpredictability that has been found to have a more significant effect of the survival and growth of businesses. For small companies to evolve from structures and systems that are design for control and maintain insularity towards a more flexible design that allows for open dialogue that transforms into actions that bring success in the business.

Faced with the fast-changing nature of the business environment, resource constraints, low barriers to entry by new competitors, and fast-moving technology that have resulted to removing boundaries towards access to information, owners, and managers of SMEs are met with challenges to develop consistent and resilient strategies to compete in the turbulent and highly competitive marketplace. As expounded from Porter's competitive strategy, Alstete (2014) found that contemporary strategy used by SMEs and entrepreneurs to sustain survival and growth include focus (market niche) differentiation strategy. Although many scholars have concurred with Porter's generic competitive plans to be suitable for the growth of enterprises, others such as Mungai and Ogot (2017) argued that not all three strategies are ideal for implementation in Small businesses due to their unique nature of small size and resource constraints. Small businesses do not possess the resources to become industry leader (cost leadership) or secure a brand that keeps a significantly high number of loyal customers to make positive margins, the differentiation strategy (Mungai & Ogot, 2017).



Small businesses are not often successful in implementing any two of the three Porter's generic competitive strategies; cost leadership and differentiation concurrently (Mungai & Ogot, 2017). Small businesses were found to be well adept at implementing the focus strategy. Moreover, Small businesses who use clear distinction with focus strategy can increase revenue growth than those that apply a purely low-cost focus strategy (Mungai & Ogot, 2017). Necessity-based entrepreneurs more often prefer to pursue cost leadership strategy than a differentiation strategy (Block, Kohn, Miller, & Ullrich, 2015). The strategic choices in small firms are mediated by the available human capital (Block et al., 2015). Small firms with a strategic focus of low cost or differentiation were more likely to achieve success if accompanied with the development of strong internal managerial competences (Agyapong, Ellis, & Domeher, 2016). Small enterprises which are highly innovative were able to implement differentiation as a competitive strategy (Agyapong et al., 2016). Another key variable that influence the choice of strategy for an SME is the business environment; firms in dynamic environment favored product innovation strategy, whereas firms in competitive environment used process innovation to achieve performance (Prajogo, 2016). Small firms should also make strategic choices based on the level of available human capital (Block et al., 2015).

There seems to be a small divergence in results in the applicability of Porter's generic strategies in small firms. Chi (2015) posited that small businesses that used differentiation strategies with an emphasis on quality, delivery performance, and flexibility were able to provide products and services, which are more valued by

customers and less imitable by the competition. Furthermore, necessity-based startups tend to favor the adoption of cost leadership strategy than differentiation due to their human capital specificity (Block et al., 2015). This strategy was also found to be adequate for dynamic business environments (Block et al., 2015).

An effective growth strategies underscored by researchers for SMEs is the use of *process innovation* which requires the acquisition of technological knowledge to reduce cost, facilitate process, and enhance competitive advantage (Hervas-Oliver, Sempere-Ripoll, & Boronal-Moll, 2014) and the use of both product and process innovation (Prajogo, 2016). Minović, Lazarević–Moravčević, and Beraha (2017) in their research for the source of competitive advantage amongst SMEs, suggested that as SMEs prefer market that accepts product offers at low cost and average quality products and services through innovation-oriented approach, medium enterprise (MEs) focus more on process innovation, while very small enterprises (VSE) concentrate on product innovation. Highly successful SMEs shifted from a single level strategy to a multi-level strategic orientation, pursuing both innovative differentiation and product/service customization strategy (Banriatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014).

While the development and implementation of a clear written business strategies remains an important ingredient for success, owners and managers must watch out for barriers to implementing such strategies including internal; management, communication, skills, leadership; organizational structure, information systems, and information technology and information technology; and external environmental barriers; sudden new entrant and government policy (Lihalo, 2013). Understanding strategy and

acknowledging its usefulness is an aspect of business activity that owners and managers of Small businesses should consider on the day-to-day management of their business.

### **Strategic Planning and Small Business Success**

Small businesses also need to take a long-term view of their activities, ensuring that adequate plans (strategies) are put in place to achieve their business long-term vision, mission, goals, and objectives. Determining the organization's mission, goals, strategic alternatives, policies to enable the acquisition and allocation of resources to achieve organizational objectives is critical activity of the strategic planning process. Bouhali, Mekdad, Lebsir, and Ferkha (2015) described strategic planning as a process whereby corporate leaders make decisions about the future aspirations and targets of the business and design methods and practices to enable its achievement, and finally continuously measure progress towards the achievement of the goals and objectives of the business. The absence of strategic planning may lead to an organization accumulation of contingencies, inability to measure of success or failures; and a lack of clear business vision, resulting to wastage of important resources and missed opportunities (Ruiz et al., 2014). Strategic planning has three significant facets including strategy formulation (through the use of the firm's vision, mission, and objectives), strategy implementation, and evaluation (Elbanna, Andrews, & Pollanen, 2016). Strategic planning may help owners and managers of SMEs to develop a clear roadmap and specific actions to generate and sustain competitive advantage (Elbanna et al., 2016). Effendi and Kusmantini (2015) postulated that there is a positive relationship between formal strategic planning and company performance. Businesses that implemented a structured

but flexible strategic planning process were found to achieve higher performance than their peers without a strategic plan (Effendi & Kusmantini, 2015).

Strategic planning can be described using three approaches from the perspective of practicing managers; the planning approach, emergent strategy, and the resource-based strategy approach. The planning approach is built on the premise that when business managers set objectives, analyze the environmental and forecast the future, a fixed plan can be developed and passes it down to employees for implementation (Chi, 2015). The second approach, emergent strategy underscores the fact that human beings are not always rational or logical and suggest that business strategy is instead built in an unpredictable manner and in a less structured way owing to uncertainty about elements that affect the strategy development and implementation process (Neugebauer, Figge, & Hahn, 2016). The third approach, which is grounded in this study, is the resource-based strategy (resource-based view) approach to strategic planning which emphasized the internal resources available to the business and proposed that strategic planning should be guided by the available resources of the enterprise (Carraresi, Mamaqi, Albisu, & Banterle, 2016; Toklu, Erdem, & Taskin, 2016). The RBV to strategic planning does not only consider the competitive environment but also consider competitive advantage to be a result of how the small business can use their owned internal resources (labor, capital) to achieve organizational objectives and goals (Carraresi et al., 2016). Scott (2007) provided 5 most prominent description of strategic planning from business manager's perspective including, knowing the firm's vision and how to achieve it, clarifying objectives and assembling resources to realize them, taking a long-term view of the

business, developing strategies to outperform the competition, and selecting the best course of action for implementation.

Companies that implement strategic planning in their business models are more able to streamline their targets by identifying their short and long-term goals, making sure that their strategies are developed based on their vision, mission, and the available resources of the business, thereby improving their ability to attain success (Toklu et al., 2016). Strategic planning has been found to improve a business' ability to appropriately allocate scarce resources of a company and also helps in the identification of possible improvement areas in the business (Gray & Saunders, 2016). Small businesses will, therefore, benefit from a formal strategic planning process since resource allocation skills may help them to maximize their scarce resources better (Gray & Saunders, 2016). Moreover, continuous monitoring of progress in the business, which is an integral part of strategic planning may help small businesses to identify areas of possible improvement and consequently reduce the likelihood for incurring waste or misallocation of valuable resources.

Many Small businesses build their operational strategy based on their experience and often ignore strategic planning; this has a disadvantage because the business may unconsciously divert from its core vision, mission, and values since strategies are not based on them. The strategic planning process allows a company to evaluate her internal strengths and weaknesses and its external opportunities and threats and therefore to make it possible for a strategy to be based on those strengths and opportunities, and that actions are in place to reduce their weaknesses and overcome existing threats (Fooladvand,

Yarmohammadian, & Shahtalebi, 2015).

Strategic planning not only helps a small business develop her successful and realistic strategies using its internal resources but also ensures that the external influences which may dampen the success of the small business are considered and actions put in place to pre-empt any risk (Nazemi, Asadi, & Asadi, 2015). Moreover, barriers to strategic planning implementation including cultural, structural, poor employee knowledge, lack of resources, and other external environmental factors need to be overcome to ensure success (Nazemi et al., 2015). Lack of planning have proven to be very costly for small businesses, leading to poor performance and missed opportunities as a result of lack of guiding vision or mission, poor controls, inadequate performance monitoring, and increase waste of scarce resources (Ruiz et al., 2014).

### **Organizational Culture, Strategy, and SME Success**

Amongst organization's critical or unique resources was *organizational culture*, termed suitable for strategic development under the resource-based view (Wernerfelt, 1989). Organization culture embodies a pattern of shared values, norms, and beliefs that help employees to understand and implement organizational functions by shaping their behaviors (Gray & Saunders, 2016). Wei, Samiee, and Lee (2014) described an organization's culture as a social system that influences the strategic priorities of the business and at the same time act as a critical strategic resource that helps to shape strategic actions. Malekifar, Taghizadeh, Rahman, and Khan (2014) suggested that values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions held within an organization mediate the way employees interact with customers, suppliers, and competitors. Malekifar et al's

perspective, provide some conclusions that strategy execution is intrinsically linked to organizational culture or cultural systems.

In SMEs, managers and owners are responsible for deciding about the values, norms, beliefs, and systems that they feel suitable to enhance the achievement of their goals and objects and this will be influenced by their values and orientation (Malekifar et al., 2014). Rational organizational cultures have been found to support new thinking and collaboration amongst management and staff thereby improving the organization's ability to address customer's needs and improving on processes, services, innovative behaviors within employees resulting to sustainable competitive advantage (Hagans & Coote, 2014). When employees are allowed to be more involved or participative in the management process and take risk on behalf of the business owners, they are more motivated to become innovative, and therefore they are more able to improve competitiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency across the entire organization, resulting in increasing performance (Gómez-Miranda, Pérez-López, Argente-Linares, & Rodríguez-Ariza (2015). Narayanan (2015) indicated that a customer-focused culture encourages employees to employ new thinking into new ways through which to improve value to customers and this is made possible by innovation radically change the organizational value chain, thereby sustaining competitive advantage for the small firm.

Small businesses may choose to adopt different types of cultures ranging from open (rational or adhocracy) culture with flexible management and decision-making systems or orientate towards a closed and centralized culture. There is a more positive impact on open or adhocracy cultures due to its support for innovation (Hogan & Coote,

2014; Senarathna, Warren, Yeoh, & Salzman, 2014), its positive influence on entrepreneurial orientation (Brettel, Chomik, & Flatten, 2015; Engelen, Flatten, Thalmann, & Brettel, 2014), and business sustainability (Galpin, Whittington, & Bell, 2015). Organizational culture, therefore, form part of the business resources (intangible asset), which can help SMEs to sustain competitive advantage over rival because it cannot easily be copied or imitated by competitors (Hyoseon, 2017).

Small businesses with positive cultures are also able to attract more skilled employees, customers, and investor who value the business (Galpin et al., 2015). Small business owners and managers need more education on the need to build and positive cultures for the growth and sustainability of their ventures because organizational culture forms the basic support system for strategic implementation in any company (Galpin et al., 2015). Besides, corporate cultures have been shown to be a crucial support towards the growth of small business success especially for its support towards innovation in Small businesses.

### **Organizational Culture, Innovation, and SME Success Strategies**

Organizational culture and Innovation form a pair of intangible resource that together, provide a positive platform from which a business can develop new ways and strategies to sustain business survival and growth; summarized as a pair of resource that brings with it a change driver towards securing increase business performance and endurance (Thong & Lotta, 2015). Innovation is useful as a strategic orientation that has been found to help small business success through a supportive organizational culture that promotes the sharing of new ideas and dynamic thinking (Reid, De Brentani, &



Kleinschmidt, 2014). Moreover, corporate culture can enhance competitive advantage of SMEs and improve growth through support for innovation irrespective of the economic conditions under which the business operates (Petrakis, Kostis, & Valsamis, 2015).

Small business owners and managers have benefited by building and supportive workplace cultures that foster innovative behaviors amongst their employees because such processes were found to improve organizational performance (Hogan & Coote, 2014). When employees are involved and free to propose new ways of serving the customer, they become more engaging in all aspects of the business value chain (Green & Cluley, 2014) Consequently they feel more satisfied with their job and can significantly improve their job satisfaction and overall business performance (Lukić, Džamić, Knežević, Alčaković, & Bošković, 2014). Dayan, Zacca, Husain, Di Benedetto, and Ryan (2016) posited that the process of innovation, when adopted and supported by owners and managers of SMEs helped employees to develop new products that improved customer satisfaction.

### **Tax Management and SME Success**

Taxes are a significant aspect to consider in developing successful strategies for SMEs survival and growth. Taxes and their applicable rates represent compulsory charges levied on the income and other activities of the SMEs and in some cases such costs become significant enough to affect profitability, growth, and survival of the SME (Borchers et al., 2016). Agwu and Emeti (2014) contended that multiple taxes imposed an adverse effect on SMEs growth. Balamoune-Lutz and Garello (2014) suggested that increasing taxes does not only decrease growth and profit but also influenced the decision

by an entrepreneur to commence business activity and even affect the ownership structure of the firm. Owners and managers of SMEs need to understand and develop an effective tax management strategy for business success (Bali moune-Lutz & Gare llo, 2014). An understanding of tax management requires that financial statements of SMEs be prepared following the prescribed regulatory standards in specific tax jurisdictions (Strouhal, Pasekova, & Crhavo, 2015). Another important aspect of tax management is to focus on is compliance (Casal, Kogler, Mittone, & Kirchler, 2016; Mohamad, Zakaria, & Hamid, 2016). Unfortunately, many SMEs do not have internal competencies or knowledge about tax management (Atawodi & Ojeka, 2012; Mohamad et al., 2016; Tan, Braithwaite, & Reinhart, 2016). SMEs have less formal tax management strategies that do not factor in tax management in the overall corporate strategy (Laguir, Elbaz, & Laguir, 2015).

The result of an absence of internal knowledge or tax management strategy has been seen to result to shift from voluntary compliance towards tax evasion (Mohamad et al., 2016) which has been found to reduce trust between the tax authority and the SMEs management. Tax compliance improves access to finance through quality reporting by management, that in turn provide the basis for financial institution's confidence on the SME (Strouhal et al., 2015). Also, compliance with tax regulations adds the transparency level of the business (Casal et al., 2016). Furthermore, taxation is also a cost to every business that needs to be adequately managed and also to ensure that SMEs license is not rescinded at any time during the early life of the small business (Casal et al., 2016). Compliance with tax regulations is not entirely negative at the startup stage of an SME (Casal et al., 2016). Joshi, Prichard, and Heady (2014) found that taxing SMEs including

those in the informal sector enhanced growth through access to markets (contract), which would not be possible otherwise.

### **SME Growth and the Informal Sector**

The informal sector is an important part of any economy and harbors a good number of SMEs, especially startups. Research in the area of SMEs would hardly be considered complete without the inclusion of the informal sector (Welter, Smallbone, & Pobel, 2015). Over 80% of enterprises in the developing economies operate in the informal sector, and these enterprises are also said to provide over 60% exiting jobs (Stein, Ardic, & Hommes, 2013). Many firms trading within the informal sector do so because they are being kept out by punitive regulations and hostile tax regimes (Welter et al., 2015). Achua and Lussier (2014) described the informal sector as "an incubator for entrepreneurs and startups" that helps to nurture casual businesses into formal enterprises. Achua and Lussier also reported that over 64.5% of informal enterprises transform into formal business. Including the informal economy into this qualitative research may provide a broader perspective on the strategic use of resources by SMEs to develop successful business strategies to sustain growth and survival beyond the first 5 years. Moreover, the process of starting up a business in the informal and formal sector is no different (resources acquisition, risk-taking, and business strategy), except that one operates in the legality of the laws and regulations of the country in which it exists (Welter et al., 2015). The informal sector also acts as a catalyst for entrepreneurships and small business startups since the individual doesn't require fulfilling any regulatory procedure before operations begin (Babbit, Brown, & Mazaheki, 2015).

Firms in the informal sector operate in perfectly competitive market environment like the formal sector, thereby making many informal sectors' SMEs on becoming more efficient, generating significant income, profits, and sustaining their business over the first 11 years (Makate, Siziba, Hanyani-Mlambo, Sadomba, & Mango, 2016). Informal SMEs face higher financial constraints (Raj & Sen, 2015) due to less access to bank loans (Farazi, 2014) and this negatively affects growth in SMEs and discourage informal SMEs from becoming formal businesses. Williams et al. (2016) concluded that gender, level of education, and income level influence the degree of willingness to formalize an informal enterprise. Female owned small businesses are always more likely to get formalized (Babbitt et al., 2015). There is an inter-linkage between SMEs in the informal sector and those in the formal sector (Distinguin, Rugemintwari, & Tacneng, 2016). This link creates the environment for informal SMEs to erode the advantages of legal enterprises through competition (Distinguin et al., 2016).

Competition amongst these two groups provides the leeway for informal and formal small business to compete for financial resources since these services are provided to both types of businesses by the financial institution (Distinguin et al., 2016). Demenet, Razafindrakoto, and Roubaud (2016) postulated that the migration from an informal SME enables a company to reduce constraints and get more access to resources, markets, and larger environmental operating scope. Owners and managers of SMEs that operate in the informal sector face much the same risk and challenges, and undergo many similar processes as their counterparts in the formal sector and the approach to building successful business strategies for survival beyond the first 5 years will be expected to be

similar.

### **Transition**

In section 1, the problem background, problem statement, the purpose statement as well as the research questions and conceptual framework on which this research is grounded were presented. Section 1 also included subheadings, interview questions and significance of the study. The RBV form conceptual framework and have been well grounded in elaboration of the literature review. In the literature review, I looked at various aspects of the use of resources to develop successful strategies for SMEs and included areas such as human capital in the form of business management knowledge and skills, education, technological expertise, strategies to raise finance, strategic planning, organizational culture, and tax management. To make the study complete, SMEs in the informal sector were also included in the literature.

Section 2 included the purpose statement, the role of the researcher in the data collection process, especially as the data collection instrument, participants description, and population sampling; the research method and design, data collection and organization techniques, data analysis, reliability and validity. In section 3, the purpose statement was restated as an introduction, followed by the presentation of the research findings. Section 3 also included applications to professional practice, the implication for positive social change, recommendations, the researcher's reflections on the DBA experience, suggested directions for future research, and a conclusion.

## Section 2: The Project

I used an exploratory multiple case study approach to explore successful strategies that small business owners and managers used to succeed beyond the first 5 years. The critical aspect of this section covered the techniques and methods applied which enabled the researcher to appropriately provide answers to the qualitative multiple case study research question. Section 2 also included the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling techniques, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection techniques and analysis, research reliability and validity of the data collection instruments.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study was to explore strategies that owners of small food processing companies in Cameroon use to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of operation. The sample for the study comprised 5 owners of small food-processing enterprises located in Cameroon who had successfully implemented strategies that sustained their business over 5 years and beyond. The implications for positive social change included the potential for small business owners to develop skills and strategies to manage their business operations, support new job creation successfully, and positive economic growth for local communities.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of a qualitative case study researcher involves the collection, organization, analyses and interpretation the data and presentation of study findings (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Patton (2015) summarized this role and described the

researcher as the primary data collection instrument with activities that include designing and carrying out interviews, transcribing and analyzing collected data, and finally presenting findings in an organized, ethical, and unbiased format. For this study, I was the primary data collection instrument. Data collection also included the examination and analysis of documents such as documents from the ministry of SMEs in Cameroon and small business strategic and operational documents and the observation of participant behavior. As a key data collection instrument, the researcher sought to employ a collection procedure or method that enabled credibly, well-founded, reliable, and relevant data relating to the strategies that owners and managers SMEs used to sustain their ventures during their first 5 years.

The researcher's role consists of developing criteria for identifying and selecting the participants and negotiating access to the organizations and the participants to be interviewed (Saunders, Lewis, & Thomhill, 2015). Moreover, being the researcher, I was responsible for developing the interview guide and conducting a face-to-face interview, collecting other forms of data from the company's financial statements, strategic documents and archives, and other secondary sources (government sources, online data from websites, and Facebook), and consequently analyzing the data. Another essential role that I performed include identifying the small business owners or managers to be interviewed through credible selection criteria, negotiate access to these organizations and participants, and conducted the interviews. Saunders et al. (2015) further underscored the need for an external researcher to an organization to not only negotiate access to participants but more importantly ensure to create an environment that helps buy in trust;

enabling meaningful interactions that induce openness and confidence to share data and information relevant to the study.

Yin (2014) asserted that researchers often bring to research bias that may influence the results of a qualitative case study research. My experience in the field of SMEs as a business owner, manager, certified accountant and consultant was the main reason for my choice of this research topic and area of study. I am also very passionate about helping SMEs in my community and country to grow and survive over the long term. My previous encounters and experience with SMEs might have influenced the direction and results of this study. To mitigate bias emanating from the researcher's personal experience, the researcher ensured to remained nonjudgmental and impartial and went beyond his/her known into the unknown world of the participants to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon from the participants' worldview (Bristowe, Selman, & Murtagh, 2015). Also, during the research process, the researcher remained open and nonjudgmental and this enabled the researcher to gain empirical knowledge about the participants' perspectives and unique experiences related to the various strategies that participants had used to achieve business success and sustainability beyond the first 5 years (Bristowe et al., 2015).

I used member checking and methodological (within method) triangulation to ensure rigor of this qualitative multiple case study research (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013) by collecting data through multiple sources. An audit trail provided a clear rationale and guided the researcher's interpretations during the study and made clear the process used in reaching the various conclusion (Houghton et al., 2013). I maintained



an audit trail to ensure dependability and confirmability of the research. Moreover, an interview protocol (Appendix C) was used to improve the credibility and quality of the research instrument with a focus to achieve data accuracy and overall quality work (Yin, 2014).

Also, I followed the guidelines outlined in the Belmont Report to perform ethical research (National Commission on the Protection of Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPBBR], 1978). The Belmont Report covers moral principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects during any research project or research participants (NCPBBR, 1978). The core of the Belmont Report includes three main ethical standards including (a) beneficence, (b) justice, and (c) respect for persons (NCPBBR, 1978). The Belmont Report also underscores the importance of putting these ethical standards into action through three necessary steps including (a) informed consent, (b) fairness in selecting participants, and (c) assessing benefits and risks for the participants. Participants were made aware of all necessary information about the research and the voluntary nature of their participation.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study included four owners and one executive manager selected from 5 small food processing enterprises who had implemented strategies which successfully sustained their growth and profitability in a consistent manner, over a period of 5 years and who were located within West and Central Africa. A total of 15 companies were involved, from which I used purposeful sampling to select the 5 participants (see Patton, 2015). More specifically, to adequately address the definition of SMEs in

Cameroon in this research, the participants included one business owner from one very small food processing enterprise, two business owners from two small food processing enterprises, and a business owner and an executive manager, from two medium-sized food processing enterprises, to adequately satisfy the definition of SMEs in Cameroon within this research. A critical case sampling method was also used to ensure that participants selected are those who have the strategies and have successfully implemented, and could better articulate them during the interview process, and this enabled the researcher to achieve the maximum impact towards answering the overarching research question as recommended by Patton (2015) and Robbin (2014).

The databases from which I selected the participants were those of the Divisional Delegations of the Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicraft (MINPMEESA), the Medium-Sized Tax Payers Offices (MTO), and the Divisional Tax Centers (DTC) of Yaoundé, Douala, and Limbe. The MINPMEESA database contained the names of enterprises, their date of creation, the name of owners and managers, contacts information, update of yearly revenue and tax declarations. The MTO and DTC databases contained all the details held by MINPMEESA as well as the annual financial statements of the businesses.

Moreover, while MTO holds information only for medium-sized enterprises, the DTC keep data for very small and small businesses. Conversely, MINPMEESA keeps data for all categories of SMEs, and these three databases helped the researcher to ensure that participants selected met the criteria for a successful SME over 5 years, which had operated and sustained survival beyond 5 years and provided more relevance to the study

(Guetterman & Timothy, 2015). I carried out a comparative analysis between the data from MINPMEESA and the two tax centers to ensure the figures reflects the current reality of the business through a review of the business financial statements (tax returns as at December 2017) which were accessible at the tax department.

To gain access to the participants, I made preliminary contacts with potential individuals by telephone and also visited them in person at their offices to explain the purpose of the study and the benefits that the researcher, participants, and the community stood to gain from the results of the study. Preliminary contact with respondents helped the researcher to get some perspective or indications for participation from the conversations and provided an opportunity for preliminary evaluation of the participants against the set criteria for participation, as well as their interest in the study (Cuervo-Cazurra, Anderson, Brannen, Nielson, & Rueber, 2016). I gave preference to individuals who were easily accessible, and those who knew and were interested in the subject under research.

After I received IRB approval, I sent letters to the candidates who were most likely to participate based on the outcome of previous conversations. I forwarded the candidates personalized letters (Appendix A) by email and in-person delivery, in which I (a) explained the purpose of the study, eligibility criteria, the nature of the face-to-face interview, and the fact that the interviews were to be recorded; and (b) requested their formal consent to participate. Participants' knowledge and access to full information about the research project were an essential element that influenced the decision concerning participation in the research data collection process (Marrone, 2016).

Moreover, participants most often gave preference to respond to questions at their convenience, and I encouraged this process (see Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015).

Establishing a cordial relationship between the researcher and the participant is fundamental to the success of any research inquiry (Yin, 2014). I interacted with the participants in an open, honest, and respectful manner with clear communication lines necessary to enhance trust and frank exchanges with the participants as recommended by Evans and van Beest (2017). Besides, I employed calmness and improved my listening capacity to ensure the preservation of the respondent standpoints during the interview process, which helped to strengthen intimacy between the researcher and the respondent and help enhanced openness during the interview as discussed by Alby and Fatigante (2014).

Moreover, managing the working relationship with participants required understanding the different motivations of the participants so I could better engage them towards a direction that met their diverse expectations. Some participants have taken part in research for the value it brings to their communities, and the ethical values held between them and the researcher, including honesty, reciprocity, and respect (Guillemin, Gillam, Barnard, Stewart, & Rosenthal, 2016). Researchers reassured the respondents about the legal responsibility to keep their demographic information and disclosures confidential (Morse & Coulehan, 2015). When researchers affirm their responsibility for confidentiality, trustworthiness between the researcher and the participants is improved, thereby bringing about more frankness and increase participants' willingness to provide more relevant information during the interview process (Check, Wolf, Dame, & Beskow,

2014). The research notes and recordings for this study will be well safeguarded for at least a 5-year period.

### **Research Method and Design**

The research method and design were key components of this inquiry which was to explore strategies that owners of small food processing companies in Cameroon used to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of operation. A qualitative method was used to understand and explore the descriptive accounts, similarities, and differences of the strategies used by owners and managers of SMEs in their natural environment. A case study design provided the researcher with the opportunity to gain a deep understanding and new insights into the contemporary phenomenon of small business sustainability (Tumele, 2015).

### **Research Method**

The qualitative research method was suitable for this inquiry because the researcher could ask semistructured questions to participants which enable him to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in its natural environment and context (Yin, 2014). Qualitative research method helped to invoke personal responses from the audience (Manhas & Oberle, 2016) and focused on applied and theoretical findings or discoveries based on the research questions through field study in natural environments (Park & Park, 2016). Gerring (2017) argued that social science's knowledge begins at a qualitative level before proceeding to a quantitative level and that qualitative data is more useful to shed light regarding unknown causal mechanisms.

Quantitative, qualitative, and multi-strategy or mixed methods are the three research methods from which researchers can select from (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Researchers have used quantitative methods to collect numerical data from measurable variables for hypothesis testing about the variables' relationships (Park & Park, 2016). Researchers used mixed methods to draw inferences from data collected and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods in an integrated manner (Johnson, 2015). To explore successful strategies used by SMEs, I did not examine relations or carry out hypothesis testing; hence the quantitative or mixed methods were not suitable for this study. I used semistructured questions to interview participants regarding strategies they used for sustainability, to gain insight into their experiences as recommended by Yin (2014). Qualitative research method also includes data collection from artifacts such as internal and external documents (Yin, 2014).

Gerring (2017) suggested that qualitative research data are more suitable when the study focused is on a small number of cases or events. Qualitative inquiry contributed to the discovery of new concepts or frameworks of analysis which encourages researchers to adopt this method (Gerry, 2017). Qualitative methods enabled the researcher to probe into the minds of participants to find answers to questions based on emerging information from the participant's responses during the interview process, whereas the aim of the quantitative method on accepting or rejecting hypothesis through statistical test or analysis (Tumele, 2015). To explore the strategies that SMEs used to sustain business beyond the first 5 years required, the use of the *how and what* questions helped the

researcher to get the actual experiences and perceptions of the business owners, rather than trying to establish some form of generalizable facts (Barnham, 2015).

### **Research Design**

Prevalent designs in qualitative research include case study, phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative design (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I selected an exploratory multiple case study design for this study because this design facilitated data collection from a small number of small business owners and managers about their experiences using open-ended interview questions, and provided an in-depth and meaningful understanding of successful strategies used to enhance growth and sustainability of small businesses. A case study design provides researchers with the opportunity for rich descriptions and investigation into new empirical phenomena and trends (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2014). Case studies are also suitable for answering the research questions through research questions that allow deeper or broader view from the perspective of the participants themselves (Aczel, 2015; Yin, 2014).

Researchers use multiple case study design to explore empirical evidence from several cases and ensure integration of objective and persuasive data (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Yin, 2014). Researchers use the phenomenological design to study lived experiences of individuals to develop emerging themes (Chan, Walker, & Gleaves, 2015). A study of the lived experiences of individual uses just interviews for the data collection; I used multiple data collection methods. Baskerville and Myers (2015) noted that ethnographers seek to understand a phenomenon within a group's socio-cultural setting in order to interpret shared patterns of behavior and cultural trends. They added

that participants may not share similar cultural beliefs or traditions and therefore may not provide a deep understanding of meaning. A narrative research design would involve studying the life stories of some successful owners of SMEs (Garud & Giuliani, 2013). Life stories were not relevant to improve current business practices because such strategies may not add value to SMEs success or sustainability strategies.

I used semistructured interviews to explore the participants' individual experience on their strategies used to sustain their businesses beyond 5 years. To ensure research rigor and data saturation, I probed into the minds of the participants to get quality information. Data saturation was necessary to ascertain research credibility and validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation was achieved when the researcher collected information to the point of information redundancy (Gentles et al., 2015) or when the researcher had gathered information until there is no new information and theme possible on further inquiry (Furch & Ness, 2015). I also used methodological (within method) triangulation and member-checking to attain saturation.

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population for this study included 5 small food processing enterprises located in West and Central Africa. Robinson (2014) contended that researcher should define the target population, the inclusion or exclusion criteria to ensure that cases included in the final study are those with the required attributes. The small food processing enterprises were existing small businesses with success and sustainability records for more than 5 years. From each company included in the population, an owner or executive manager who has worked in the organization from startup and for at least 5



years was selected and included in the participants' list to take the interviews. I gave priority to owners who have managed their businesses for the first 5 years and who were willing and capable of articulating their experiences on strategies used to sustain their business. The researcher avoided bias (Morse & Coulehan, 2015), because of the potential negative impact on the results of the study's credibility, validity, and trustworthiness (Ajagbe, Isiavwe, Sholanke, & Oke, 2015).

To ensure richness of information collected, one business owner who did not fulfill the criteria was replaced by an executive manager who had worked with the small business for at least 5 years and who have been managing from the initial startup period. The sampling method used for participant selection stemmed from the conceptual framework and the research questions that this study was designed to address (Palinka et al., 2015). In qualitative research, scholars have used nonprobability purposeful sampling method to select suitable samples which are an appropriate representation of the target population and also adequate for addressing the research questions and research objectives (Gentles et al., 2015).

Purposeful sampling strategies allowed the researcher to select individuals or small business owners in the food processing sector with the appropriate knowledge and experience on the phenomenon under study, who demonstrated their availability, willingness to participate, and their ability to communicate clearly in response to the interview questions (Palinkas et al., 2015). Matterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2016) suggested the use of the concept of information power as a guide to determine the sample size of qualitative research. Information power refers to the extent, relevancy, or level of

depth of knowledge, experience, and information held by the sample or participant specific about the phenomenon under study (Matterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016).

The more relevant information was held by the participants with a high quality of dialogue (open and detailed conversation during the interview process) with the interviewer, the lesser the number of participants required to reach data saturation (Matterud et al., 2016). There was no standard for what can be considered an appropriate sample size in a qualitative study; instead, the sample size was influenced by the research questions, sample design, and purpose of the study (Elo et al., 2014). The focus of the sample participants was to enable the exploration of diversity in responses and not necessarily the statistical significance (Elsawah, Guillaume, Filatova, Rook, & Jakeman, 2015).

The logic and power in the use of purposeful sampling strategy for this study were that it facilitated the selection of information-rich cases which, in turn, yielded profound insights and in-depth understanding of the strategies that small businesses used to achieve sustainability and growth beyond the first 5 years (Patton, 2015). Any sampling decision adopted for use in the study came with a focus on attaining data richness and quality, enabling the attainment of data saturation and credibility (Kevin et al., 2015). The sample size was dependent on the researcher's ability to reach data saturation (Bekhet & Zausniewshi, 2014).

Reaching data saturation was essential because it enabled the researcher to demonstrate rigor in the qualitative case study design (Morse & Coulehan, 2015). Data saturation was achieved when sufficient information had been collected until there was

no new theme(s) emerging from further inquiries or data collection process (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation in qualitative interviews does not depend on the number of participants interviewed but on the quality and scope of the information provided during the interview process (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse & Coulehan, 2015). Strategies to promote data saturation in this research included prolonged field exposure through repeated in-depth semistructured interviews with participants, member checking, and methodological (within method) triangulation of interviews and secondary evidence from review and analysis of company documents, and information from third-party sources as recommended by Kevin et al. (2015).

### **Ethical Research**

As research involving human participants continue to rise, with the preponderance of technological advancements facilitating access to human participants; increasing financial and professional incentives to participate, this heightens the risk of violation of the rights of research participants (Bozeman, Slade, & Hirsch, 2009). Possible increased risk of non-respect of human participants meant that ethical consideration must continue to be an integral part of any research involving human participants (Moustakas, 1994). University institutional review boards (IRB) were responsible for ensuring that the researchers fully comply with ethical rules (Bozeman et al., 2009). Like in the medical sciences field, research studies in social sciences involving human participants must also follow the ethics review process and the application of the Belmont principles (Koepsell, Brinkman, & Pont, 2015). Key process researchers used to ensure compliance with the

ethical standard in research work involving human participants is the informed consent of participants (Marrone, 2016).

Informed consent process emanated from the Belmont Report which is a principle that set out the framework for participants to evaluate the benefits and risks of their participation in any research study (Myers & Venable, 2014). Researchers used informed consent to avoid consent bias (Loannidis, 2013). Informed consent has been used to document the participant's voluntary decision to participate in the study (Schrems, 2014) and also to meet up with the researcher's legal responsibility to participants involved in the study as prescribed by the US Office of Human Research Protections and as required by Walden University IRB (Sugarman, 2017). Participants understanding of their responsibilities, risks, and benefits of their participation were the cornerstone of the informed consent process (Kraft, Porter, Shad, & Wilfond, 2017).

A researcher must disclose appropriate information about their research to potential participants to allow them to make voluntary choices about their involvement in the study (Kraft et al., 2017). Sugarman (2017) stated that recent emphasis to enhance the informed consent process have been to foster participant's comprehension and understanding of the research work to enable informed decision process. The onus was on the researcher to provide detail and sufficient facts about the study to enable the participants to understand the reason for and against their participation Sugarman (2017). Researchers may violate ethical principles in some cases including, (a) too close relationship between the researcher and the participants (principle of justice),(b) poor research design and any imposition of participants (principle of merit and integrity), and

(c) lack of knowledge about risk and benefits associated with the study (principle of respect), thus, affecting credibility and validity (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). Greenwood (2016) argued that the process of identifying the risks and benefits of any research study should be a two-way process that involves both the perspective of the researchers and that of the participants. Therefore, I explained the risk and benefits of the research before their participation, as a strategy to instill confidence and openness during the interview process.

An understanding of some of the reasons why individuals or organizations have often gotten involved in research as participants included transparent communication, the researcher's ability to demonstrate respect of privacy, participation incentives (knowledge acquisition, financial, or social change impact) can enhance the researcher's ability to secure informed consent with participants (Skinner et al., 2015). The informed consent form for this research work spelled out (a) the purpose of the research, (b) participants' expectations, (c) the known risk and benefits of the participants in the research, (d) participants' right to respond or withdraw at any time without prejudice, (e) confidentiality assurances, (f) data collection procedure, (g) secure data storage for over 5 years, and (h) the IRB approval number, and signatures of the participants and researcher. The letter of introduction or personalized letter (Appendix A) also explained to the potential participants the various headings and content of the informed consent form which enabled participant's comprehension and helped participants to make an informed decision about their participation in my study as recommended by Kraft et al. (2017). I fully complied with ethical principles related to participants right to anonymity,

confidentiality and voluntary withdrawal without notice as noted by Scambler, Gupta, and Asimakopoulou (2015).

During the interview process, participants were free to respond or object to any particular question and may withdraw at any time without penalty. The primary incentive to participate in this research was participants' free access to a page summary of the results of my findings and the opportunity to benefit from the exchange I had with them during the interview, and the opportunity to impact positively on this research study through community development. I did not offer cash or any other incentives as compensation for participation. I also obtained ethical approval number **05-02-18-0483847 on May 2, 2018** from Walden University IRB before conducting field data collection. The IRB approval number was also enlisted in the informed consent form before signature by participants. I maintained confidentiality of research participants and their information by making sure that there were no visible links between the respondents and the responses from the in-depth interview process in the final study. The kept the identities of the participants (names, business, address) confidential at all times and I ensured the preservation of all data, records, and information collected during the study securely in a safe and coded for 5 years to protect the rights of participants. During this 5 years period, I will not grant access to any person or body, except Walden University. After 5 years, I will remove all evidence stored and destroy by shredding.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Researchers are the primary data collection instrument in a qualitative study and formed an integral part of the research process (Bernard, 2013; Houghton et al., 2013). I

was the primary data collection instrument during this research as indicated by Yin (2014). Researchers interact with the participants during the inquiry process and serve as the primary instrument in the data collection process with a focus on collecting data that is of value to the phenomenon under study (Gatsmyer & Pruitt, 2014). Sources of data for this study included primary and secondary sources. Primary data sources were mainly through semistructured interviews and secondary sources included documentation and archival records (Yin, 2014). Lewis, Harris, Morrison, and Ho (2015) conducted a qualitative case study research on the small business success of mothers who transitioned from employment towards self-employment using the semistructured in-depth interview as the primary data collection source and secondary data source including archival documents (media reports, industry and company published reports). I carried out semistructured interviews with the participants as a means of transferring their life experiences and the meanings from the participants to the interviewer (Brinkman, 2016). Elsworth et al. (2015) asserted that researchers used semistructured interviews in the process of human interaction to collect data patterning to a specific research topic from the participants' thoughts and their interpretation of the phenomenon under study.

Saunders et al. (2016) posited that semistructured and in-depth interviews were appropriate in qualitative research when, (a) the study is exploratory or incorporate an exploratory element, (b) the research seek to establish personal contact with participants because managers have been found to more easily accept participation in interviews that relate to their areas of activity and that enable them to discuss on topics with fewer efforts, and (c) when the nature of the interview questions is complex or open-ended.

Researchers used semistructured interviews to understand participant's interpretation of the real-world situation based on their experiences with a particular phenomenon under study (Paine, 2015; Peters & Halcomb, 2015). Sliwinki and Sliwinska (2016) used semistructured interviews in a qualitative multiple case study research to explore the factors that impeded the growth of Polish small businesses in foreign or international markets. Schonfeld and Mazzola (2015) conducted semistructured interviews with self-employed individuals operating small businesses. Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions were appropriate for this research because it gave participants their freedom of expression without limits and facilitated easier identification of themes (Seierstad & Kirton, 2015). Researchers used face-to-face open-ended semistructured interviews as a valid strategy for collecting data (Pain, 2015). Therefore, to get an in-depth understanding of the strategies that small business owners have used to be successful from their perspective, I conducted semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to probe the minds of the small business owners. Ensuring reliability and validity was an integral part of this research work.

Strategies to ensure reliability and validity of qualitative case study research include member checking and methodological triangulation (Yin, 2014). Member checking improves reliability and validity of data collected (Vance, 2015). Member checking requires that data or the results of the research are sent back to the participants to check or compare for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Birt et al., 2016). Birt et al. (2016) also provided two additional member checking approaches, including returning the transcribed interviews to the participants for accuracy and using synthesized



member checking; sending back both the raw interview data and the interpreted data for the interviewee to review or using previously interpreted interview data as a basis for proceeding interviews. Synthesized member checking has been used in semistructured and in-depth interviewed to improve the credibility of results (Birt et al., 2016). As recommended by Birt et al (2016), I sent back the interview transcripts and my interpretations to the participants to review and confirm, thereby enhancing the validity of my interpretations. In addition, to use synthesized member checking, I sent back both the interview data and my interpretations of the interviews to the participants to validate and then use the results of this process as a basis for the next three interviews to verify if the participants share similar experiences (Harvey, 2015). After during member checking, the participants verify the accuracy of the interpretations of their responses and then signed the corrected version of the member-checked interview transcripts.

Harvey (2015) suggested the use of the results of analysis on one participant's interview for the next participant's interview as a valid strategy to ensure reliability and validity of data. Also, methodological (within method) triangulation was an appropriate method to ensure reliability and validity of data (Morse & Coulehan, 2015; Yin, 2014). Researchers carried out member checking by providing the results of finding to the participants to ascertain that data was an accurate representation of the participants' experiences and their interpretation (Ciemins, Brant, Kersten, Mullette, & Dickerson, 2015). Triangulation enabled comparison of interview data with those from other sources such as published reports (Hussein, 2015). Morse and Coulehan, 2015 (2015) asserted that validity and reliability are inherently linked with the attainment of reliability

somewhat synchronized to achieving validity. I used member checking and methodological (within method) triangulation to achieve validity and reliability. To ensure that I fully captured the participants' responses and the meaning their experiences of their success strategies I sent back my interpretations of their responses for review and confirmation (Birt et al., 2016; Yin, 2014). I used a member checking protocol (Appendix D) to enhance the process.

Interviews are an essential source of data in qualitative research (Arsel, 2017). The qualitative interview is an instrument of transfer of life experiences from an interviewee to the interviewer and enable the production of knowledge through human interactions in a specific context (Brinkmann, 2016). The purpose of the in-depth open-ended interviews was to allow me to understand or gain insight into the life experiences of the small business owners and their interpretations thereof. I conducted the interview process with the aid of an interview protocol (Appendix C) and communicated to the participants. The interview protocol (Appendix C) provides an outline of the critical points and questions that the researcher can use to explore the phenomenon, including the procedure to establish informed consent and indicating the voluntary nature of participation involvement (Arsel, 2017).

### **Data Collection Technique**

This study aimed to explore the strategies that small food processing enterprises in Cameroon use to achieve success and sustainability of their business beyond the first 5 years. Interviews are common instruments for collecting data in qualitative research (Onwuebuze & Byers, 2015). I used face-to-face interviews for data collection, through

semistructured interview questions (Appendix B) to selected participants to enable me to capture the participants' perspective or viewpoint about their success or sustainability strategies as suggested by Lewis et al. (2015). Other sources of data included contemporary documents (companies' internal reports, media reports, strategic plans, and minutes of staff planning meetings) and archival documents (reports on growth trends, company budgets, past financial statements for previous 5 years, and government record (taxation and ministries in charge of small businesses). Semistructured interviews are the most common data collection strategies in qualitative case study research because it allows for the collection of relevant data and provides ample flexibility and easy accessibility to understanding a particular phenomenon via the participants' lens (Seierstad & Kirton, 2015).

Semistructured interviews provided an opportunity for the researcher to get a deeper understanding of a participant's view by asking to follow up questions (Bodolica & Spraggon, 2015) and facilitates researcher's understanding of a phenomenon from a respondent's perspective (Paine, 2015; Peters & Halcom, 2015). The researcher used semistructured interviews to capture data about the participants, which enabled proper ample interpretation of the subject matter and facilitated judgment making (Elsawah et al., 2015). Audiotaping of interviews provided greater accuracy than notetaking and offered a more accurate representation of participant's viewpoints (Yin, 2014). I used audiotapes to record interview responses from the participants. Phones and tablets acted as backup recording systems to guard against any failure or malfunction of audio

recording systems. Note taking was an integral part of data recording system during the evidence collection process.

Before conducting the interviews, I discussed with participants about the content of the informed consent form and the semistructured interview protocol (Appendix C) to enhance their understanding and discuss any issues raised by the participants before their signature. The researcher presented the interview questions (Appendix B) to the participants 2 hours before the actual interview started to clarify expectations and provide them ample time to familiarize with the research questions, improve the relationship with the interviewer, and improve response accuracy as recommended by Rizo et al. (2015). The face-to-face interviews were conducted at locations that provide the best convenience to the respondents. I requested participants consent about the interview site to assure their comfort, convenience, and freedom of expression. Face-to-face interviews are advantageous in qualitative research data collection because the interviewer can monitor respondent's nonverbal communication and make sense out of the data collected (Onwuebuozie & Byers, 2014).

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews enabled trust-building between the researcher and respondents via direct interaction and promote openness in sharing even more insights about small business sustainability strategies at the nascent stages of their small businesses. Archival records supported primary data collected using the interviews and corroborated the evidence. Themes emanating from interview transcripts were compared with data from the archives to corroborate evidence (Yin, 2014) through methodological triangulation (Jaskiewicz, Combs, & Rau, 2015).

Researchers can achieve methodological triangulation by comparing the semistructured interview data with data from other sources including archival documents (Hussein, 2015). Researchers perform member checking by providing the interview questions and their interpretations to the participants for review and confirmation (Vance, 2015). I used methodological triangulation and member checking to ensure data accuracy, credibility, reliability, and validity of this research study. As recommended by Harvey (2015), member checking enabled the researcher to achieve dependability, credibility, and confirmability. At the end of the interviews, I took back the interview transcripts and my interpretations to participants for a member checking interview/meeting, to review for accuracy and confirmation (Birt et al., 2016). Multiple data sources facilitated the attainment of methodological triangulation which is fundamental to strengthening trustworthiness in case study research (Yin, 2014).

To improve the quality and rigor of my research, I used member checking and methodological (within method) triangulation to achieve data saturation. In the case of qualitative case study research, there is no direct relationship between the sample size and researcher's ability to attain data saturation (Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & LaRossa, 2015). However, having a lesser number of participants in the sample with sound knowledge of the phenomenon facilitated the achievement of data saturation (Matterud et al., 2016). The participants consisted owners or founders who have been managing their business from inception and and executive manager who had deep knowledge and was able to express the strategies they used to sustain their business over the first 5 years. I conducted semistructured open-ended interviews with the participants

and probed into their minds, had deep discussions until a point where they were not able to bring out any new information or discoverable themes as recommended by Fusch and Ness (2015). In addition, as recommended by Constantinou, Georgiou, and Perdikogianni (2017), I used the comparative method for theme saturation (CoMeTS) to reach data saturation. The CoMeTS is a two-step approach in which (i) all themes from the interviews are compared with each other and (ii) the sequence of interview reordered again to check saturation.

### **Data Organization Technique**

After recording the interviews, making notes during the interview and archival document review and documentary evidence, the next step was to organize the data in a way to facilitate data analysis and storage. Data when organized and efficiently stored enhanced data analysis and effective communication of results (Korhonen, 2014). The use of qualitative data analysis software packages was to improve or strengthen the quality of the study by promoting transparency during the analysis process (Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2016). NVivo 12 for Mac software is a qualitative data analysis software package which qualitative researchers used for data codification and to generate themes; clarifying relationships that exist within such data (Oliveira, Bitencourt, dos Santos, & Teixeira, 2016). The advantage of NVivo 12 for Mac software for analysis in this exploratory research is its ability to code and generate themes using data from different sources including interview transcripts, literature (text material), audio recordings, documentary evidence with a high level of reliability (Oliveira et al., 2016).

At the end of data collection process, I transcribed all my field notes, interview transcripts, accounting records, and documents (financial statements, statistical and tax returns, marketing flyers, budget, and books of original entries- Cash and expenditure booklets), and classify them into storable folders and name them as recommended by Flannery and Gormley (2014). I then loaded all completed transcripts and other data into the NVivo 12 for Mac software for coding and generation of themes for a better understanding of the research phenomenon (Zamawe, 2015). At the end of the study, I ensured that all data and related evidence are stored in a secured location, under key and lock systems, and after 5 years I will destroy the data by shredding all paper versions and formatting storage devices.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is fundamental in the research process because it enables the researcher to identify patterns and relationships from the transcribed data collected and determine how they relate to the phenomenon under study (Saunders et al., 2016). The data analysis process in this qualitative research were focused on identifying themes emanating from the participants' interview and archival documents to provide appropriate answers to the fundamental research questions (Davidson, Paulus, & Jackson, 2016). During data analysis, I performed preliminary codification and categorization of the semistructured interviews base on identifiable themes, patterns, and categorize the data according to their similarity in meanings (Saunders et al., 2016). Yin (2014) posited that methodological triangulation is a suitable procedure for analyzing case study data.

Researchers use triangulation to boost confidence and strengthen the validity of the study by analyzing rich data and providing unbiased results (Joslin & Müller, 2016). As recommended by Joslin and Müller; and Yin, I used methodological triangulation for analysis by comparing the transcribed data from the semistructured interviews, documents, and archival sources to ensure the validity of the data collected. To ensure that the data analysis is complete and fully represents the experiences of the participants, I performed transcription of the audiotapes, interviews, and field notes, at the close of every interview or data collection session to avoid losing precious data or misrepresenting participant views (Plauche, Marks, & Hawkins, 2016). Besides, using member checking, I took back my interview transcripts and interpretation to the participants for review, correction and validation during another session called member checking meeting (Birt et al., 2016). During the member checking, I followed strictly the member checking protocol (Appendix D).

Another credible data analysis method is the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo which helps to analyze the interview transcripts and facilitate data management and storage (Cridland, Jones, Caputi, & Magee, 2015). NVivo software aid the researcher to organize, code, and analyze large volumes of data (text, audio, and videos) into themes and provide assistance in uncovering relationships that exist within the data (Oliveira et al., 2016). Moreover, CAQDAS can increase transparency and methodological rigor (Saunders et al., 2016). I used NVivo 12 software for Mac to digitally code and analyze the transcribed data, which also allowed the possibility of automatic modification, connections, and cross-referencing



of data without any loss of perspective gathered during the initial analysis phase (Oliveira et al., 2016). In an exploratory study of the factors in small handicraft small business from data collected from small handicraft businesses managed by their owner-managers, the researchers used content analysis and NVivo to analyze the data (Ammar, 2017).

A thematic content analysis aided in identifying themes or patterns in the coded data for further analysis about the research questions (Saunders et al., 2016). Elo et al. (2014) contended that researchers ascertain the trustworthiness of qualitative content analysis through credibility, dependability, transferability, and authenticity of the process. The reliability of the content analysis was achieved by ensuring that the data used for analysis is rich, well appropriate, and saturated and that the results represented a mirror image of the data (Elo et al., 2014). I reviewed data at various stages of preparation, organization, to reporting the result as a means to achieving trustworthiness as recommended by Elo et al (2014).

For a careful analysis and quality results, I used Yin's 5 steps of data analysis procedure; compiling, disassemble, reassemble, interpret, and conclude (Yin, 2015). Durodola, Fusch, and Tippins (2017) used Yin's five-step data analytic procedure in their qualitative case study using in-depth interviews. The compiling phase involved in the organizing of the data in an order, to create a database. Database compilation involved sorting out the field notes and arranging the textual data into an organized order (Durodola et al., 2017). Repetitive reading of the field notes, interview responses and the discussions with participants enabled the researcher to recollect and more carefully understand the responses and discussions and the meaning that participants attributed to

them (Durodola et al., 2017). Again, the researcher was more able to make clear connections between data collected and the original research questions and got assurances about the completeness of the research data collected before analysis (Durodola et al., 2017). At the end of the compilation process data were arranged into a consistent format or data record (Yin, 2015).

At step 2, the disassembling process involved breaking down compiled textual data into smaller fragments and assigning labels to each small fragment. I classified similar participant's explanations and those with specific opinions into level 1 codes (major themes) and other data with more narrower category placed under level 2 codes (sub themes). I performed codification on a line by line basis to ensure all the interview responses (transcribed data), field notes, and other documents (tax returns, accounting records, business and activity plans, minutes books, financial records, employees record booklets, sales records, flyers, and posters; stock records booklets, standard operating procedural manuals); government documents (Tax returns, training posters and flyers, list of SMEs funded projects; soft copy of historical data for registered SMEs in the region since 2010 and their tax situation and revenues); and company online data (Facebook, LinkedIn profiles, and websites), were fully captured and coded (Yin, 2015). The reassembling process involved in clustering and categorizing the labels into a sequence of groups (Yin, 2015). After the disassembling stage, the next step (step 3) was the reassembling of textual data which involved bringing together data fragments into identifiable themes (Yin, 2015). During this stage, I identified patterns by checking various participants responses for the various questions and match with their

demographic information. I checked the responses and discussions or field notes from participants with a similar demographic background to find out how their responses and experiences relate to each other vis a vis the research questions. The process of identifying the patterns or themes were a repetitive process until consistent patterns or themes were reliably obtained, adequately linking the sub themes to the main themes (Durodola et al., 2017).

The interpretation stage involved in creating narratives from the sequences and groups for conclusions. After ascertaining that credible and consistent patterns had been achieved, the researcher proceeded with data interpretation (Step 4), essentially looking for connections between the patterns or themes (linking sub themes to the major themes) and finding out how the themes related to the research questions and the conceptual framework (Yin, 2015). I performed a scan of the reassembled data from a broader perspective and narrow down to align well with the objectives of my research to enable accurate interpretation. After, interpreting the data, the final stage in Yin's five-step is a conclusion which ends the data analysis process.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity are important facets that scholars have used to determine the quality of the qualitative study, and which were considered as an integral part of this research (Saunders et al., 2016). Reliability and validity were shown to enhance the credibility of qualitative study (Noble & Smith, 2015). To achieve a good quality research, the researcher must develop strategies to attain reliability and validity. Reliability refers to replication and consistency, while validity indicates how appropriate

the measure used is the accuracy of the analysis of results; and the extent of generalizing the findings (Saunders et al., 2016).

### **Reliability**

Morse and Coulehan (2015) suggested some key strategies to achieve research reliability including; (a) member checking, (b) triangulation, (c) prolonged engagement, (d) thick description or data saturation; (e) reducing researcher bias, (f) peer debriefing, and (g) external audits. In this research study, I used member checking, methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement with participants, and clarifying researcher bias to attain reliability as recommended by Morse and Coulehan (2015), I carried out member checking by taking back my interpretations to the participants for member checking meeting to gain accuracy of their statements and also to ensure that the results represent their true experiences about small business sustainability strategies, thereby enhancing credibility of the results of this study (Birt et al., 2016; Vance, 2015).

In particular, Birt et al. (2016) suggested the use of synthesized member checking as a strategy to enhance reliability. Following Birt et al. recommendations, I used the synthesized result of the member check of the first two participants as a guide to modify the third participant's interview. I performed methodological triangulation by comparing the data from the semistructured in-depth interviews with those from other sources including documents and archival sources (Hussein, 2015). The use of NVivo software was found to promote accuracy and reliability of results (Zamawe, 2015) and improve transparency and methodological rigor, thus fostering trustworthiness in the data analysis and results which is fundamental to achieving credibility, dependability, transferability,

and authenticity of the research (Elo et al., 2014). Reducing the opportunity for errors or bias was an essential part of this process (Sandelowski, 2015). I used the standardized interview protocol (Appendix C) to ensure that all participants follow the same process during the interview to ensure internal consistency. Following the interview protocol (Appendix C), I asked all the participants the same questions to improve internal reliability (Narayanan, Greco, Reeves, Matthews, & Bergin, 2014).

### **Validity**

The validity of qualitative research is assessed using credibility, dependability, transferability, and authenticity (Elo et al., 2014). The strategies used to achieve validity of this study include member checking, methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement with participants, and clarifying the researcher's bias (Morse & Coulehan, 2015; Yin, 2014). The use of methodological triangulation increases confidence and strengthens the validity of the study through rich data and unbiased results (Joslin & Müller, 2016). Thick and rich data necessary for data saturation is arrived at when further inquiry produces no new data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation remains a key strategy for enhancing the validity of a qualitative study (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Credibility is determined by ensuring that the results of the analysis reflect the participants' live experiences (Birt et al., 2016). Establishing the relationship between the original data collected from participants and the researcher's interpretation enhanced credibility (Munn et al., 2014). Researchers achieve credibility through the attainment of the qualitative research validity and reliability (Noble & Smith, 2015). Dependability and

confirmability have been considered to be linked to each other and results from data from the similar situation being consistent over time (Anney, 2014).

Confirmability refers to data that is impartial and correct (Munn et al., 2014). Hussein (2015) asserted that confirmability in qualitative study demonstrates that research data truly represents participant voices, and free from the researcher's personal bias. Methodological triangulation and NVivo 12 software for Mac analysis can aid in confirmability, transferability, and reliability of data (Hussein, 2015). I used NVivo 12 software for Mac to establish confirmability by running the data and understanding the frequency of words or themes and establishing relationships with the research questions, literature, and the conceptual framework for this research.

Unlike generalizability is used in quantitative research to determine acceptance of research findings, qualitative research use the concept of transferability. Marchall and Rossman (2016) pointed out that data collected for one case study may be too tight to the specific study and difficult to be transferred to another study. To enhance transferability, qualitative researchers engaged in a process of sharing their interpretations of the data collected with the participants (Yin, 2014) and ensure data saturation is achieved (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Readers of qualitative research are those to determine transferability based on their decision on the acceptance of the research process and results of the study and how to consider it for future studies (Hess, McNab, & Basoglu, 2014). Moreover, the onus of applicability of a research findings from one context to a different context is at the discretion of future researchers (Marchall & Rossman, 2016). Therefore, the aspect of transferability remains at the discretion of the readers of this qualitative research and the

results. As proposed by Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2017), to ensure transferability, I used a qualitative exploratory multiple case study design with methodological (within methods) triangulation to reach data saturation, and acknowledging any known research bias.

### **Transition and Summary**

In section 2, I described the purpose of the study, my role as the researcher, I identified the research participants and explained the importance and procedure of ensuring ethical research; a description of the population and the sampling strategies, data collection method, data collection technique, data organization techniques; data analysis and methods of achieving reliability and validity. In Section 3, my focus was on presentation and analysis of the findings of the study and the applications to professional practice, and implications for social change. I also included some further recommendations for future research.

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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study was to explore strategies that owners of small food processing enterprises in Cameroon use to succeed in sustaining their business beyond the first 5 years of operation. Recognizing the pivotal role that SMEs play in the development of any country through job creation and economic growth, gaining more profound insights about sustainability strategies for small business is an essential aspect for positive social change. In Cameroon, a general enterprise census carried out by the CNIS in January 2018 revealed that small business in Cameroon employed a total of 635,965 persons as at December 31, 2015, an increase of over 64.6% from 2008. In another study by MINEPAT in 2016, the survival rate of SMEs beyond the first 5 years was recorded at less than 27.7%, depicting that for every 10 new registered businesses in Cameroon, only 3 survived after 5 years, leading to increasing unemployment and hardship. The results of this study, therefore, comes at the right moment and may potentially contribute to improving the knowledge of potential and existing business owners small businesses about strategies that can help them succeed and sustain their enterprises and also drive business sustainability agenda in Cameroon and the world at large.

I conducted semistructured and open-ended interviews with 5 participants: four (4) owners and one (1) manager of small food processing enterprises. All the businesses operate in Cameroon and have more than 5 years of business experience and success. I used methodological triangulation to verify data collected from the interviews using



secondary sources (see Yin, 2014). The participants provided their responses to the interview questions, and the data I collected provide insights into the strategies they used to achieve success beyond the first 5 years. I ensured data validity and built confidence and strength in the rich data collected through methodological triangulation which I analyzed using NVivo 12 through Yin's 5 steps to produce unbiased results (Joslin & Müller, 2016). Data analysis involved identifying themes which emanated from the participants' interview responses interpretations and archival documents which provided appropriate and logical answers to the fundamental research questions (Davidson, Paulus, & Jackson, 2016).

The analysis of the participants' responses to the interview questions which I did after member checking and methodological triangulation to enable data saturation revealed varying but consistent themes indicative of the various strategies that the small business owners had used to achieve success during their first 5 years of their businesses. Primarily, I developed the initial coding (Level 1 nodes) based on the conceptual framework, the RBV, the interview questions, and the literature review. Subthemes (Level 2 nodes) emerged and consistent patterns formed that then provided significant linkages between the subthemes and the major themes. The results demonstrate the actual experiences and strategies that the SMEs owners used to sustain their small business beyond the first 5 years. Major themes associated with the strategies that SMEs used to achieve success and sustainability beyond the first 5 years include: (a) education, technical experience, and skills; (b) entrepreneurial and business management skills; (c) access to external support; (d) bookkeeping and financial management; (e) human

resource management; (f) owner's personal dedication and commitment; (g) research and development and marketing strategies; (h) resource-based strategic planning; and (i) understanding of business ecosystem, regulations, and taxation. I used member checking and methodological triangulation to ensure data saturation, reliability, and validity of the results of this study.

The five small food processing enterprises used in this study may not fully represent the industry and strategies for success and sustainability in the sector. However, the results provide a deep insight into practical strategies for success in SMEs in Cameroon, which may enhance and improve small business owners' knowledge on success and sustainability strategies, thereby improving their success rate. The results are also consistent with the conceptual framework and the body of knowledge as described in the literature review section. Also, I suggest some directions for further research on small business success and sustainability strategies. In Section 3, I provide detailed presentation and analysis of the findings of my study, the applications to professional practice, and implications for social change. I have also included suggestions for future research.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The central overarching research question for this study is: what strategies do owners of small food processing enterprises in Cameroon use to sustain their business beyond the first 5 years of operation? I collected data using semistructured, open-ended interview questions with four (4) owners and one (1) manager of small food processing enterprises in West and Central Africa. I collected secondary data pertaining to the participants' organizations including company documents (tax returns, accounting

records, business and activity plans, minutes books, financial records, employees record booklets, sales records, flyers and posters, stock records booklets, and standard operating procedural manuals), government documents (Tax returns, training posters and flyers, list of SMEs funded projects, soft copies of historical data for some registered SMEs since 2010 and their tax situation and revenues), and company online data (Facebook, LinkedIn profiles, and websites). A qualitative data analysis enabled me to identify patterns and relationships from the transcribed data collected and determine how they relate to the phenomenon under study (see Saunders et al., 2016). To ensure anonymity, I represented each participant and their business name with a letter and a number: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and B1, B2, B3, B4, and B5 respectively. I conducted all the interviews in safe locations chosen by each participant (participants' offices and home offices). I recorded the interviews using an audio recorder to ensure accuracy of the data collected, which enable appropriate coding of all the data collected (see Yin, 2014). I used semistructured open-ended interview questions, which helped me understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants (see Paine, 2015; Peters & Halcomb, 2015; Seierstad & Kirton, 2015 ).

At the end of the interview process, I transcribed the recorded interviews and took a scheduled member checking meeting with each participant during which the participants reviewed my transcribed data and confirmed by signing the my interpretations. During the member checking session, I used the member checking protocol (Appendix D) to ensure consistency in the review process and to ensure that every detail was discussed, which helped to reduce the influence of personal bias.

Researchers used member checking to validate data collected and improve trustworthiness and credibility of the results (Birth et al., 2016).

I used Yin's 5 steps analysis procedure and analyzed data via NVivo 12 for Mac software. I assembled all the data collected from P1, P2, P3, P4, & P5 including; interview transcriptions, member checking, notes, and secondary data; tax documents, company reports (financial reports, budgets, minutes of planning meetings, and various record booklets), marketing documents (posters and flyers). Other data collected include online data (Facebook pages and client's product feedbacks), government magazines, and data from product labels and packaging. I then organized all data into an order to create a database and inputted into NVivo 12 for Mac software for analysis to identify emergent themes. Based on the conceptual framework, literature, the interview questions, and in line with Yin's five steps, I categorized the data and created the initial codes, designated in NVivo as "Nodes" and termed them "nodes level 1" (or major themes). I reviewed the NVivo data and perused the automatically created sub nodes/sub themes and manually linked similar sub themes to the major themes in a consistent manner.

I used methodological triangulation to achieve data saturation, which is the point where no new information or themes emerge with further verification of the interview transcript, member checking, and documentary data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Nine main themes emerged denoting the strategies that SMEs may use to succeed and sustain their businesses during the first 5 years including: (a) Education, Technical Experience, and Skills; (b) Entrepreneurial and Business Management Skills; (c) Access to External Support; (d) Bookkeeping and Financial Management; (e) Human Resource

Management; (f) Owner's Personal Dedication and Commitment; (g) Research and Development and Marketing Strategies; (h) Resource-Based Strategic Planning; and (i) Understanding of Business Ecosystem, Regulations, and taxation. The results are indicative of the strategies that SMEs have used to achieve success and sustainability beyond the first 5 years.

Table 2

*Emergent Themes (Level 1 Nodes): Summary and References*

Themes (nodes)	Number of sources	References
Education, technical experience, and skills	5	56
Entrepreneurial and business management skills	5	47
Access to external support	3	22
Bookkeeping and working capital management	4	65
Human resource management	3	42
Owner's dedication and commitment	3	29
Research and development and marketing strategies	5	79
Resource-based strategic planning	4	41
Understanding of business ecosystem, regulations, and taxation	3	46

### **Participants Demographic Characteristics**

I selected participants from the database of operational businesses at the Small and Medium-Sized Tax Payer's Office and the Regional Delegation of the Cameroon's

Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Social Economy, and the Handicraft for Limbe, Douala, and Yaoundé. I contacted a total of 15 small business owners and 2 managers. Five respondents completed the interview process, including member checking, 6 respondents responded and rejected participation, while one participated, but was not available to complete member checking. All participants who did not meet or responded but dismissed participation came from Douala and Yaoundé.

Table 3

*Business Owners' Response to Researcher's Participation Request*

Small food processing enterprises owner	Number of participants	Rate
Number of respondents who completed	5	33%
Number of respondents who rejected	6	40%
Number with no feedback on request	3	20%
Number withdrawn	1	7.00%
Total contacted	15	100%

### **Research Participants**

Four owners and one manager participated in this research. To ensure anonymity, I represented each participant and their business name with a letter and a number: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and B1, B2, B3, B4, and B5 respectively. P1 is a business owner who has been doing food processing for over 18 years, holds a secondary school certificate, and did not have any previous business knowledge before commencing her business. P1's company processes soya beans and other locally cultivated products. P2 holds a master's degree in

mechanical engineering and had worked with Cameroon's largest agricultural corporation in different capacities including crop production director for about 30 years before retiring. P2 started his business while still working with the agricultural firm before retiring to actively manage his business that cultivates and processes palms and cassava products. P3 holds an elementary school certificate (First School Leaving Certificate [FSLC]) and has been processing and preserving local produce like moringa and cocoa for distribution to local stores. P3 had no previous business experience. P4 is a first-degree holder in management sciences with over 6 years of experience in managing a very successful small food enterprise that produces food for babies. P5 is a graduate in theology and a reverend priest whose passion for agriculture business is to help support community growth through sponsorship of young people's education. P5 helped organized a cooperative of farmers and processed their farm yields of yams, cassava, and plantains into flours, and distributes in both local and international markets. P5 has over 8 years of food business experience. However, he grew up in a family of business owners. All respondents who completed the interviews met the participant selection criteria described in the consent form.

### **Emergent Theme 1: Education, Technical Experience, and Skills**

I analyzed initial coded data from interview transcripts, member checking, company documents, and tax files from the tax department, and inputted them into NVivo 12 Software for Mac. I used NVivo to identify similarities between the data and the pre-coded themes, and manually reviewed the data in NVivo until all related patterns or subthemes were linked to the major themes. The result revealed for theme 1 is shown

on Table 4 below with 56 total references with sub themes including, education and training (17), previous business experience (17), and technical skills.

Table 4

*Emergent Theme 1: Education, Technical Experience, and Skills*

Subthemes (Level 2 nodes)	Number of souces	References
Education and training	5	17
Previous business experience	3	17
Technical skills	4	22

Four out of the five respondents indicated that their educational background, experience, and training helped their businesses to succeed during the first 5 years. P2 worked for over 29 years (1973-2003) as production director and in several technical and management positions in a state corporation engaged in Oil palm, rubber, and banana production. P2 completed a B.S and M.S. in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Hawaii, Manoa before returning to Cameroon to join the agrosector as production director. P2 stated that during his tenure working in the corporation, he attended several trainings and gathered a multitude of production experiences and relationships that helped him in his business. A review of the employee list for P2 and P4 showed that the two companies gave prefernces for individuals with some level of experience because they felt that those with technical experience were more effective in the production. This explains why P2 mostly recruited individuals from the state own agricultural corporation



where he worked before so that his business was able to benefit from the technical experience acquired from year of hands-on training and experience.

P5 used workers without experience because he did not have the funds to pay those with technical skills, but he realized that as his staff learned on the job and also attending training organized by the ministry of SMEs, his business output and the quality of the products improved and waste also reduced. P5 also concurred that once his production manager was ill and he noticed that their quality and output dropped and they couldn't even meet up with the customer's orders, but when his production manager returned, the problem was automatically resolved (P5 personal communication, 05/28/18; member checking, 06/06/18; and stock records; 05/28/18). P4 indicated that his knowledge acquired from university with a B.S in management helped him to succeed and though he lacked technical skills, his business has depended on employees who have those skills and he communicate openly to technical staff about the business dependence on them (P4, personal communication 05/28/18, member checking 06/04/18, and Minutes of staff meeting, 05/05/18). P4 organized several inhouse training for their employees which he found helped them to improve his reduced penalties that they paid P1 and P3 had less formal education, but they have been of the list of SMEs which always benefited from government training programs (confirmed by government documents review).

The resource-based view (RBV) prescribes the importance of businesses developing their business strategies based on the resources that the firm own and control as a basis for securing competitive advantage and sustainability. Such resources include owner's education, technical experience, and the skills, including those of her employees

which form a bundle of intangible resources necessary for success (Wernerfelt, 2014). Past studies have revealed a direct relationship between the owner's level education and business success, with a higher level of education resulting to improvement in turnover growth and success (Akinboade, 2015; William, Shahid, & Martinez, 2016).

All 5 participants mentioned that they had attended seminars organized by the ministry of SMEs in Cameroon on product standardization, marketing, packaging, and management, and this improved their knowledge and helped their businesses to succeed (confirmed via member checking, & documents in ministry of SMEs) . This result is also consistent with Neneh's (2014) findings, that concluded that increase education did increase not only the chances of survival of SMEs but also improves the entrepreneurial intentions in young university students in Cameroon. Training, especially tertiary education support the ability to start up a business and helps individuals to gain skills necessary to support business success (Hunady, Orviska, & Pizar, 2018). While higher education may be poised to encourage business startups and sustain business success, research in Cameroon found that individuals owned over 51% of businesses without a secondary school certificate and individuals with a university degree owned 7% of SMEs (CNIS, 2018). Education, therefore, contributes to business success to a greater extent than it encourages individuals to take up the responsibility to startup a small business or develop entrepreneurs.

P1 and P2 cited previous business experience as a factor that contributed to their business success. P1 responded that she had previously managed other food ventures where she produced other products, and from her experience, she decided to focus on the

most successful outcome to formally start up her business ( P1, interview response, 05/10/18; member checking, 05/28/18) . P1 said her experience helped her to understand how to manage her business resources, product packaging, and managing relationship with her customers which was very critical for her success. P2 also indicated that his over 30 years' experience in agricultural business helped him to understand the agricultural value chain from identifying the critical resource (land suitable for palm cultivation), risk associated with palms cultivation and production ( how the palm oil mills operate), how to meet stringent quality standards in the sector, and finally securing the market for first harvest ( P2, interview response, 05/23/18; member checking, 05/30/18; sales record of P2; 05/23/18 ). Also, P2 underscored the contributions of his managerial experience as a critical success factor in the planning process in agribusiness since he was only able to understand the processes with his knowledge and experience gathered over the years. Consistent with the literature, previous managerial experience, including the employees' unique experiences, plays a vital role towards entrepreneurial success (Staniewski, 2016).

Technical skills were very critical for the success of all participants' businesses as revealed by their responses. The food processing sector requires technical skills and knowledge in food engineering, processing, and standardization which owners can easily acquire through education and hands-on field training and experience. Except for P2 who studied mechanical engineering (verified via P2 LinkedIn profile; personal communication, 05/23/18) and have served as production director for several crops in the large agricultural corporation in Cameroon, and could use this knowledge in Oil palm and banana production. All the other four participants acquired technical skills on the field as

their business operated over the years. Technical skills helped SMEs to achieve efficiency and improved their production capacity (Visser, Chodokufa, Amadi-Echendu, & Philips, 2016). All five respondents indicated that their technical abilities and that of their employees were a fundamental constituent of their success. P1 said after acquiring technical skills in processing Soya beans, she had managed her cost by using her hands (technical skills) to do some of the work manually, and this was very helpful in ensuring that her product quality remains high while reducing her cost because she did not need to pay many people to work with her. P4 reported that one key aspect that guaranteed the sustainability of his business is the technical knowledge of his workers which they acquired over time (confirmed from member checking 06/04/18; and review of employee records and activity plans, 05/28/18). P4's production team have been very stable, and he has worked so hard making sure these technically skilled workers feel ownership of his business because growth all depends on them. The literature further validates the critical role played by staff experience and their technical skills on the success of the company (Macheke & Smith, 2013).

Moreover, the conceptual framework (resource-based view) considered staff knowledge, skills, and competencies as a foundation for a small business strategy development since employee knowledge and experience conform with resources which are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable and thus can enable an SME to achieve sustainable competitive advantage over rivals (Shafeey & Trott, 2014). This findings also concur with the assertion in the literature which suggest that during the startup period of an SME, the ability of owners and managers to develop strategies based

on owned resources such as human capital, knowledge, skills, and competencies is strategic to achieve competitive advantage and hence secure initial success (Szymaniec-Mlicka, 2014). Technical skills were therefore the most referenced theme which participants concluded that their acquisition was one of their strategies to achieve business success and sustainability during the first years of operations. The assertion further supports the above results in the literature about the positive relations between management skills, strategic planning, educational knowledge, and experience of the entrepreneur and small business success (Purves, Niblock, & Sloan, 2016). The results also concur with Raven and Le (2015) who found that entrepreneurs who attended training on business skills were more motivated and better improved their success.

### **Emergent Theme 2: Entrepreneurial and Business Management Skills**

Entrepreneurial and Business Management Skills or their acquisition were found to be associated to be one of the strategies that enabled all five participants to achieve success during the period under research (confirmed with all participants interviews and member checking). These skills were associated with (a) business owner's attitude to risk, (b) knowledge and skills in business management, (c) leadership skills, (d) managing relationship with stakeholders, (e) Social Capital and Business Network, and (f) Entrepreneurial Attitude as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*Emergent sub theme 2: Entrepreneurial and Business Management Skills*

Subthemes (Level 2 nodes)	Number of sources	References
Owner's risk attitude	4	7
Business management skills	3	10
Leadership skills	3	7
Managing relationship with stakeholders	4	6
Social capital and business network	3	5
Entrepreneurial attitude	3	12

Every small business owner faces different types of risk, especially during their start-up period. To startup a business means overcoming fear and loving risk as mentioned by P4 and P2 (member checking). P2, indicated that he started his business with capital that was contributed by him and his colleagues while still working, but a year later while crops had not started yielding, all his colleagues withdrew their money. P2 had to take the challenge of continuing alone, resorting to borrowing from family and friends at an interest, which demonstrated risk loving attitude (P2 personal communication, accounting records; 05/23/18). P1 indicated that she was born as an entrepreneur and she started her business with less than \$5 and used available local farm produce which alternatively would be dumped to start up her business (P1, interview 05/10/18 and member checking 05/28/18). Most of P1's work was manual from producing to marketing and distribution, which she did by hawking and making door-to-

door sales. P4 indicated that as an entrepreneur, he needed to "think big, act big," an entrepreneur should not fear to spend or invest, speaking of his risk loving attitude that helped his business to succeed over the years. P2 needed farmland of over 100 hectares for palm plantation but didn't even have the required down payment to negotiate a land purchase. As an entrepreneur, P2 use his negotiation skills and relationships and secured a long term agreement for installment payments with a village community chief, and then exploited the timber from the same land and used the revenue as part payment of the property as well as part initial startup working capital (P2, personal interview response and member checking, confirmed land purchased agreement & P2 Tax returns, 05/22/18). Entrepreneurial skills are very fundamental to business success because it is this skill that initiates or motivate an individual to start up a business in the face of risk (Hietanen & Jarvi, 2015). The results also support the conclusion that entrepreneurial skills as a critical determinant for performance in SMEs (Mutandwa, Teramwa & Tubanambazi, 2015).

Moreover, leading people was significant, and four out of the five participants indicated that their leadership skills and personal attitude helped them succeed. P5 stated that he had to lead by example, getting involved in the production activity encourage all his employees to become more committed, and involved in the process and this reduces wastage of raw material and increase their output and product quality. Also, the owner's attitude was also found to be very important because relating with workers and getting involved in solving their problems helped improved on their relationship and this helped

reduce staff turnover, as the employees had a sense of belonging in the business ( P2, P4, & P5; personal communication; confirmed through member checking).

Managing relationship with stakeholders was also found to be a good strategy for success in the SMEs. P4 mentioned several times that his relationship management helped him get access to credit purchases of from the farmer's cooperative society and other local suppliers of raw materials which helped his business bridge the gap of inadequate access to capital (P4, accounting records; 05/28/18). For example P4 had agreement with the farmers cooperative society under which members supplied maize and Soya beans on credit to P4 through the cooperative and P4 always ensured to meet up with payment dates as a strategy to maintain the contract and enable him to always get access to raw materials (P4 accounting records). P2 indicated that his relationships (social capital or networks) and connections which he gained from his over 30 years' experience with the largest agricultural corporation helped him negotiate the first market for their produce (Confirmed through P2 review of manual sales record book, 05/23/18). P2 was also able to exchange some of the farms produce with other goods which his employees needed for their families and this opportunity helped him get alternative credit facilities and reduced the cash portion of employee salaries during the period when the farm was yet not generating income. In particular, relationship with the government and tax department was very fundamental to the success of P2's business as once connected, he did not have any additional tax controls which 53% SMEs indicated as their main success challenge in Cameroon (CNIS, 2018).



Besides signaling entrepreneurial skills as a critical strategy for success, all participants confirmed they needed some business management skills to sustain their business over the long term (member checking). As a new business with insufficient resources and facing larger competitors in the food industry, who are even more loved by the population ( local population favor imported food with their perception of higher quality), the entrepreneur needs to understand how to manage the limited resources to gain competitive advantage and make a significant profit. Entrepreneurs need to harness capabilities, such as business management knowledge and competences as a strategy to achieve success (Qureshi, Saeed, & Wasti, 2016) and gain competitive advantage. P2 mentioned that his education, MSc. in mechanical engineering together with his experience in crop production and managing oil mills helped him with the management knowledge which was very critical for his business success.

In addition, P2's past job role at director level in a large agricultural corporation enabled him to gather substantial business management experience in areas of resources management, cash management, and will allow him to be able to identify and necessary resources (land and technical staff) which formed the hallmark of his success strategies and consistent with the conceptual framework (P2 communication, 05/23/18, member checking, 05/30/18). P4's education is a BSc. in management, which gave him an understanding of how to identify, manage resources for profit maximization, especially managing their human resources (technical staff) whom they considered to be very crucial to their success(P4, personal communication, 05/28/18 and member checking, 06/04/18). The outcome is well consistent with the literature. Entrepreneurial skills have

been demonstrated to have helped individuals to be able to identify and exploit new and emergent opportunities successful (Hayes, Chawla, & Kathawala, 2015).

Researchers found that over 54% of failed small businesses was due to lack of entrepreneurial skills (Worku, 2014) as well as business management skills was indicated to be essential for an SME to achieve success (Purves et al., 2016). This assertion is indicative of the need for management skills which SMEs in Cameroon require to improve on the success rate. Over 85% of small businesses in Cameroon are managed by their owners who often lack the needed business management knowledge or skills, which may explain the high failure rate of SMEs in Cameroon of 27.7% (MINEPAT, 2016). Entrepreneurs may consider improving on their entrepreneurial skills and business management skills and competencies through education and training such as seminars organized by the ministry SMEs as a strategy for success and sustainability (Qureshi, Saeed, & Wasti, 2016).

### **Emergent Theme 3. Access to External Support**

Access to external support in the form of government support programs, credit facilities from banks, and outside professional advice provided a significant contribution to business survival and success during the first 5 years. Analysis of data revealed that the third pre-coded theme, access to external support were important success strategy with significant references, with various related sub themes as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6

*Emergent theme 3. Access to External Support*

Subthemes (Level 2 nodes)	Number of sources	References
Bank loans	1	2
Government support	3	9
Outside professional advice	2	11

In Cameroon, the ministry of small and medium-size enterprises, social economy and the handicraft provide tailored trainings to small business owners and some employees of food processing enterprises in the areas of product standardization and certification, packaging, marketing and branding, as well as platforms for exhibitions, where small business owners have been able to showcase locally process food products. Except for P2, all the other four participants indicated that they attended training organized by the ministry which was very critical for their success. I reviewed documents at the offices of P1, P3, P4, and P5 showed that the owners and their employees attended training seminars on organized by the ministry of SMEs and later they laid down action plans for improvement on packaging, standardization of products, as well as their feedback to the sponsor, the ministry of SMEs in Cameroon, which showed that their standards, packaging and communication with the customers improved after the training (confirmed through review of documents in regional office of the Ministry of SMEs; 05/17/18; the different product labels) . I also confirmed that training was significant from an improvement on the packaging of P1 products which she indicated she received

the knowledge from a seminar and decided to modify her packaging. Also, P5 won the national price for best innovative food enterprise in Cameroon her product quality and packaging (confirm in records of awarding ministry; SMEs; 05/17/18). P5 also testified that thanks to the training on packaging, her business was awarded a national price as the best in innovation and packaging due to their upgrade on packaging and the quality of her plantain flour. In line with previous research, government financial support policies towards business innovation helped SMEs to improve success (Doh, S. & Kim, 2014).

In addition, the government free exhibitions for small businesses helped the small food enterprises to get access to market as reported by P1, P3, P4, and P5; who mentioned that they gain their product recognition and new market during exhibitions. P1, P3, P4, and P5 revealed as one of their challenges in the market being consumers preference for imported food products over their locally process natural farm produce; which they are gradually gaining confidence through efforts made by the government to promote local products ( P1, P3, P4, & P5; all confirmed during interview and member checking; review of documents and flyers, from ministry of SMEs confirmed that government is providing support to small food enterprises to get access to market through exhibition; 05/17/17). Another critical government support mentioned was grants in the form of cash support to small food businesses in Cameroon. P4 indicated that he received a government grant in the form of non-reimbursable loans with performance conditions as a critical source of capital for their business at their third year of startup when the company was already facing shortages in investment capital to purchase machines to automate production (P4 confirmed through member checking; 06/04/18 and review of

documents 05/28/18). P4 was able to buy production machines and moved from a manual production system thanks to this government grant/loan (I corroborated this with review of P2 asset register; 05/28/18). Moreover, the performance conditions together with technical support from government helped P4 to succeed in his business. An understanding of government policies and support programmes to SMEs is essential for small business owners to enable them to carry out better planning and take opportunities available. This result is consistent with the assertion in the literature that over 80% of small business owners in Cameroon did not know the various government support programmes available to SMEs (MINEPAT, 2016; CNIS, 2013).

Although all 5 participants strongly felt that lack of access to capital was their main challenge after taxation, the results indicate their acceptance of such lapses and their dedication to success through other strategies to raise finance such as through friends and family and contributions from meetings. Out of the 5 participants, only P4 had received a bank loan after improving performance with the help of the government grant a previous year. All participants responded that they got their startup capital from their savings. Over 30.7% of SMEs in Cameroon pointed out that their primary challenge to success is access to finance, with only 6.3% getting startup finance from banks, 80% from personal savings (family and friends) and 15.3% from Njangi groups ( A form of rotatory contributions where individuals benefits from each other) (CNIS, 2018). An understanding of strategies used by SMEs to raise startup capital is vital for success.

Outside professional advice, knowledge, and skills were also a strategy used to achieve success during the first 5 years by P2 and P4 (confirmed through member

checking; P2-05/30/18, P4-06/04/18). Before commencing his business, P4 had to contact the tax department and the ministry of agriculture to understand the various laws which would affect his business. In particular, P2 indicated that even his initial capital was subject to taxation when he started and without pre-consultations, it would have been devastated (confirmed, P2, member checking, 05/30/18 and documents review- tax paid on capital; 05/23/18). P2 and P4 both sought advice from professional tax advisor with experience in the field, and this helped to reduce undue tax burdens and contribute to their business success.

Researchers have concluded that taxation accounts for 53.5% of the obstacles faced by small business owners in Cameroon (CNIS, 2018). External technical support helped to improve business support, especially on meeting up with stringent quality standards in the agribusiness sector (P2 & P4 stated during interviews and confirmed during member checking). P4 indicated that some of his external support and advice he get through informal discussions with competitors and peers who are professionals in the sector, thereby reducing the cost to his business if he were to pay. This is also consistent with past research assertions that soft business advice from peer-to-peer ( networking with competitors) within the same sector improved the likelihood of success in both businesses (Kuhn & Galloway, 2015). Access to external support was a reasonable strategy for success in the small enterprises with a lower number of references compared to other successful strategies.

#### **Emergent Theme 4: Bookkeeping and Working Capital Management**

All the 5 participants pointed out that bookkeeping and adequate working capital management (Bootstrapping finance, capital sourcing, internal management of financial resources, and costs control strategies) provided significant contributions to their success during the period under the research. The results of analysis of interviews, notes, member checking, and documents through Nvivo software revealed in Table 6 shows high level of references for working capital management as a critical strategy employed by the small food businesses to achieve success and sustainability during the first 5 years.

Table 7

##### *Emergent theme 4: Bookkeeping and Working Capital Management*

Subthemes (Level 2 nodes)	Number of sources	References
Bookkeeping	3	16
Working capital management	4	49

On bookkeeping, P1 mentioned that from the beginning, she didn't keep any records of her financial transactions, but she realized that she couldn't evaluate whether or not her business made profit, neither was P1 able to plan or prepare a budget for her business, until the second year when she started recording transactions and it provide the necessary information to prepare her budget and planning process. P4 indicated that he faced challenges in getting access to bank loans because he did not have complete records of his financial transactions, which the bank insisted on getting complete records of his financial transactions for analysis and creditworthiness check. P4 started keeping records

and also making deposits of his income into his bank account, which enabled him meet up with the loan conditions and got the loan (P4 confirmed through interview and financial statement, 05/28/18 and member checking, 06/04/18). A review of the companies' financial statements and internal accounting records, as well as member checking of P1, P2, P4, and P5 confirmed that bookkeeping and complete accounting records helped them for better planning (budgeting), decision-making, cost control, and management, which led to their success as asserted by Chhabra and Pattanayak (2014). Allah et al. (2013) concluded that poor record keeping was a primary cause for failure in small businesses during their first 5 years of operation. P4 indicated that bookkeeping is the basis for successful management of taxes because, in the absence of business records, the tax depart always does arbitrary tax assessment which sometimes leads to payment of excessive taxes and cash flow challenges (confirmed from P4 member checking, 06/04/18; P4 review of monthly tax declarations, 05/28/18).

Second level codification through NVivo software revealed that working capital management (financial management) as a sub theme with over 49 references as shown in Table 8 below. Working capital management (financial management) is a vital success strategy for SMEs with all participants strongly agreeing that this strategy was fundamental to their growth and sustainability (confirmed during interviews, member checking, and review of company documents). The primary resource of any business is the startup capital in the form of cash and other liquid assets.

Table 8



*Emergent subthemes 4: Working capital Management*

Sub themes (Level 2 nodes)	Number of sources	References
Managing startup resources	2	22
Capital sourcing strategies	2	10
Bootstrapping finance (internally generating finance)	2	17

All 5 participants interviewed indicated that their startup capital came from their savings and contributions or loans from their friends and family, which is consistent with research carried out by CNIS (2018) that concluded that over 80% of enterprises in Cameroon startup their business with capital from private funds and family sources. Respondents indicated that success in their startups depended on their strategies implemented to raise their initial capital, especially in the absence of external financing possibilities. P2 noted that since he couldn't raise the initial capital (after his initial partner withdraw during the first year) required to purchase the large land portion needed for palm cultivation, he started by negotiating for a small initial deposit and then payment by installments, which later helped him to pay using resources from the farm itself (P, confirmed through member checking 05/30/18, documents review, 05/23/18). Another strategy that P1 and P2, and P5 used as a source of startup capital was to employ family members and personally work as laborers for no pay and this allowed them to not pay huge amounts as wages, thereby reducing the cash portion of employee expenses. For example, P2's daughter has occupied the position of accountant (part time) for his business since creation, which helps him not to incur on hiring a full time accountant at

higher cost. P1 uses her family members to do door to door sales, especially during their vacation time when they are out of school (P1 personal communication; 05/10/18). This provides the platform as per the conceptual framework that small business should base their strategies on resources which are under control, valuable, rare, non-substitutable and inimitable. P2 also stated that he negotiated loans from family at fixed interest rates with no penalties for delay payments and no fixed repayment dates and this help him cover some of his expenses during the startup period. Another essential aspect as pointed out by P1 was a clear separation of business resources from personal resources and personal expenses of the owner. P1 found this strategy to be very helpful for her success because she did not use her business resources to carry out her private activities or expenses (P1, confirmed, review of P1's income & expense records).

Another successful strategy that was significant with a high number of references from analysis of the data through NVivo 12 was managing startup resources or working capital management (financial management) which included cash management and management of other liquid resources (P2). Consistent with the resource-based perspective, the small businesses all stated that their primary strategy was to build their business strategy around locally available resources with are readily available and cheap to purchase. Limbe in the Fako division in Cameroon happens to be very fertile for agriculture and have farmers who usually bring farm produce and some do not often have an available market from the local population due to their high volumes and perishable nature ( P5, interview, 05/28/18 & member checking, 06/04/18) . P5 mentioned that the high rate of dumping of unsold farm produce in local market demanded services of food

processing and preservation and which is why he started his business to transform locally available natural farm produce as a source of competitive advantage over other food enterprises. This strategy is consistent with the conceptual framework as concluded by Anderséson et al. (2016) that sustainable competitive advantage is more feasible when resources which are VRIN meets the condition of immobility. A fertile land resource is immobile and building a firm's strategy of such available resource is a successful strategy for these businesses. Moreover, Arend (2015) supported that nascent SMEs could develop their strategies based on a few strategic resources as a means to achieve competitive advantage and improve their survival rate. The results suggest that internal management of working capital through cost-cutting and resources management strategy contribute to small business survival.

Bootstrapping also emerged as a successful strategy used by 3 out of the 5 respondents (P2, P4, & P5). In the absence of the abundance of initial capital, the SMEs interviewed used bootstrapping finance strategy to raise capital internally using different methods. P2 paid his staff using some of his finished products which reduced the cash portion of employees remuneration as well as created revenue in the form of internal sales, using employees as initial customers (P2, confirmed by documents review). P2 also exploited the wood ( as timber and fire-wood) in the farmland which he bought, and while he sold some for money, some were used as energy during the processing of the initial palms produces. P2 raise additional capital by making a forward sale of his produce to the large customers in an exchange with other raw materials, some products, and cash which his staff needed for their family and also use the money to pay the

suppliers for fertilizer ( P2, confirmed sales records, 05/23/18). This also helps secure forward sales and also build relationships with his employees as they were able to get access to items their family needed and thus reducing the cash burden on the entrepreneur during the initial period of maturity of the palms (Confirmed with credit sales record for employee, 0523/18). The technically experienced staff employed by P2 also helped him to produce fertilizer locally at no additional cost to the business by using other organic methods such as cross cropping; P2 put cattles on the farms, the cattle ate grass and also provided manure which he used as fertilizer, thus reducing cost for labourers to clear the farms and reduced the cost for fertilizers, while also providing alternative income from sales of cattles (P2, personal communication; 05/23/18).

P4 and P5 used internal sources (bootstrapping) by negotiating and building relationships with farmers cooperatives which help them get credit for raw materials and discounts as well as getting members of the cooperative society which they purchase raw materials from them on credit, processed and paid them as they sold the finished products. Bootstrapping financial is a financial management strategy (cash flow management) which demonstrate is an alternative strategy that SMEs can use to raise capital or finance for the survival of the business (Financial records; purchases, stock records for P4 & P5; 05/28/18). Karadag (2015) stated that an understanding of working capital management and financial planning, adequate financial planning, as well as developing alternative strategies to acquire and manage financial resources would improve small business performance and survival. Firms that were implementing adequate working capital management strategies demonstrated improved efficiency in the management of short-

term resources, profitability, and consequently improve business performance and guarantee survival prospects of the small business (Enqvist, Graham, & Nikkinen, 2014).

### **Emergent Theme 5: Human Resource Management**

Based on the data analysis, human resource management (HRM) emerged as a vital strategy for small business success and sustainability with 42 references (4 participants indicated that HRM was essential for their business success). Consistent with the conceptual framework (RBV), small firms that focused on their internal resources such as their employees' knowledge were more able to build dynamic capabilities which helped them to gain competitive advantage and sustain the growth of their businesses (Nieves & Haller, 2014). Human resources offer the closest description of rareness, inimitability, uniqueness, and valuable resources grounded in the RBV which forms the conceptual framework for this research (Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2016). The sub-nodes that emerged relating to HRM included, communicating and motivating employees, managing employee cost, and organizational culture. The results are consistent with the literature and the conceptual framework. Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016) found a direct relationship between the firm's human resources and organizational performance in small firms. Human capital in the form of employees knowledge, talents, and skills contributed to the sustainability of rents (business returns) as indicated by Mehrota (2015).

Table 9

*Emergent theme 5. Human Resource Management*

Subthemes (Level 2 nodes)	Number of sources	References
Communicating and motivating employees	4	23
Managing employee costs	3	12
Organizational culture	2	7

Communication and employee motivation was found to be very fundamental to the success of small businesses in Cameroon. Small business owners must adequately communicate to their employees on a constant basis about different aspects of their business including the company's vision, mission, objectives and the strategies to ensure their attainment. (P2, P4, & P5; confirmed by interviews & member checking). P4 used a policy to hold weekly meetings with employees during which they evaluated their past week's job outcomes and feedback, as well as corrective actions and lay down weekly plans for the following week, assign specific responsibilities to key person; which improved his employee's commitment and job involvement (P4, confirmed by member checking, 06/04/18 & review of the minutes of staff meetings; 05/28/18). P4 indicated that effective and open communication with staff was the primary strategy he used to ensure that their technical team continually met up with product characteristics or desired quality as per feedback from customers via their marketing department. Moreover, open communication with employees was necessary because the staff became actively involved in the strategic planning process and consequently more motivated to ensure

that the planned objectives in the strategic plan were achieved (confirmed by P2-05/30/18 & P4-06/04/18 during member checking). Adequate and timely communication with employees provided an opportunity to improve labor relations through clarity in job requirements, facilitated understanding, and limited or resolved conflicts issues as well as enhanced employee commitment and more importantly improved overall organizational success and performance (Dupe, 2015).

The SMEs interviewed were engaged in food processing and preservation, which is labor-intensive in nature, with stringent quality requirements. Managing the human resource budget was also an important factor for success for the firms during their initial startup period. All 5 participants mentioned and confirmed during member checking that they used strategies to cut down staff costs as part of the cost management strategies for improved profitability. P1, P2, P3, and P4 all indicated that they initially used their family members and themselves as labor during their startup period. Primarily, there were little or no payments as remunerations to family members working for their businesses when they started their operations. P5 used casual workers and paid them hourly rates (taskwork) and only employed them when there was a need for bulk production, thereby reducing the number of permanent employees (confirmed; P4 employee register and records of payment of labourers; 06/04/18). P2 used technical employees who were individuals with technical experience working with the large agricultural firm (who worked under his authority when he was production director) and employed them as part-time consultants, which helped him to get access to skilled laborers at very reduced rates (P2, Member checking).

Owners and managers of SMEs may improve their business growth, success, and sustainability through ensuring that they keep employees with sound business and technical skills (Robinson, 2015), thereby reducing staff turnover and employee cost. P4 implemented a staff placement strategy whereby individuals were allocated responsibilities based on their skills, experience, and their abilities and often carry out reassessment did necessary reallocation of staff; this strategy had the effect of reducing waste that may have resulted from production errors and wastes during the production process. Another essential strategy to manage employee cost was report and confirmed by P2, P4 and P5 who used employee motivation to reduce staff turnover thereby avoiding the potential loss of their firms intangible resources and helping them to maintain their competency pool and avert negative and minimized possible staff training cost for their small businesses (Wang, Wang, Xu, & Ji, 2014). When employees and motivated and happy with the work environment, they hadly decide to leave the organization.

P5 also confirmed that he used team building strategies in which P5 physically performed tasks with his production staff in his factory, which helped him as a tool for motivation and building trust. P5 active participation in the factory work and getting involved in all aspects of the production process helped to set an example which staff really followed and intensified their involvement and focus on the work (P5, member checking, 06/04/18). The effect of team building have been found to enable the principal (business owners) to build team cohesion and trust in team members which encouraged team members (employees) to individually work in the interest of their principal



(business owner), which resulted to reduce staff turnover business growth (Riener & Wiederhold, 2016). This is consistent with building positive organizational culture cited a success strategy. Positive cultures with the existing talents, technical abilities as well as teamwork and effective communication helped to promote problem-solving, new ideas generation, constant improvement, and innovation; thus creating high value for business and the community (Silva, 2017).

### **Emergent Them 6: Owner's Dedication and Commitment**

This research was not focused on the entrepreneurial characteristics of the business owners because the fact that the respondents have all operated their businesses for at least 5 years and above is an indication that they are entrepreneurially oriented and have characteristics of an entrepreneur or have acquired those attributes over time to remain successful. The analysis of the data from interviews, member checking, and documents yielded the references and sub themes as indicated in table 10 below;

Table 10

#### *Emergent theme 6: Owner's Dedication and Commitment*

Subthemes (Level 2 nodes)	Number of sources	References
Passion and patience	2	8
Driving the vision and mission	3	10
Personal commitment to the business	3	11

However, all 5 participants mentioned their entrepreneurial orientation and risk taking attitude as a key element that contributed to their success. Entrepreneurial

oriented individuals are more able to develop and facilitate competitive advantage to reach superior performance (Gutiérrez, Fuentes, & Ariza, 2014). Furthermore, in line with the literature entrepreneurial characteristics represents the risk taking attitude, resilience, and innovative nature of the business owners which they used for their strategic decision-making processes to develop, achieve, and sustain their firm's mission and vision (Shirokova et al., 2016). P2 underscored his entrepreneurial attitude, risk loving attitude; focus, and persistency, to be his greatest asset that helped his business to survive during the first 5 years (P2, personal communication, 05/23/18 & member checking, 05/30/18). All participants indicated strongly that their personal commitment and dedication to their business was very critical to achieve success. Other words used interchangeably is persistency and consistency. P3 described his fervent commitment and dedication to ensure his dream comes true and not die (P3, member checking – 06/04/18).

Every entrepreneur has a driving force that motivated she/he to startup a business venture and a vision and mission that she/he plan to achieve for his business. More importantly, the business owner committed his personal saving and other personal resources into the startup, risking virtually so much of their wealth. This makes it imperative for the owner to be dedicated to achieving the mission and goals of the new business. This explains the participants' personal commitment and involvement in the production processes as stated and confirmed by P1, P3 and P5. P5 was motivated by the high wastage for local farm produce and his quest to help poor children achieve their dream towards education (social change), therefore his motivation was not directly the profits for business, but the potential for him to raise enough profit to use to pay for

tuition and children education needs. The sub themes that related to the Owner's Dedication and Commitment include passion and patience, driving the vision and mission, and personal communication. Entrepreneurs often develop commitment to success of their business without consideration of their circumstances, rather they focus on the drive to achieve their vision/mission and goals.

### **Emergent Theme 7. Research and Development and Marketing Strategies**

Research and development and marketing Strategies were far the most common strategy that all the participants indicated they used to achieve success during the first 5 years with total references of 79. Increase marketing capabilities of an SME were found to be positively related to high innovation performance and business growth ( Ren, Eisingerich, & Tsai, 2015). Moreover, business innovation result from a good R&D capability of the small business which uses information from the marketing department collected from customers about their requirements and developed new products to meet clients' needs ( Ren, Eisingerich, & Tsai, 2015). The food processing and preservation sector require careful to follow through processes, quality standards, as well as a continuous fulfillment of consumers' changing tastes. All 5 participants started their businesses as individuals and owner-managers in a new sector where stringent government laws existed to ensure quality products to safeguard and protect consumers from any related risk ( confirmed; review of mandatory standard operating procedures and published standard ranges from government). Table 11 shows the initial coded theme, research and development and marketing strategies and the related sub themes or activities.

Table 11

*Emergent theme 7: Research and Development and Marketing Strategies*

Subthemes (Level 2 nodes)	Number of sources	References
Continuous product improvement and innovation	4	17
Maintain product quality	3	9
Marketing (advertising and publicity)	5	45
R & D for raw material identification	2	8

All the respondents cited research and development (R&D) as their dominant strategy for success especially because their new businesses were always in a quest for learning to improve on their products vis a vis the prescribed quality standards by the government and to continually meet up with the customer's ever-changing taste and preferences. Since the businesses are product based and subject to product approvals, R & D was very fundamental to developing products to meet the acceptable level of quality. Research and development processes were always a backbone strategy because products needed to be improved as we met with competition from larger firms who import their products and the local population believed that imported food product has better quality ( confirmed by member checking, P4, June 04, 2018). P4 and P5 gave out samples of products to family and friends who tasted and provided feedback for improvements before the final products went to the market ( Confirmed via member checking, P4 & P5, June 04, 2018). Moreover, continuous innovation enables small firms to fight against piracy as unscrupulous individuals had used the logo of P4 to sell lower

quality products which the pirates locally manufactured. Constant R & D and training offered by the ministry of SMEs helped to improve on product packaging with security features to reduce the risk of impersonation of products through labels (P4, member checking; 06/04/18; various product packages showed improved features; 06/04/18; Facebook display on company onlins page). Identifying and sourcing the best quality raw material was also very imperative for success and our technical team had to regularly test available fresh farm products for their species and determined output quality before purchasing (P4 & P5, interviews communications and documents review; 05/28/18, member checking; 06/04/18). P5 commeneted that they usually purchase small samples of raw materials and tested in their factories for quality before deciding on the vendor whose plantain yielded the best quality output (P5, member checking; 06/04/18; Review of documents showed records of testing results from various selected vendor)

During the initial stages of the business most small food enterprises use what could be referred to as "indigenous knowledge (IK)" of food processing and preservation to manually perform the task of processing and preservation/storage of food items, a method considered to be simple, low cost, but traditional as a means to reduce wastage of raw farm produce and guarantee food security (Asogwe, Okoye, & Oni, 2017). All participants who participated in the interview used the IK method because it is cheap, safe, and still allows them to supply food products which are more nutritious and natural. As the business gain customers and recognition, the manual method could not provide enough output to meet increasing customer's demands, thus requiring R& D for product innovation. Continuous product products improvement and innovation is a compelling

growth and success strategies for SMEs and consistent with past research results that suggested that innovation provided an increase in customers benefits, led to substantial cost reduction, created new business, and brought about superior organizational performance (Slater, Mohr, & Sengupta, 2013).

The respondents cited marketing strategies as a vital success (sustainability) strategy for the SMEs, principally due to the need for product recognition by the public and the SMEs depended on the sale of their initial production to be able to raise working capital to continue their business. Again, consumers needed to taste and accept their products before mass production. Marketing is crucial for success in SMEs because it's the medium for an exchange of commodities for income or revenue, which is necessary to advance all other business processes and secure process continuation for success (Asah, Fatoki, & Rungani, 2015). This results further support other existing bodies of knowledge on the importance of marketing and entrepreneurial skills of an entrepreneur or business owner as a key determinant for business success and sustainability (Mutandwa, Teramwa, & Tubanambazi, 2015). Key marketing strategies/activities which emerged as sub-nodes based Nvivo software analysis, which the participants used are shown in Table 12 and include; products branding and rebranding, communicating product content to customers, constant product availability, service quality and customer feedback for improvement, customer relationship management, mouth to mouth marketing or word of mouth marketing, use of Social Media to improve product outreach to new customers, and price reduction.

Table 12

*Emergent subtheme 7: Marketing Strategies*

Subthemes (Level 2 Nodes)	Number of sources	References
Branding & rebranding	3	6
Communicating product content to customers	3	6
Constant product availability	2	3
Service quality and client feedback for improvement	2	1
Customer relationship management	4	14
Mouth to mouth marketing	2	9
Social media for communication	2	3
Low pricing	2	3

P2 indicated that he used his relationship as a formal employee as of the largest agricultural firm to negotiate the initial sale of his products (relationship marketing, social networks). Other successful marketing strategies adopted by P1, P3, P4, and P5 (confirmed via member checking and documents reviews; flyers, posters) included door to door selling, word of mouth marketing, and exhibitions in events organized by the Ministry of SMEs, social economy and the handicrafts to promote locally process foods. Product branding was also very indicative of the results of analysis using social media and the company's logo. P2, P4, and P5 have active Facebook pages which they use to communicate their products offerings (Confirmed by online review of Participants' active online Facebook pages). However, while P4 indicated that branding through social media

was a very successful strategy for communication with his customers and securing new business, P5 suggested that he mouth to mouth (word of mouth) and door to door marketing yielded better results for his company. Social media (Facebook) has been cited in several past studies as an effective means of communication and marketing of business products, and managing relationships with customers ( Atanassova & Clark, 2015; Wang, Pauleen, & Zhang, 2016; Ainin, Parveen, Moghavvemi, Jaafar, & Shuib, 2015) and consequently improving business success. Social media remains a cost-effective marketing strategy for SMEs found to enhance non-financial and financial performance through improvement in customer relationship management, and a general reduction in marketing and customers service costs ( Ainin, Parveen, Moghavvemi, Jaafar, & Shuib, 2015). Following the references of the sub-themes on Table 7a, customer relationship management, mouth to mouth (word of mouth) marketing, branding and rebranding, and communicating product content to customers were the key marketing strategies adopted by the SMEs to achieve success. Social media, price, and product availability were not as significant for success, but relevant.

### **Emergent Theme 8: Resource-Based Strategic Planning**

According to the resource-based view (RBV), successful strategic planning process in small businesses should be based on the perspective of the internal resources as well as externally available resources which the company can secure and control (Carraresi, Mamaqi, Albisu, & Banterle, 2016; Toklu, Erdem, & Taskin, 2016). All the 5 small business owners indicated that they use resource-based strategic planning to achieve success in their firms with the theme having a significant level of references from



the analysis of the data collected. The sub-themes results indicate that the SMEs interviewed used both planning and resource-based strategic planning for competitive advantage as two sub-strategies which form the theme resource-based strategic planning as shown in Table 13 below.

Table 13

*Emergent theme 8: Resource-Based Strategic Planning*

Subthemes (Level 2 nodes)	Number of sources	References
Planning	3	18
Resource-based strategic planning for competitive advantage	4	23

While all participants considered planning to be a cornerstone strategy of their sustainability, they pointed out that their planning process was initially based on the available resources which they had access to such as abundant availability of raw farm produce (P1, P3, P4, P5; member checking; plans), availability of fertile land and their skilled labor (P2; interview, member checking; and financial statements). Moreover, their location was also vital in gaining such access to these raw materials. All 5 SMEs interviewed are located in the South West Region of Cameroon where agriculture and subsistent farming is the norm together with the fertile soil ( and land space) which made it possible to get raw natural food items for producing, resulting to quality organic process food. Before starting business, P5 had observed a high level of dumping of unsold farm products by peasants farmers in different markets and saw the the need to provide solution that could reduce waste of farm products and also improve living

standards of the farmers, while generating income to use for his NGO that provided tuition for orphans and other underprivileged children (P5, personal communication; 05/28/18 & member checking; 06/04/18). The owner's business internal resources were also vital for the planning process as confirmed by P2 and P4 (personal interviews, 05/23/18 & 05/28/18; member checking, 05/30/18 & 06/04/18 respectively) and the literature supports this on the importance of the small business use of internal resources during the strategic planning process to achieve business objectives and goals (Carraresi et al., 2016). Strategic planning helped SMEs to identify, allocate, and maximize scarce resources for business growth (Gray & Saunders, 2016).

The results provide evidence about the key role that strategic planning contributes toward supporting small business success, but also underscores the need for small business owners to adapt their strategic planning processes to align with their available resources. The food processing industry generally has stringent quality standards and inherent risk associated with the business, thus operating in the sector require thoughtful planning processes that involve the use of both internal and externally available resources and risk management strategies to ensure success (Zazemi, Asadi, & Asadi, 2015). Determining the timelines for the planning process was also indicative, and the owners have the prerogative of choosing weekly or monthly plans. The planning processes generally adopted by the business including areas such a budgeting, financial planning, operational planning, activity (production) planning and all geared towards ensuring that their plan remains within the limits of their available resources. Resource-based strategic planning also resonates with the conceptual framework which suggests that small

business strategic development are more likely to enhance growth and profitability when the plan is linked to resources which are heterogeneous and inimitable (Pergelova & Angulo-Ruiz, 2014) and immobile (Andersén et al., 2016).

One of the participant (P4) indicated that during the planning process he carried out an assessment of the internal capabilities of his personnel and other resources and got employees involved in the process, then shared assignments to the staff based on their skills (confirmed with evidence from interviews, budgets, and minutes of employee meetings; 05/28/18) , which is consistent with the resource-based perspective of strategic planning. Moreover, given the limited nature of financial resources, budgeting and general financial planning we an essential aspect of the strategic planning process used by the SMEs to achieve success. Resource-Based Strategic Planning was a critical success strategy based on a detailed review of documents, notes, and member checking with all respondents which pointed to their dependence of the available resources which they could easily access at start up period.

### **Emergent Theme 9 : Understanding of Business Ecosystem, Regulation and Taxation**

After coding all the data collected from the interviews, member checking, notes, documents, and online company Facebook pages into NVivo for coding of the theme, understanding business ecosystems, regulations and taxation which provided the references as in Table 14 below, indicating the fundamental the theme contributed to the success of the food enterprises in Cameroon.

Table 14

*Emergent theme 9: Understanding of Business Ecosystem, Regulation and Taxation*

Subthemes (Level 2 nodes)	Number of sources	References
Industry's ecosystem and regulations	2	13
Product quality and certifications	3	8
Sector risk management strategies	2	6
Tax planning and management	3	19

Small business owners in the food sector sought to understand their ecosystem due to the constantly changing business ecosystem in terms of social condition and competing interest of various stakeholders (e.g. customers concerns about food hygiene and taste; government minimum standards for product approvals), as well as understanding the industry as a whole to enable them to build knowledge and systems that promote their success (D'Souza, Wortmann, Huitema, & Velthuisen, 2015). The business ecosystem may also provide opportunities that owners of SMEs can build advantages for growth such as knowledge and skills sharing, access to critical resources (e.g., capital and grants from government), and building relationship with active industry shareholders ( Zahra & Nambisan, 2012). P2 stated that before starting his business, he reached out to the ministry of agriculture to understand government policy orientation on agriculture, and also reached out to other agricultural companies in Malaysia to understand the future trends in the industry (P2, interview and member checking). P2 built relationships in the industry that allowed him to gain access to credits purchases of raw

materials (fertilizers) for industry leaders which otherwise would have been more difficult and expensive for his business. Other advantages that owners of SMEs may enjoy from an understanding of the business ecosystem is also linked to their accumulation of knowledge on how financial systems within the specific sector works or the flow of financial resources into the industry and the partners interested in financing sectors like the food processing sector as posited by Bravo-Biosca, Criscuolo, and Menon (2016). Stam (2015) Encouraged entrepreneurs to actively engage in creating a sound business ecosystem as a strategy to promote business growth and sustainability.

The food processing industry, like any other involved in producing food for human consumption, require close follow up by government and society to ensure various quality standards are maintained at all times. The food sector is undoubtedly regulated by several laws from agricultural land space authorization process, quality standards, and government policy towards providing incentives towards local food production. All 5 participants confirmed that one of their most significant strategies for success is compliance with various regulatory standards such as product quality, packaging specification, facility certifications, and hygiene ( confirmed via interviews, member checking, documents on standardization and operating procedires). They all participants said they functioned under strict respect of the prescribed rules to enable them to avoid penalties often faced by other SMEs in the sector. P2 used former employees (technical staff) from the major agricultural company in who helped ensure compliance, which was one main reason that his first produce (output) met international quality standards and gave him access to the market. This result is consistent with past

research results which concluded that the regulatory framework and availability of government incentives provided significant contributions towards small business sustainability (Al-Mutairi, Naser, & Fayed, 2017). SMEs facing challenges for capital may orientate their efforts to get capital towards government grants. P4 indicated his continuous follow up with government helped him to get his first ever external finance which came from a non reimbursable government grant under the ministry of SMEs, which helped him purchased production machines and kickstarted bulk production, thereby increasing output and revenue that helped him build rapport with the banks for next financing.

The food sector has with it an inherent risk at various stages of the production to final consumers and necessary for SMEs owners to develop a comprehensive risk management process to pre-empt any harm to their business at any levels ( Srivastava, Chaudhuri, & Srivastava, 2015). A definite risk management plan is essential for survival, for example, P4 mentioned that his business has been fighting piracy, where unknown persons used their business name of the packaging to sell low-quality products. Another risk that the SMEs pointed out included penalties for non-compliance and poor quality or product defects. 4 out of the 5 participants used training organized by the government as a method of understanding and implementing their risk management strategy (Confirmed by P1, P3, P4, & P5; member checking; and documents for SMEs receiving training support-Ministry of SMEs' office). Other areas used have been ensuring that authorities always certify products and the SMEs take control of

communicating the product ingredients to the customers and also this helped to reduce piracy (P4, member checking; 06/04/18).

Another important strategy was tax management. Research conducted by the CNIS (2018) revealed that taxation is the most common barrier to the sustainability of SMEs during their initial startup period. Over 53.5% of SMEs in Cameroon cited tax as a barrier to their success (CNIS, 2018). This is consistent with the results of this study and also with past research in the area of SMEs sustainability and growth. Baliamoune-Lutz and Garelo (2014) concluded that increasing taxes does not only decrease growth and profit for a small existing startup but also influenced the decision by an entrepreneur to commence business activity for fear of failure even before the business kicks off. It is essential for an entrepreneur seeking to start up a business in Cameroon to understand taxation or consultant experts on the topic. P2 pointed and confirmed that his capital was subjected to tax even before he started his company, which further reduced his startup capital. However, this didn't disturb him (P2) because he was already aware of this process and though not encouraging for business, his preparedness helped him overcome the challenge. To avoid the tax hurdles, P1 and P3 decided to operate in the informal sector to prevent the burden of unscrupulous tax officials and processes. P5 chose to register a common initiative group (CIG) exempted from some types of taxes as a strategy to manage taxes.

Tax compliance improves access to finance through quality reporting by management that in turn provide the basis for financial institution's confidence on the SME (Strouhal et al., 2015). P4 after improving on his bookkeeping and recording of the

transaction, alongside with tax compliance, was able to provide a quality financial report that helped his business secure a bank loan (confirmed from analysis of financial statement). Also, compliance with tax regulations adds the transparency level of the company (Casal et al., 2016). Furthermore, taxation is also a cost to every business that needs to be adequately managed and also to ensure that SMEs license is not rescinded at any time during the early life of the small business (Casal et al., 2016). Compliance with tax regulations is not entirely counterproductive at the startup stage of an SME (Casal et al., 2016). Furthermore, and understanding of government regulations and tax laws applicable to the business sector is important, for example, the time and cost of registering a new business, purchasing and processing adequate property rights may affect business growth, partly because the ownership documents are always required to form the primary guarantee/collateral security for any business loans (Chatterjee, DuttaGupta, & Upadhyay, 2018). The result of this study provides evidence about the key role played by tax planning and management strategies towards SMEs success and sustainability and add a significant body of knowledge to existing research. The major strategies resulting from this analysis are appropriate and may provide a roadmap for which If carefully follow through.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The focus of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study research was to explore the strategies that owners and managers of SMEs used to grow and sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years. The findings and the recommendations of this study may not be considered as a "rule of thumb" rather, they may provide an important



practical guide or roadmap on which potential entrepreneurs, small business owners, and managers can develop their success and sustainability strategies. SMEs have generally pointed out that tax regulations (Akinboade, 2015; CNIS, 2018); administrative procedures or bottlenecks, access to finance or capital (Kumar & Rao, 2015; CNIS, 2018); access to market (Joshi, Prichard, & Heady, 2014; CNIS, 2018), and corruption (CNIS, 2018); this research was focused on the strategies that an entrepreneur, a small business owner, or a professional manager can develop and have control over implementation for the success of her/his enterprise, while overcoming the challenges faced in the field.

The findings are supported by the resource-based view, which lay emphasis on the premise that owners and managers of SMEs should develop their business strategies based on their internal and external resources which they can access and control, such as entrepreneurial and business management skills, education, technical skills, previous business experience; a competency-based entrepreneurial strategic development process (Qureshi & Wasti, 2016). Entrepreneurs may also learn about and systematically apply these success strategies which have already been tested and proven adequate to support small business growth, profitability, and survival beyond the first 5 years by already successful SMEs. Over 53.5 % of small businesses in Cameroon also indicated that their primary obstacle to business sustainability is taxation (CNIS, 2018). Therefore small business owners may use this results to develop internal competencies or skills on tax management to improve their success and survival opportunities (Atawodi & Ojeka, 2012; Mohamad et al., 2016; Tan, Braithwaite, & Reinhart, 2016).

In summary, the broad themes indicating the success strategies which SMEs may learn and implement for their survival include; (a) Education, Technical Experience, and Skills, (b) Entrepreneurial and Business Management Skills, (c) Access to External Support, (d) Bookkeeping and Financial Management, (e) Human Resource Management, (f) Owner's Personal Dedication and Commitment, (g) Research and Development and Marketing Strategies, (h) Resource-Based Strategic Planning, and (i) Understanding of Business Ecosystem, Regulations, and taxation. However, the three major prevalent themes which emerged and provide the most used strategies included; (i) Research and Development and Marketing Strategies, (ii) Bookkeeping and Financial Management, and (iii) Education, Technical Experience, and Skills. The research findings also add more insight to the body of knowledge on small business success and survival. The sub-themes provide a more detailed strategic process that small business owners, potential entrepreneurs, as well as managers of SMEs, may adopt to enable them to build their capacity, attract resources, and build strategies that will help them overcome barriers to growth and improve assurance for success and survival in the long term. It's worth pointing out that most of these success strategies could be learned via continuous training on the various aspects. Owners and managers of SMEs may use the results of this study to formulate successful business strategies based on their unique resources that are valuable, rare, non-substitutable, and inimitable which will support long-term growth and sustainability of their business (Kazlauskaitė, Autio, Gelbūda, Šarapovas, 2015; Alonso, Bressan, & Sakellarios, 2016).

### **Implications for Social Change**

There has been an increase in the number of SMEs creation in Cameroon which has been mainly supported by government policy through the promulgation and establishment of the Center for Creation and Formation of Enterprises. However, countrywide research has concluded that less than 27.7% of SMEs survived beyond the first 5 years (MINEPAT, 2016). More importantly, in addition to the fact that individuals with elementary education own and manage 51% of SMEs in Cameroon, 85% of SMEs are generally controlled by their owners (CNIS, 2018), providing substantial evidence about the link between the founder's educational knowledge and small business sustainability (Banwo, Du, & Onokala, 2015; Obeng, Robson, & Haugh, 2014). SMEs creation and growth remains the cornerstone of economic development in terms of employment and wealth creation (Ayyagari, Demirguc-Kunt, & Maksimovic, 2014; Omri, Frikha, & Bouraoui, 2015; Eniola & Entebang, 2015; Gupta, Wilson, Gregorian, & Healy, 2015; Memili, Fang, Christman, & Massis, 2015; Omri et al., 2015) as well as innovation (Mazzarol, Clark, & Reboud, 2014). The onus for growth, sustainability as well the guarantee for a country's development lies in the abilities of owners of SMEs who must develop their skills and capacities as well as strategies to successfully grow and sustain their businesses for the benefit of themselves and the community. Many governments around the world have come to conclude that entrepreneurship is a remedy for unemployment and the pursuit of economic growth through job creation (Glaeser, Kerr, & Kerr, 2015).

More specifically, this research was carried out with food enterprises in Cameroon, which constitutes part of the agricultural sectors which employs over 70% of the active working population, provide over 42% of the country's GDP, as well as contributes to 30% of export revenue (CNIS, 2010). Most families depend on subsistent farming as a lifeline, unfortunately, these families are unable to preserve their yields due to lack of food processing and preservation methods available to them, leading to wastage of food produce, economic hardship, and lack of food security for the families (Asogwe, Okoye, & Oni, 2017). The findings may throw more light on strategies that food enterprises can use to improve their success and sustainability. Moreover, the results may encourage new entrepreneurs and local families to learn about methods that can help them reduce dumping (wastage of their farm yields) of raw farm produce through traditional food processing methods (Asogwe, Okoye, & Oni, 2017), thereby improving the quality of life for the families and considerable communities in Cameroon who are dependent on agriculture. K'nife and Haughton (2013) suggested that an increase in entrepreneurship, especially social entrepreneurship, have a direct effect on reducing the crime rate in communities and promoting peace and harmony within the community. The findings may contribute to positive social change by improving the living standards of communities and individuals in particular in the agricultural sector by encouraging young startups in food processing, enhance financial revenue for families already operating and dependent on agriculture (raw materials for food enterprises), as well as provide employment growth and economic development globally. Every successful and growing

small business in the food sector represents success registered families who serve reduction on unemployment levels and reduction in crimes in the community.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Starting a small business or becoming an entrepreneur is an enjoyable experience which is often motivated by several reasons including financial growth (Belás, et al., 2015), independence (Block, Sandner, & Spiegel, 2015), preferences for work-life balance ( Annink, Den Dulk, & Amorós, 2016), and other motivational factors ( Dalborg, von Friedrichs, & Wincent, 2015). However, the challenge is for owners and managers of SMEs to be able to sustain their businesses for their benefit and that of the community. Owners, manager, and potentials business owners and entrepreneurs may adopt the results of this study to enable them to develop their successful business strategies for long-term sustainability. The failure rate of SMEs in Cameroon is currently 72.3% (MINEPAT, 2016) and 50% in the US (SBA, 2014), thus indicating that before engaging into the entrepreneurial activity or starting up a small business, individuals need preparedness and an understanding of the success strategies which have been used to achieve success as revealed by the findings of this study; (a) Education, Technical Experience, and Skills, (b) Entrepreneurial and Business Management Skills, (c) Access to External Support, (d) Bookkeeping and Financial Management, (e) Human Resource Management, (f) Owner's Personal Dedication and Commitment, (g) Research and Development and Marketing Strategies, (h) Resource-Based Strategic Planning, and (i) Understanding of Business Ecosystem, Regulations, and taxation. More specifically, entrepreneurs may develop their successful business strategies based on the available

resources which they can access as well as compete in business areas in which they are better than the competitors. Business owners may accumulate or secure the requirement for sustainable growth of their business through continuous education and field training.

While regulations or government programs such as the formation of Center for Creation and Formation of SMEs in Cameroon are essential, government programs may include support to SMEs' growth and sustainability, such as training programs in bookkeeping, marketing, and working capital management; provide extensive knowledge and explanations on various programs available to support SMEs, as well as makes full access to opportunities such as SMEs' access to government contracts as a way to grant them access to markets. Small business owners may develop an interest in the need to use the services of professional advisers in areas of their business which they lack in-house skills such as taxation and other technical skills. Moreover, while the results encourage entrepreneurs and small business owners to engage in a process to understand and support building their business ecosystem (D'Souza, Wortmann, Huitema, & Velthuisen, 2015), government programs should also provide enabling environment for SMEs to success such as reducing bottlenecks and administrative burdens and providing an atmosphere of transparency within the business ecosystem, whereby regulatory procedures and processes are more clearly understood to ease compliance and minimize corruption for SMEs, which will help to improve their sustainability rates. I shall also facilitate access to this research to scholars through different business journals in the US and around the world, including Cameroon and I will personally organize and attend

entrepreneurship conferences and training events through which I shall share the results of this research.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This research was carried out in the food processing sector in Cameroon where the significant positive impact was anticipated, using a qualitative method and multiple case study research design. The case studies comprised of 5 successful small business owners which enabled the researcher to be complete the study using his limited resources. The results are an adequate representation of the actual business experiences and strategies which participants used to achieve success because data to enable data saturation through prolonged and in-depth conversations with participants, member checking, and methodological triangulation which ensured that all important data were collected for analysis and results. The boundaries set for this study was mainly the concentration in one sector (agriculture- food processing enterprises) and the number of respondents which enabled the researcher to reach data saturation. Moreover, there was limited documentary data from the SMEs documents since the businesses often did not keep complete records. The researcher overcomes this by using original books of entry ( income and expenses ledgers, stock records), meeting registers, and data from the ministry of SMEs and Tax department to enable him to collect required data and corroborate data from the available documents and interview responses with external empirical data.

Further research may broaden the scope to understand sustainability strategies generally used by SMEs and Large firms in the agricultural and other sectors in

Cameroon with a focus on expanding the applicability of the resource-based perspective (Wernerfelt, 1984) to small business growth and sustainability strategies. A qualitative multiple case study design using focus group for data collection and a quantitative study may also add impetus to the results of this study. Another area of interest and importance is in the field of building a favorable entrepreneurial ecosystem; the role of the entrepreneurs and the impact of technological innovation on the sustainability of small food enterprises in West and Central Africa. Since taxation has been listed as the most significant barrier to SMEs' sustainability in Cameroon (CNIS, 2016, 2018), a study focused on how SMEs can overcome this barrier is worth considering. Finally, researchers may focus their research effort on understanding sustainability strategies for SMEs in crisis situations.

### **Reflections**

Entrepreneurship and business generally have always taken my interest, and I am a firm believer that I control events around me. However, my DBA journey thought me something different, success requires hard work and leaning on others who ultimately provide the foundation for the success we seek to achieve. As a chartered certified accountant and with experience in business management and small business consulting, I thought I had the required knowledge and skills to help sustain a small business. AS I progressed towards the research section of the study, I came to realized my experience was limited and as I shared views in the class with other scholars, I was then more convinced that life is about learning and exchanging knowledge. Several opinions from my interactions with peers and my doctoral chair permeated my views, polished my



perception, and resulted in a worldview in research and learning that acknowledges that all knowledge is useful. Being able to accept and process the worldviews of others is also a result of this academic journey.

During my data collection process, I faced so many challenges to secure the required number of participants that I wanted to research on. One of my participants canceled his participation just when we were seated to start the interview. I had driven for over 5 hours to meet this potential and quality participant, and yes, I was broken, but I had to pull myself together and follow the IRB procedure and my consent form, that stated that he (the participant) could withdraw at any time without any prejudice. I thought of how to handle disappointment with Grace. During my interviews, I realized that though business owners may not have acquired much educational knowledge, they are in possession of a wealth of practical knowledge and experience that is more worth learning. I learn how to bury my experience and opinion during data collection to avoid biased responses from participants.

After completing this study, I recognized that as scholar-practitioner, my role is to act as a vessel that transmits knowledge and experience from one medium (business, sector, community) to another as a means to impact positive social change. It's never again going to be about what I can take, but how far I can go to give out this invaluable knowledge that the DBA has impacted in me for the world.

### **Conclusion**

The focus of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study research was to explore the strategies that owners and managers of SMEs used to grow and sustain their

businesses beyond the first 5 years. 5 owners of small food processing enterprising located in Cameroon participated in the semistructured, open-ended interviews. The small sample size of 5 was appropriate to enable the researcher to reach data saturation (Metterud et al., 2016). To ensure reliability and validity of the results, I used prolonged engagements with the participants, member checking, and methodological triangulation (Birt et al., 2016; Morse & Coulehan, 2015; Vance, 2015; Yin, 2014). Member checking was also important for the research to achieve data accuracy, creditability, confirmability, and dependability (Harvey, 2015). The results of analysis of the multiple source data collected revealed 9 significant themes representing the strategies that the owners and managers of SMEs used to sustain and succeed in their business venture during the first 5 years including; (a) Education, Technical Experience, and Skills, (b) Entrepreneurial and Business Management Skills, (c) Access to External Support, (d) Bookkeeping and Financial Management, (e) Human Resource Management, (f) Owner's Personal Dedication and Commitment, (g) Research and Development and Marketing Strategies, (h) Resource-Based Strategic Planning, and (i) Understanding of Business Ecosystem, Regulations, and taxation.

The resulting themes which emerged are further supported and justified by the existing body of knowledge in the literature and well founded on the conceptual framework for this study. The SMEs's owners have tested these strategies which represent strategies that SMEs generally need to understand and adapt to enable them to sustain their businesses beyond the first 5 years. The most significant business strategy used to achieve success was Research and Development and Marketing Strategies.

Research and development is very important for product-based small businesses because it supports innovation through products development, quality improvement which enables a company to meet up with customers' requirements ( Ren, Eisingerich, & Tsai, 2015), as well as reduce cost, while creating new business to achieve superior performance (Slater, Mohr, & Sengupta, 2013). Marketing strategies mainly focused on customer relationship management, mouth to mouth marketing, and communication, often through social media. Secondly, education has a direct relationship with small business growth and success (Akinboade, 2015; William, Shahid, & Martinez, 2016) as well as education also facilitate the entrepreneur and startups to acquire other skills through learning (Hunady, Orviska, & Pisar, 2018) to achieve business success. Technical skills help SMEs to improve on their Technical skills, managerial skills, educational knowledge, entrepreneurial experience support business success and sustainability (Purves, Niblock, & Sloan, 2016). Furthermore, human resources management should be considered as an important aspect of a successful strategy, ensuring that employees receive adequate communication and motivation.

Thirdly, Bookkeeping and working capital management was an important success strategy. Successful entrepreneurs seek to manage their working capital in the areas of Managing Startup resources, Capital Sourcing Strategies, and Bootstrapping Finance (Fatoki, 2014; Malmström, 2014; Van Auken, 1996) giving them a broader opportunity to succeed. The entrepreneurial skills or attributes motivate in the face of actual risk for the startup to kickoff (Hietanen & Jarvi, 2015), through opportunity recognition (Hayes, Chawla, & Kathawala, 2015) and triumph (Teramwa & Tubanambazi, 2015). Successful

entrepreneurs can harness competences in business management knowledge and capabilities as a strategy to achieve success (Qureshi & Wasti, 2016) and gain competitive advantage. Another key success strategy for success in SMEs that entrepreneurs need is to understand the business ecosystem, government regulations, as well as the tax policies in the environment of operation. An understanding of the business ecosystem help SMEs to build knowledge about the various aspects such as competition, customers, and market dynamics (D'Souza, Wortmann, Huitema, & Velthuijsen, 2015); industry risk assessment ( Srivastava, Chaudhuri, & Srivastava, 2015), and build relationships and access resources critical for success and sustainability ( Zahra & Nambisan, 2012).

Startups may develop their successful business strategies using the resource-based view approach to strategic planning whereby, owners and manager develop strategies using resources which they can assess and also which are rare, valuable, inimitable, non-substitutable, and immobile. Also, The startup may seek to compete in markets or areas in which they believe their competences or resources are better than those of their competitors to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and sustainability over the first 5 years. As a scholar, my continuous research and is to bring to successful light strategies that can help both existing and potential entrepreneurs to improve their opportunities to sustain their SMEs in the long term and support community growth and economic development generally. The regulatory framework and availability of government incentives may make significant contributions towards small business sustainability (Al-Mutairi, Naser, & Fayez, 2017). The government may orientate her

support programs in the light of these results through training programs, transparency, and policies that support entrepreneurship and innovation, as well as small business development.

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### Appendix A: Personalized Letter to Participants

Dear Mr./Ms Xxxxxx,

My name is Atem Emmanuel Ndeisieh, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Business Administration program at Walden University. The reason I am writing you is to invite you to participate in my research study. I obtained your name/contact info via Mr. Xxxxx at the ministry of small and medium-sized enterprises/taxation department. I am seeking owners-managers of food processing enterprises with over 5 years operational existence to volunteers as participants in my study to explore the strategies that Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) used to achieve success beyond the first 5 years. There is no compensation for participation in this study. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a semistructured face-to-face, audiotaped interview with the researcher regarding strategies you used to sustain your business during the first 5 years. The interview will be scheduled in a private location of your choice. The duration of the interview will be forty minutes.
- Member check the interview data, which is ensuring your opinions about the initial findings and interpretation is accurate.

I anticipate the research may contribute to social change by providing knowledge for small business owners on success and sustainability strategies for their businesses, thus helping them to job creation and contribute to community development. Business owners and managers may also use the findings from this study to evaluate the effectiveness of their success strategies in use. In addition, this study could provide

greater insight regarding strategies that a small business can use to ensure long-term profitability and growth.

If you are interested in participating in this valuable research, please email me (or send hard copy to address: xxxxxx) your reply and any questions you may have about the study.

Best Regard,

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to achieve success in your business during the first 5 years?
2. What strategies did you find worked best in identifying, managing, and maximizing your tangible and intangible resources to improve business success?
3. What strategies did you use to secure and manage startup capital for your business success?
4. What did you find worked best to attract, retain, and satisfy new customers for your business?
5. What role did strategic planning play in developing your initial business strategies for success during this startup period?
6. How did you overcome barriers that threatened your progress during the first 5 years?
7. How did outside professional advice, education, training, and experience contribute to your business performance?
8. What impact did tax management have on the initial success of your business?
9. What other successful strategies and experiences would you like to share?
10. What additional information would you like to share?

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Insert name, thank you for choosing to meet with me today and participate in my research on the topic *Strategies for Success in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)*. The purpose of my study is to explore the strategies you used to sustain your business during the first 5 years of operations. The first order of business is the consent form. Please read the consent form while I read it aloud. If you understand and agree with the consent form, please sign and date the consent form for me. Do you have any questions? Did you bring any archival documents? If so, I will take them now. Once I am finish with the documents, I will return them to you. Let us get started! If anytime, I ask a question that you do not want to answer please say “pass” and I will continue to the next question. My first question is:

1. What strategies did you use to achieve success in your business during the first 5 years?
2. What strategies did you find worked best in identifying, managing, and maximizing your tangible and intangible resources to improve business success?
3. What strategies did you use to secure and manage startup capital for your business success?
4. What did you find worked best to attract, retain, and satisfy new customers for your business?

**Insert name**, thank you for all this excellent information and data. To let you know how the process will work. I will transcribe the interview and write up a synopsis of each question. Once I have completed the transcription of the interview and written the



synopsis, I will contact you to schedule another meeting (member checking meeting) for you to review the synopsis for accuracy. Again, thank you very much for participating in my study!

## Appendix D: Member Checking Protocol

**Insert name**, thank you for meeting me today. I completed the transcription of the interview and wrote down my interpretations of your answer to each question. Here is a copy of the questions with an in-depth summary (interpretations) of your answers. I will go through the summary with you to make certain that what I have written represents the answers (or meaning of the response) you provided and ensure I did not miss anything. In addition, you can contribute more information, if you want.

You understand? Let us get started.

**Insert name**, again, thank you very much for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me to go over the interview synopsis. If I have additional questions, I will be in contact with you. However, most importantly, I will provide you a copy of the complete study once it is approved. Thank you very much!