

2019

Sustainability Strategies for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Zimbabwe

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Donnemore Majukwa

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Sustainability Strategies for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Zimbabwe

by

Donnemore Majukwa

MS, University of Liverpool, 2016

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2019

Abstract

Zimbabwe's entrepreneur owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) comprise approximately 94% of business owners but contribute only 50% of the country's gross domestic product. Entrepreneur owners play an important role in strengthening Zimbabwe's economy because they create approximately 60% to 80% of employment opportunities. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies owners of SME in Zimbabwe use to sustain their businesses. The population consisted of 5 owners of SMEs who have successfully implemented the strategies to sustain their businesses for over 5 years. The general systems theory was the conceptual framework of the study. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and review of company financial documents. Member checking and methodological triangulation were used to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings of the study. The data analysis process was conducted using Yin's 5-phases of qualitative data analysis. Four themes emerged from data analysis, including passion and dedication, quality of products and services, customer satisfaction, and employing staff with the right skills. The results of the study could lead to positive social change for SMEs and the communities by helping owners of SME to create growth strategies, increase revenues for the country, and create long-term employment opportunities for the communities. The findings from the study could catalyze positive social change by improving workforce capabilities, creating awareness of the success of entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, and increasing the interest of financial institutions in lending to SMEs.

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Dedication

To my late mother Rita and my late sister Margaret. I wish you were here to see the man I have grown to be.

Acknowledgments

I am profoundly grateful to my Chair Dr. Susan K. Fan, whom for without her guidance, understanding, support, patience, and fast turnarounds, I wouldn't have made it this far. I would also want to thank the committee members Dr. Janie Hall and Dr. Rocky Dwyer for their valued feedback. Thank you to my family and friends who have immensely supported me both by keeping me harmonious and helping me to put the pieces together and his Almighty God, for his grace in me.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Harare is the capital and most populous city of Zimbabwe, comprising informal and registered small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Owners of SMEs play an important role in the sustainable development of emerging economies. The owners of most SMEs control and manage the day-to-day operations of the business. Some business decisions that owners of SMEs make may affect the potential growth of the business and lead to failure (Efferin & Hartono, 2015). The owners face many challenges to gain profitability and sustain their businesses. The purpose of the qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies owners of SMEs use to sustain their business.

Background of the Problem

The quest to explore the strategies owners of SMEs in Zimbabwe use arose from the low growth rate of small businesses in Zimbabwe. Some SMEs in Zimbabwe are not growing and do not survive longer than 5 years (Majoni, Mutunhu, & Chaderopa, 2016). In developing countries such as in Zimbabwe, SMEs are important for driving the growth and development of the economy and for creating employment opportunities (Wang, 2016). The owners of SMEs and policymakers in Zimbabwe were concerned; therefore, it was imperative to explore ways of promoting sustainable development of small businesses. SMEs foster entrepreneurship and do not demand high capital or high technology but instead require management skills and knowledge to develop the business (Tinarwo, 2016). SMEs contribute to the economy through employment creation, development of appropriate technologies, and gross domestic product (GDP). Small businesses are a significant source of technological innovation and new product

developments (Foghani, Mahadi, & Omar, 2017). The owners of SMEs can provide a strong foundation for developing new industries and can strengthen existing businesses to promote wealth creation and productivity in the economy.

Problem Statement

The owners of SMEs in Zimbabwe operate in a difficult and uncertain business environment because of the country's economic instability (Majukwa, Haddud, & Shaofeng, 2016). Small businesses in Zimbabwe comprised approximately 94% of the business population but contribute only 50% of the country's gross domestic product (Majoni et al., 2016). The general business problem was that some owners of SMEs enter business initiatives without adequate preparation. The specific business problem was that some owners of SMEs lack the strategies to sustain their businesses for over 5 years.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies owners of SMEs in Zimbabwe use to sustain their business for over 5 years. The targeted population consisted of five owners of SME in Harare, Zimbabwe who were over 18 and have implemented the strategies to sustain their businesses for over 5 years. The findings from the study could lead to positive social change for SMEs and the communities by helping owners of SMEs to create growth strategies and sustainability to increase revenues for the economy and create long-term job opportunities for the communities. The findings from the study could catalyze positive social change by improving workforce capabilities, creating awareness of the success of entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, and increasing the interest of financial institutions in lending to SMEs.

Nature of the Study

Research methods for academic studies include mixed, qualitative, and quantitative methods (Leppink, 2017). In qualitative methods, researchers gather and analyze nonstatistical data to interpret meanings and understand social life through the targeted populations (Yazan, 2015). In quantitative methods, researchers include measurements, statistical, or numerical analysis of data using computational techniques to test the hypothesis for variables' relationships or differences (Snelson, 2016). In the mixed method, researchers combine quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments and processes (Kealy, 2016). Because there were no statistical variables to measure, quantitative or mixed methods were not appropriate for the study. Qualitative methodology was suitable for this study because using it enabled exploration of complexities of behavior and processes from the viewpoint of participants regarding a contemporary phenomenon.

Research designs for qualitative studies include (a) case study, (b) ethnography, (c) narrative, and (d) phenomenology (Liu, 2016). An ethnographic approach involves observing the culture of participants as part of field work (Mannay & Morgan, 2015). Because observing a culture was not the purpose of this study, ethnography was not a viable design. Narrative studies include written or spoken words or visual representation of people under the study (Godden, 2017). Phenomenological approaches involve the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). Because there was no storytelling or focus on the understanding of participant's perceptions, narrative and phenomenology designs were not viable. A case study was an appropriate

research design because it is robust, particularly when a holistic and in-depth exploration is required (see Ponelis, 2015). A case study was suitable for this study because it was useful for understanding what strategies owners of SMEs use to sustain their businesses.

Research Question

The overarching research question of the study was as follows: What strategies do owners of SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe use to sustain their businesses?

Interview Questions

The open-ended questions included the following:

1. How has your education background and professional experience prepared you to operate an SME?
2. What strategies do you use to sustain your business?
3. What are the steps to consider when applying new strategies to gain profitability?
4. What business practices have influenced your strategies for sustaining the business?
5. How, if at all, have the changes in the SME sector influenced your strategies to sustain your business?
6. What else do you want to share about the strategies to sustain the business?

Conceptual Framework

In the 1930s, von Bertalanffy introduced the systems theory to show the interrelationships and connections between separate disciplines (Drack & Pouvreau, 2015). Von Bertalanffy (1968) suggested that a system is an open complex of elements

interacting with their environments. The systems theory was further developed as the basis of unifying science and an integrated approach to analyze the phenomenon (Kast & Rozensweig, 1972). In the systems theory, the researcher treats systems as whole combinations of related parts. System thinkers focus on processes, relationships, and interconnections of the components in the system (Rousseau, 2015). The general systems theory is effective in studying complex situations open to a myriad of options (Mekios, 2016). The conceptual framework for the study was the general systems theory. The conceptual framework provides a potential lens through which the researcher can understand the context of the study (Demetis & Lee, 2016).

Systems thinking enables the researcher to understand the problem by considering the interactions of critical factors that define a phenomenon. Chikere and Nwoka (2015) postulated that general systems theory enables the researcher to view things holistically and understand the phenomenon in a variety of settings. Using the general systems approach involves exploration of related parts as the whole system (Ramosaj & Berisha, 2014). The owners of SMEs operate in a volatile business environment; they face challenges on day-to-day operations. Systems theory is a fundamental approach to effect intellectually engaging complexity and change (Dominici, 2017).

Operational Definitions

Entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurship is the practice of discovering, creating, enacting, and evaluating business opportunities to create goods and services (Marjanova, Sofijanova, Davcev, & Temjanovski, 2015).

Profitability: For this research, profitability refers to the ratio of measuring the performance and ability of the business to create revenue within a certain period (Margaretha & Supartika, 2016).

Small and medium enterprises: There are varied definitions of SMEs. The government of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises and Cooperative Development (2014) defined a small enterprise as a registered business entity with not over 50 employees and the medium enterprise as a registered business entity with employees between 75 and 100.

Strategies: The overall direction, the vision of a company, and the linking of resources to develop capabilities in each situation (Martinsons, Davison, & Huang, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions and limitations are the issues beyond my control, but if they disappear, the study would become irrelevant. Assumptions are the facts I assume are true but cannot prove. Limitations are the possible weaknesses of the study and are out of my control. Delimitations are the characteristics in my control that limit the scope and define the boundaries of the study.

Assumptions

Assumptions help the researcher to develop the inferences, theories, and findings beneficial to the study (Yin, 2018). In this study, I included three basic assumptions. The first assumption was that a qualitative method was an appropriate methodology to explore the phenomenon under the study. The second assumption was that the participants would

provide honest and accurate responses. I assumed that the participants would provide complete responses and an accurate description of their business experience. The third assumption was the ability of owners of SMEs to describe the accurate accounts and strategies they use to sustain their businesses.

Limitations

Limitations refer to potential weaknesses of the study (Merriam, 2014). The first limitation was that the literature focused on strategies the owners of SMEs use to sustain their businesses was relatively scarce, and the number of newly published studies examining strategies of SMEs in Zimbabwe has diminished within the last 5 years. The willingness of the research participants to be candid in their responses in this research was the second limitation. The third limitation was including only the owners of SMEs who have implemented strategies to sustain their businesses.

Delimitations

Delimitations are bounds or restrictions that researchers impose to shape the study (Simons, 2014). The boundaries described in the research were limited to the geographical location, which included owners of SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe. The study only included owners of SMEs who have implemented strategies to sustain their businesses. Including the owners of SMEs who have succeeded and excluding those who have failed was a delimitation of the study.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is that it could provide valuable insights to the new owners of SMEs who consider innovative and cost-effective ways to sustain their

businesses. An enriched understanding of the strategies owners of SMEs use to sustain their businesses could assist the businesses to compete more effectively. The owners of SMEs who are knowledgeable could manage the intricacies of starting a business, leading to maximizing workforce capabilities to increase revenues to support the communities, local state, and the governments.

Contribution to Business Practice

The owners of SMEs must understand the strategies for achieving profitability and sustain their businesses (Durendez, Ruiz-Palomo, Garcia-Perez-de-Lema, & Dieguez-Soto, 2016). Owners of SMEs who consider successful methods other owners use to sustain their businesses may gain valuable insight from the findings of this study. Creating sustainable competitive advantage by identifying strategies for sustaining the business may be the most important goal of any organization and may be the most important single attribute on which a business can place its focus (Chen & Zhang, 2015). The long-term success of an SME can be determined by the ability of the owner or the leader to maintain competitive advantage, even in the most unpredictable economic times (Pletnev & Barkhatov, 2016). The findings from my study may help owners of similar SMEs to understand the potential opportunities for identifying and improving key business processes for profitability and to sustain their businesses.

Implications for Social Change

The ability to effect positive social change starts with the owners of SME crafting, modeling, harmonizing, and directing sustainability activities and efforts for emerging opportunities (Szczepańska-Woszczyzna & Kurowska-Pysz, 2016). The findings of the

study could lead to positive social change for SMEs and the communities by helping the owners of SMEs to create growth strategies and sustain their businesses, increase revenues for the country, and increase career opportunities for the communities. The findings of the study could catalyze positive social change by improving workforce capabilities and increasing revenues to support the communities, local state, and the governments. An increase in the number of people working in a country can increase the GDP and create more opportunities for economic expansion (Karadag, 2016).

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies owners of SMEs use to gain profitability and sustain their businesses for over 5 years. SMEs in Zimbabwe represent 60% of the country's workforce and contribute 50% to the country's GDP (Mungozhi & Hlabiso, 2017). The purpose of the professional and academic literature review is to place each work in its contribution to understand the research problem. In qualitative research, the literature review enables researchers to (a) provide the intellectual context for work and position the research with other related studies, (b) identify gaps in knowledge, (c) avoid reinventing the wheel by discovering the research already conducted on a topic, (d) set the background on what has been explored on a topic, and (e) increase the breadth of knowledge in research (Gentles, Charles, Nicholas, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2016). A literature review helps researchers and scholars discover research methods that may apply to the study (Baker, 2016). For this study, I gathered sources from searching business and management databases in the Walden University Online Library. The literature review contains 233 peer-reviewed

articles, and 94% of the articles published between 2015 and 2019. I used these databases: (a) Business Source Complete, (b) ABI/INFORM Collection, (c) Google Scholar, (d) Emerald Insight database, (e) Sage Journals, (d) EBSCO Primary, (e) Science Direct, and (g) The European Journal of Business Management database. The keywords I used to search articles in these databases included *competitive strategies*, *small business strategies*, *operations strategies*, *SMEs*, *entrepreneurship*, *small business innovation*, *small business profitability*, *small business failure*, *strategies for small businesses*, and *small businesses in Zimbabwe*.

The review of professional and academic literature section of this research contains eight subject categories, including systems theory, SMEs, SMEs in Harare, leadership of SMEs, the contribution of SMEs to economic and social development, factors inhibiting growths of SMEs, SME strategies for success, and entrepreneurship.

Systems Theory

In the 1930s, von Bertalanffy introduced the systems theory to show the interrelationships and connections between separate disciplines (Drack & Pouvreau, 2015). The system theory was developed to suit different environments. Von Bertalanffy (1968) suggested that the system is an open complex of elements interacting within their environments. The systems theory was further developed as the basis of unifying science and an integrated approach for analyzing the phenomenon (Kast & Rozensweig, 1972). In the systems theory, the researcher treats systems as whole combinations of related parts. Yurtseven and Buchanan (2016a) articulated that systems theory has been modified to suit varying organizational settings, eventually adopting goals that include (a) to

formulate generalized systems theories, (b) to establish the method of describing the function and behavior of the systems objects, and (c) to elaborate the generalized models of the systems. Dominici (2017) highlighted systems thinking as the meaningful way to detect complex and less distinct interactions faced by contradictory tendencies wherever management acts. Rousseau (2015) found that system thinkers focus on processes, relationships, and interconnections of the components in the system. The systems theory was chosen to ground the conceptual framework of this study to explore the strategies of SMEs in Zimbabwe to sustain their businesses for over 5 years.

Mekios (2016) found that systems theory is effective in studying complex situations open to a myriad of options. The owners of SMEs operate in a volatile business environment; they face challenges on day-to-day operations. Porvazník and Ljudvigová (2016) revealed that in systems theory, leaders pursue multiple goals, link with all departments within the business to operate as a singular unit and obtain feedback from both outside and inside the organization. Yurtseven and Buchanan (2016b) discussed the interaction of business departments in the systems theory as an enabling process where the different subsystems enable each other to perform effectively. The proposition in systems theory is that owners of SMEs have the role of ensuring that proper strategies are in place at each level, and there is coordination between all the departments in the organization as a system (Porvazník & Ljudvigová, 2016). Systems thinking enables the researcher to understand the problem by considering the interactions of critical factors that define a phenomenon. Chikere and Nwoka (2015) postulated that general systems theory enables the researcher to view things holistically and understand the phenomenon

in a variety of settings. Using the general systems approach involves exploration of related parts as the whole system (Ramosaj & Berisha, 2014). Drack and Pouvreau (2015) expressed that researchers assume that there exists interdependence between the personnel and there are also influences of the external environment on the organization structure. Dominici (2017) asserted that systems theory is a fundamental approach to effect intellectually engaging complexity and change. Okręglicka, Gorzen-Mitka, and Ogrecan (2015) propounded that the systems theory has been applied in businesses to understand different aspects of how the business functions.

Spencer (2014) asserted that in general systems theory each system is organized so components are independent but interrelated. Yurtseven and Buchanan (2016a) posited that systems theory succeeds although it does not provide detailed methodologies applicable to specific fields. Mekios (2016) postulated that in systems theory, leaders recognize various departments as parts of the organization and the interrelations of these parts in the system as a unit. Porvazník and Ljudvigová (2016) expressed that systems theory requires top management to clearly understand how the system operates. Okręglicka et al. (2015) revealed that using the systems theory enables researchers to understand the relationships of elements and changes of the structures that influence the sustainable development.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

The characteristics of SMEs include family owned businesses and nonfamily owned (owner manager) businesses (Hassan & Mohamed, 2015). There are varied definitions of SMEs (Lampadarios, 2017). The government of Zimbabwe defined a small

enterprise as a registered business entity with not over 50 employees and the medium enterprise as a registered business entity with employees between 75 and 100 (as cited in Tinarwo, 2016). Stephen, Olsen, Ian, and Hasle (2015) articulated the general characters of SMEs, which include the management style, the ownership of business, having a limited market share, having high resource constraints, operating under extreme financial pressure, and having a high potential for failure. In developing countries, most owners of SMEs lack support and expertise; as a result, they rely on trusted relationships for business information (Hassan & Mohamed, 2015). Massaro, Handley, Bagnoli, and Dumay (2016) revealed that SMEs are geographically scattered but relatively disadvantaged owing to economies of scales.

Most owners of SMEs hire members of the family, their friends, or part-time workers, and they offer low wages and often experience shortages of skilled labor (Lampadarios, 2017). Stephen et al. (2015) revealed that in developing countries, SMEs are the pillars and the lifeblood of modern economies. Thelepis, Mastamet-Mason, and Antonites (2016) described SMEs as the building blocks for the economy. The SME sector plays a pivotal role in developing the country's economy if supported with adequate resources and favorable economic policies. SMEs are labor intensive and lead to a more equitable distribution of income than larger enterprises by generating increased levels of employment, thus alleviating poverty. Sadeghi (2018) asserted that the small and medium business sector is a fundamental engine for innovation, the key to economic growth and job creation.

SMEs in Harare. In some countries, starting up an SME is a choice or a passion. In Zimbabwe, it is about survival for employment and creating value, but if the outcome results in wealth creation for the entrepreneur, that is a bonus (Zvarivadza, 2018). For the local state and the government, SMEs are about the employment of the local communities and the contribution that must be made to the fiscus. SMEs are the centerpiece of economic growth and poverty reduction (Khosa & Kalitanyi, 2017). The SME sector in Zimbabwe is a mixture of self-employment outlets and dynamic enterprises mainly concentrated in urban areas involved in an array of activities, including manufacturing, services, food processing, agriculture, safari and tourism, restaurants, and retail sectors (Moyo & Mandizwidza-Moyo, 2017).

Most SMEs are focused on the domestic market, given their limited international competitiveness. Mungozhi and Hlabiso (2017) expressed that hard-economic conditions affecting the country have resulted in many big companies closing businesses, creating a high level of unemployment and leaving SMEs as the only hope for survival. In most SMEs, owners do not separate their ownership and control of the business operations; usually, the business has no separate or external equity owners. Zvarivadza (2018) described the governments' tax regimes and regulatory frameworks as conditions affecting the smooth operations, the development, and the growth of SMEs. The operations of SMEs are compounded by challenges including the shortage of raw materials, competition from large corporations, and unavailability of financial assistance from financial institutions. Chigora and Zvavahera (2015) discussed the SMEs' fundamental role in promoting and developing homegrown economies and equitable

sustainable development. Some SMEs evolve to become large enterprises as the countries develop and the economy matures; therefore, development initiatives are a panacea to the economic growth. Wadesango (2015) revealed that, in Zimbabwe, stimulating and sustaining the development of SMEs has been an important issue, the center point of which is the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Corporation. A parastatal is formed through an act of parliament to promote the development of SMEs and cooperatives in the country through lending and capacity building. However, contrary to the situation in industrialized economies such as in the United States of America, in Zimbabwe, the approach to SME development and promotion lacks commitment on funding research and promoting technological innovation efforts (Makanyeza & Dzvuke, 2015).

In Zimbabwe, the environment in which SMEs operate is characterized by economic challenges that impact the costs and production of the business (Wadesango, 2015). Most SMEs are born out of the people or groups of people with the visions to operate and run prosperous businesses (Zvarivadza, 2018). The individuals running businesses may be coming from various backgrounds with no exposure to any managerial knowledge or skills. Chigora and Zvavahera (2015) discussed the challenges bedeviling the SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe, which include (a) lack of access to affordable finance, (b) cumbersome processes of setting-up the business, (c) poor infrastructure, (d) poor institutional structures, (e) limited formal avenues for pursuing interest-bearing investment options, and (f) shallow stock market. Dlamini (2017) asserted that SMEs in Zimbabwe have been regarded as important players in developing the country, and the

government has made tremendous efforts to recognize and promote SMEs into the mainstream of the economy. However, Mapeto, Ziska, and Derera (2015) revealed that the relationships between SMEs and large organizations have been very cozy, and both the private and public sectors accuse most of the SMEs of being inefficient and letting them down in achieving the targeted lead times, failing to obtain the value for money in their business organizations. SMEs can acquire and improve competitiveness through the adoption of innovation (Kambwale, Chisoro, & Karodia, 2015). Thus, it is critical for the policymakers to understand the levels of innovations that SMEs undertake, and their commitment is valuable in designing policies targeted at competitiveness in the developing countries (Moyo & Mandizwidza-Moyo, 2017).

The definition of SMEs varies from one country to another and is generally focused on the size of the business, the turnover, the value of assets, the number of employees, or a combination of these. Sitharam and Hoque (2016) posited that the lower limit for small businesses is usually 5 to 10 employees and the upper limit is 50 to 100 employees, while the medium enterprises usually have the upper limit of between 100 and 250 employees. In Zimbabwe, the upper limits of employment in SMEs is 100 people (Tinarwo, 2016). Thus, an SME in the developed economy such as in the United States of America may be a large enterprise in Zimbabwe and other developing economies. Mutalemwa (2015) revealed that SMEs are ubiquitous and have a high employment generation potential, which makes them capable of playing an important role of building the national competitiveness. Most SMEs operate in the informal sector, and the business environment is not conducive to entrepreneurship. Majoni et al. (2016) revealed that the

SME sector in Zimbabwe, employ 60% - 85% of people and contribute 50% of gross domestic product (GDP) to the economy following the collapse of the formal sector. To boost the country's economic growth and development, policymakers must take considerable measures to encourage the promotion and growth of SME businesses. Crick, Eskander, Fankhauser, and Diop (2018) asserted that SMEs need to be supported to produce higher returns for economic development. The local governments must set up loan guarantee schemes to promote and develop SME businesses as national investment imitative.

Leadership style in SMEs. In fast-changing and highly competitive business environments, SMEs are found to exert strong influences in economic development of the developing and developed countries (Margaretha & Supartika, 2016). Developing a viable SMEs sector comes with a cost, hard work, and sacrifices. There is therefore the need to avail funding, improve access to information communication technology (ICT), and management capacity building, development of information data bases, and incentives for the sector. Sitharam and Hoque (2016) revealed that SMEs have played major roles in fostering economic growth, generating employment opportunities, and reducing poverty. Leadership refers to abilities and behaviors, which can be discovered, developed, and promoted towards certain objectives and environment (Ozkan, 2015). Lack of leadership skills can lead to the collapse of businesses mainly due to poor decision making. Garavan, Watson, Carbery, and Obrien (2015) revealed that performing an organization lies in the leadership styles of the management. Missioura (2015) revealed that leadership is about encouraging and inspiring individuals and groups to do

their best in accomplishing a targeted objective. Leadership must have a consistent pattern of behavior different from management, where management is about coordinating activities, monitoring the operations and resources allocation in line with achieving organizational goals (Deschamps, Rinfret, Lagacé, & Privé, 2016). Managing SMEs requires solid leadership skills. Karadakil, Goud, and Thomas (2015) revealed that successful entrepreneurship goes beyond basic leadership practice. The owners of SMEs must create business processes and strategies from nothing and lead the people to meet the goals of the business. Leadership has been the key interest of entrepreneurial and management studies and has gradually become a topic of increased concern (Lai, Hsu, & Li, 2018).

SMEs require strong owners who can build competitive strength for the business and compete in the market to sustain their businesses. Szczepańska-Woszczyńska and Kurowska-Pysz (2016) found that the success or failure of an SME depends on the owners' choices and his or her behaviors. All successful SMEs need effective owners who can formulate and communicate new strategic direction of the business and motivate employees. Lai et al. (2018) asserted that leadership in SMEs is associated with the capability of one or several individuals at the top of the organization. SMEs have small structures, the nature of leadership style assumed can determine the performance of the business. Allameh, Pool, Kazemi, and Mostafavi (2015) revealed that SMEs require pragmatic owners who focus on the processes behind the business goals and tasks needed to get the things done. Karadakil et al., (2015) articulated the importance of leadership in an organization which include (a) to formulate the company's strategy, (b) to maximize

profits, and (c) to ensure the smooth flow of the business operations. Muenjohn and McMurray (2016) reiterated that owners of SMEs must be problem solvers who can guide the organization in any situations through the challenges and achieve goals through other people. Allameh et al. asserted that the ability to unite the organization to work towards the organization's goal is the role of an effective leader and it is critical to the organization's success and performance. Lawal, Worlu, and Ayoade (2016) revealed that the role of leadership in SMEs can influence the day-to-day operations of the businesses and subsequent performances. The way small business managers establish and utilize leadership information might improve to be the key to success or failure.

Dabke (2016) asserted that great leaders communicate the organization's future path to a certain group of people effectively and get them to work as one towards common goals. Leadership is important to an organization's success and business performance in the competitive environment in which SMEs operate (Mgeni & Nayak, 2015). The organization's success or performance is influenced by the difference in the leadership styles. Efferin and Hartono (2015) highlighted three types of leadership styles which include transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and passive-avoidant leadership. Tajasom, Hung, Nikbin, and Hyun (2015) concluded that transactional, transformational, and passive-avoidant leaders are part of the SMEs environment, they influence individual and organizational performance. Transactional leadership involves guiding and motivating the followers to achieve the goals of the organization (Garavan et al., 2015). Transactional leaders focus on their tasks and are receptive to the performances of their followers. Chatterjee and Kulakli (2015) postulated that

transformational leaders identify the need for change, to set goals and to provide guidance towards the change while effectively managing the transition. Ng, Kee, and Ramayah (2016) asserted that transformational leaders are proactive and endeavor to maximize the individual, group, and organizational development beyond expectation and provide a sense of mission. Dunne, Aaron, McDowell, Urban, and Geho (2016) postulated that passive-avoidant leadership is comparable to no leadership. Leaders are important to many organizations. Samuel, Siagian, and Octavia (2017) revealed that leaders play different roles and perform various important functions. Some owners of SMEs lack talent, attitude, experience, skill, knowledge, and training. Lekhanya (2015) asserted that leaders provide directions and encourage their followers to accomplish tasks.

The owners of SMEs must provide effective leadership in organizations to achieve new visions, missions, and objectives through implementing new strategies. Ozkan (2015) concluded that deficiencies in leadership can lead to costly business decisions. The personal goals of a leader can affect the business strategies (Miloloža, 2018). The organizations with effective leadership have owners who can motivate, inspire, supervise, guide, set ethical standards, and evaluate individuals and teams in their organizations so they can give their best in implementing the selected strategies (Okřęglicka et al., 2015). Leadership is necessary to provide the direction and to ensure that all members of the team participate and move in the same direction. Sainis, Haritos, Kriemadis, and Fowler (2017) asserted that effective leadership involves leading and directing people to use their talents, abilities, knowledge, skills, and attitudes most

effectively and efficiently to accomplish organizational objectives. Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy (2015) postulated that leaders need to realize the important linkage between leadership and organizational performance, most organizations are paying more attention to the need to develop effective leaders in their organizations. SMEs need effective owners to sustain their profitability and growth, they will create the context that will enable their employees to take on new challenges and achieve superior business results (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2016). SMEs without effective leadership risk their chances of achieving maximum productivity to gain a competitive urge in the market. The size of SMEs means a simple managerial mistake can lead to the collapse of the business with minimal opportunity to learn from past mistakes (Sainis et al., 2017).

Coordinating SME business activities involves chances of success and failure.

Luu (2017) asserted that leadership means the ability of a leader to perform the tasks and goals achieved through the work of other people under his or her command. Leadership is needed when there is an objective to be achieved, or a task to be performed, and when more than one person must execute those tasks. Garavan et al. (2015) asserted that all managers are leaders in that they can only do what they concern the support of their teams who need to be inspired to follow them.

Contribution of SMEs to Economic and Social Development

The success of the economy in a country can be measured through a variety of indicators, which include: the level of national income, per capita income, and employment opportunities (Zamfir, Mocanu, & Grigorescu, 2017). The most important steps in developing these indicators are through the business sector. The role of the SMEs

in developing countries including Zimbabwe has been established, such businesses contribute immensely to the economic and social development of a country. Ribeiro-Soriano (2017) found that SMEs can transform and develop the communities in developing countries. SMEs provide a platform for training of indigenous entrepreneurs, which drives the wealth creation process at all levels. Peprah, Mensah, and Akosah, (2016) established that SMEs promote local knowledge by utilizing locally available raw materials that would have been discarded. SMEs are the nursery of entrepreneurship where individual creativity and innovation are the driving force. Suárez-Ortega, García-Cabrera, and Knight (2016) highlighted the importance of SMEs in a country which includes crucial for spearheading national industries, creating more jobs, and contributing to the foreign exchange and tax.

SMEs are engines of economies, they create employment opportunities, develop the country's, and ensure social stability (Hyder & Lussier, 2016). SMEs utilize labor-intensive technologies and thus have an immediate impact on employment generation. Ndikubwimana (2016) asserted that SMEs support economies in strengthening entrepreneurship and innovation and contribute to the economy by employing many people and play a big role by increasing economic development. Tonis (2015) propounded that SMEs stimulate an entrepreneurial spirit, innovation, and are important in promoting competitiveness and employment. Given the importance of SMEs in an economy, Cant and Wiid (2016) proposed that policymakers should aim to promote entrepreneurship initiatives to create a favorable business environment, allowing the owners of SMEs to realize their full potential in the market. Musa and Chinniah (2016)

posited that SMEs are flexible and responsive to frequent changes that occur in the contemporary global environment than large enterprises. Some SMEs are involved in primary and secondary economic activities that depend heavily on locally sourced materials (Muzamwese, 2016). As such they achieve high value-added operations activities which are the key roles in the growth and development of any economy. Afrifa and Tauringana (2015) articulated that the crucial role of the SME sector in the economy can only be realized if there are strong supportive government policies to help them increase access to resources. The owners of SMEs must formalize their business activities to attract investors and get financial support from the financial institutions. Eniola and Entebang (2015) asserted that SMEs are recognized as the engines in which the growth of the middle-income group of the economy can be achieved to sustain the country's economic growth.

Hollender, Zapkau, and Schwens, (2017) discussed the importance of SMEs in their role of growth at various phases of economic development including contributing to output, fulfilling social objectives, attracting foreign reserves into a country, and providing employment. SMEs could easily be in the rural areas and survive on the rudimentary industrial infrastructure and serve as facilitators for industrial dispersal and economic development. Hyder and Lussier revealed that the output of most SMEs serves as parts or semi-processed goods and services of the large-scale businesses. SMEs generate mutual industrial linkages that connect the local producers and large-scale businesses. SMEs are recognized as the driving force in the modern economies, for their contributions to the economic development. Maksimov, Wang, and Luo (2017)

postulated that in developing countries, SMEs are crucial to unravel the economic challenges which include poverty alleviation, employment creation, and sustainable economic growth for the countries. Landoni et al. (2016) revealed that innovation is one of the most important engines for business growth, and successful innovation can propel the organization forward in its sector. Adoption of modern technologies has the potential to spur the growth of individual enterprises at the micro level with possible ripple effects at the macro level. Eniola and Entebang (2015) discussed the short-term gestation period and high potentials for quick yield on investment and suggested that the owners of SMEs provide promising alternatives for countries that desire the fast option of industrial development. The owners of SMEs use flexible and less sophisticated technologies which they can manipulate to handle the day-to-day operations to meet the needs of their businesses (Ahmedova, (2015).

In the developing economies, such as in Zimbabwe, the owners of SMEs play pivotal roles in re-engineering the socio-economic landscape of the country (Tinarwo, 2016). The owners of SMEs use formal and informal training and they become better by using their knowledge and intensive service activities. Mapeto et al. (2015) discussed the significant roles of SMEs in Zimbabwe which include employment creation, utilization of scarce resources, limit the challenges associated with rural-urban migration, critical breeding space and nurturing grounds for local entrepreneurial capacities, and improve the technical skills of the local population. Muzamwese (2016) revealed that the owners of SMEs contribute to the economic and social development through aiding technological innovativeness and managerial competencies, revenue generation interventions,

utilization of local raw materials, and being a change agent in economic transformation. The owners of SMEs provide opportunities for developing local skills and technology acquisition through adaptation. Lekhanya (2015) revealed that the SME sector is widely recognized as a major driver of developing socio-economic activities. In developing economies where there are limited number of large-scale companies, SMEs are the major source of GDP and employment. Karadag (2016) discovered that the economic growth and developing of the SME sector are closely associated in both the developed and the developing countries. The rapid growth of SMEs depends on the economic environment, the low economic environment helps the SMEs to grow while the high inflation environment provides challenges to the businesses.

Khosa, and Kalitanyi (2017) found that the creation of new venture, employment, and the value-added contribution of the SME sector to the economy differ between the developing and the developed economies. SMEs are important in promoting competitiveness and to bring new products into the market. Tezel, Koskela, and Aziz (2018) asserted that owners of SMEs need to expand their level of production can inject more financial investments or acquire new equipment to gain competitive advantage. Rahayu and Day (2016) asserted that increasing investments into the existing business can help expand the business, thus ensuring the competitiveness in the market.

Factors Inhibiting the Growths of SMEs

SMEs are the veritable tool of economic development; however, challenges hinder their business performance and growth. Suárez-Ortega et al. (2016) revealed that there is a high rate of failing SMEs in Zimbabwe and a low rate of start-ups every year.

Asongu and Tchamyoun (2016) expressed that homegrown businesses often face a challenge of not being able to acquire goods and services from suppliers in the market.

Margaretha and Supartika (2016) asserted that the owners of SMEs need to understand the determinants of profitability to develop effective growth strategies for their businesses. Sarwoko and Frisdiantara (2016) identified internal and external factors that hinder the growth of SMEs arguing that internal factors include a variety of organizational characteristics, while external factors include barriers related to access to credit. Wang (2016) revealed that there is a considerable range of barriers that affect the growth of SME businesses depending on conditions of specific markets. Sadeghi (2018) alluded that factors that hinder the growth of SMEs are determined by a variety of factors and the conditions vary from country to country. Kusi, Opata, and Narh (2015) discussed factors that hinder the growth of small business which include individual characteristics, environmental characteristics, strategy development, and organizational development.

Asongu and Tchamyoun (2016) alluded that the personality traits of a leader, his or her competences, motivational growth, and personal background are the most important determinants that determine the growth of SMEs. Gancarczyk and Gancarczyk (2018) concluded that most of the SMEs in developing countries have no clear modalities in place to measure their organizational performance. Singh (2014) established that most SMEs in developing countries are created out of economic necessity, principally after the owners were not employed for a long time or needed to supplement their inadequate incomes, which force them to operate without following the right procedures. Baporikar, Nambira, and Gomxos (2016) discovered that in most developing countries, the

entrepreneurial orientations of the communities made up mostly of disadvantaged people driven by the need and desperate desire to survive. The underprivileged desire to start businesses can be both a gift and a curse as survival provides enough drive for progress to a positive degree, but it also helps as a limiting factor of innovation and diversification.

Most SMEs have limited access to foreign exchange and institutional credits.

Ndikubwimana (2016) expressed that the inability of SMEs to access financing remains one of the key constraints to business growth. With industrial change and government policy shifts, increased integration of global markets and business, many enterprises are experiencing increasing pressure to remain sustainable as their markets grow, and they compete with a larger number of firms. This has hurt SMEs scale of operations.

Gebremariam (2017) concluded that most SMEs lack creditworthiness and management capacity, so they have difficulties to secure finances from financial institutions and such institutions or banks are reluctant to lend to small business to avoid perceived high credit risks.

Most SMEs are predominantly sole proprietorship, bank authorities view them with caution. O'Connor and Kelly (2017) identified access to finance, lack of marketing strategies, lack of skilled manpower, and poor customer service as barriers to the growth of SMEs. SMEs contribute to economic growth. Seo and Chae (2016) concluded that the major challenge affecting the growth of SMEs include how to improve their performance through innovation management in the long term. The death of the owner of most SME's result in discontinuity of their operations as there are usually no succession plans in place. The lack of potential continuity for most SMEs after the demise of the owner raises

the risk of financing such establishments. Seeletse and MaseTshaba (2016) highlighted leading causes of failure of SMEs which include (a) lack of basic skills and establishing an SME for wrong reasons, (b) lack of adequate market, (c) lack of or inadequate business plan, (d) lack of financial literacy and poor money/financial management, and (e) inability to secure funding. Kulemeka, Kululanga, and Morton (2015) discussed the common challenges affecting performance and growth of SMEs, which include (a) limited accessibility and availability of finance, as most SMEs are owner capitalized, (b) lack of the capacity to conduct research and development, (c) weak business structures, (d) poorly defined legal and regulatory frameworks, (e) poor marketing channels, (f) difficulties in adapting to environmental changes, (g) insufficient management resources, and (h) absence of supportive institutional structures.

The availability of infrastructural facilities in most developing countries is grossly inadequate. Legas (2015) identified poor infrastructure as a frequent factor that inhibits the growth of SMEs and can cause poor service delivery. The lack of infrastructure includes an epileptic power supply, lack of adequate water supply, the poor state of the road network, and unreliable telecommunication facilities among others. Wadesango (2015) revealed that most SMEs are characterized by their poor record keeping, as a result they lack the required information that could be used for management planning and for future decision making. Hilson, Hilson, and Maconachie (2018) discussed the ignorance of SMEs about accounting information suggesting that the lack of accountability hinders the growth of the business. Globalization and changes in the world economy have raised new challenges for the business. The success of SMEs is usually in

jeopardy as most entrepreneurs lack the required entrepreneurial skills and management expertise to survive. Lai et al. (2018) revealed that some owners of SME lack leadership skills which comprise of basic skills, motivation, and sustainable knowledge among graduates. The inadequacy of developed skill-sets in SMEs affects leadership performance in organizations. Thelepis et al. (2016) stressed that in developing economies, lack of leadership skills contribute to the failure of many SMEs. Irungu and Arasa (2017) postulated that the organizational influence of a leader, his or her knowledge, and strategic vision can make a clear direction for the business and these are important factors in deciding the policies of the company. Sitharam and Hoque (2016) concluded that the personal values and strategies of a leader can affect the growth of the business, where personal values influence the strategies used for the business. Some owners of SMEs lack good exposure to management theories and training practices, they do not keep abreast with modern day techniques.

Ahmedova (2015) revealed that training programs for entrepreneurship in developing countries have been limited, different materials were used than what was needed, and the technology used in the training programs were too expensive for owners to buy and use. Akinboade (2015) concluded that entrepreneurial training programs in developing countries are weak and have no after-training follow up services. Mapeto et al. (2015) discussed the lack of consistency in some SME's in Zimbabwe, arguing that SMEs move from one product or service to another, depending on what is in demand which results in them losing loyal customers. Baporikar et al. (2016) posited that some owners of SME's understand the importance of technology in boosting business growth,

but they cannot keep the pace with changing technology, which impacts their business development. Most developing economies have formulated good policies, but implementation and control have always been the problem, as such SMEs hardly thrive in Zimbabwe. Martati and Suminto (2018) concluded that government assistance to SME's in developing countries such as in Africa is weak and inadequate. Some owners of SMEs, policymakers, and financial institutions should realize resources that influence the growth of the business to understand their needs for better cooperation. Kachlami and Yazdanfar (2016) posited that understanding the determinants of growth can be important for policymakers, SME managers, and financial institutions.

Zvarivadza (2018) concluded that in most developing countries, policies and regulatory frameworks imposed to govern the SME sectors are not clearly spelt out to promote and enhance the performance of the businesses. This will cause businesses failing to meet the market requirement and ultimately shut down operations. Navickas, Krajinakova, and Navikaite (2015) discussed the paradigm shift of competitive advantage in the SME sector. SMEs struggle to gain competitive advantage in the market due to immense pressure deriving from globalization and competition from large companies. Wu and Huarng (2015) revealed that most owners of SME do not understand the strategies they can use to achieve competitive advantage in the market.

SME Strategies for Success

Survival is the objective of most SMEs at high risk of failure. Ifekwem and Adedamola (2016) conducted a strategic analysis on SMEs by dividing them into three broad categories which include (a) those which might cease to trade soon, (b) those

which are small but have the potential to survive, and (c) those which will endure the challenges then grow rapidly. Kloviene and Speziale (2015) concluded that the development and sustainability of most SMEs emanate from the external support or financial boosting from their external networks. Garba and Aliyu (2017) asserted that high growth SMEs are positioned in selected markets where they thrive using sophisticated innovation technology. Odoom (2016) expressed the importance for SMEs to introduce new products in the markets in which they serve. The chances of business growth are limited if owners do not create activities for new products development. Hazudin, Kader, Tarmuji, Ishak, & Ali (2015) advocated for entrepreneurs to possess the traits of a risk-taker to tackle the economic challenges inhibiting the growths and survival of SMEs.

Brem, Maier, and Wimschneider (2016) articulated the ingredients of developing an SME to gain competitive advantage, which include (a) market focus (b) financial plan, (c) management structure, and (d) established roles of the business owners. The sense of initiative and ability of the leader to turn ideas into actions can determine the growth of the business (Ogarca, 2015). Owners of SMEs need to articulate their visions and align them with organization's strategies to achieve high output, gain market shares, and increase more profit to attract the market. Sachitra (2016) articulated the importance of measuring the competitiveness of the business and concluded that owners of SMEs must put the tools in place to continuously measure the performance of their business. Owners of SMEs can gather information regarding the performances of their businesses through applying competitive advantage measurements. Ribeiro-Soriano (2017) stressed the

importance of success strategies for SMEs, suggesting that, entrepreneurs must create business ideas that resolve economic and social challenges to achieve growth for their businesses and improve the quality of life for the people. van Scheers (2016) revealed that gaining the leadership skills through education and experience is very important to developing SMEs and the economy. Ifekwem and Adedamola revealed three essential strategies for SME growth, which include focus, cost leadership, and differentiation. Ingley, Khlif, and Karoui (2016) proposed 4 critical areas that future owners of SMEs need to build competitive strengths and expand into new markets which include (a) applying technology, (b) agility, (c) accelerated innovation, and (d) attracting and retaining talent. Navickas et al. (2015) concluded that policymakers need to support entrepreneurial activities to solve the factors that inhibit the growth and survival of SMEs. Bilal, Naveed, and Anwar (2017) asserted that the importance of growth for SMEs involves the ability to survive major changes in its environment.

Baporikar et al. (2016) advocated that the appeal of SMEs as the solution to economic development problems in the developing countries can be traced back to size and the ability to grow despite formidable obstacles. The economic success of the SME sector can be derived from the point at which businesses can deliver goods and services and satisfy the market (Gancarczyk, Gancarczyk, & Bohatkiewicz, 2017). Taneja, Pryor, and Hayek (2016) emphasized the need for owners of SMEs to focus more on product innovation and brand building to enhance the performance of their businesses and gain further competitive strength. Yun, Jung, and Yang (2015) concluded that sustainable development of SMEs requires the knowledge strategy and the viable business model

which are the two-open innovation. Yazdanfar and Öhman (2015) revealed there are positive and significant associations between the business's growth ambition, the pursuance of product, and business model innovations. Marketing of goods and services is a key business strategy for the development and growth of any business venture. Al Bulushi (2015) propounded that marketing strategy is important to SMEs for targeting any customers and reach them on a low-cost budget. Cant and Wiid (2016) suggested using online marketing tools besides their traditional activities and succeed in the market. Anyamga and Nyamita (2016) discussed the adoption of product development strategy and identification of new markets for existing products. Irungu and Arasa (2017) stressed the impact of strategic leadership, the adoption of technology, the availability of resources, and the organizations' culture to have a positive relationship with the competitiveness of the organization.

García-Palma and Molina (2016) suggested that the owners of SMEs must embrace viable business methods to keep up with the market requirements and to beat their potential competitors through developing enhanced mechanisms that help them to gather market intelligence and benchmarking to meet standards and keep in constant touch with customers. Rahman, Yaacob, and Radzi (2016) postulated that in a stable economy, the entrepreneurial culture and development can be enhanced through policy reviews, introducing sensitization programs, advocacy and mobilization support for entrepreneurial education, program focus, and government subsidies. Ndikubwimana (2016) revealed that, in most developed economies, policymakers have implemented policies which aim to establish the lending institutions to support SMEs.

Barkhatov, Pletnev, and Campa (2016) revealed that high growth of SMEs can be achieved by businesses at any size, from any sector, and at any age characteristics, which are distinguished more by the strategies and actions of managers than by their profile characteristics. The major influence of the growth of SMEs lies with how the owners react to the changes in the market environment (Roncaglia, 2016). Owners of SMEs must develop their internal organizational structures in ways they can delegate responsibilities for operational tasks to become more focused on strategic level functions to grow successfully. Navickas et al. (2015) argued that owners of SMEs face persistent day-to-day operational challenges which comprise inadequate resources and low expertise in change management, which is daunting for them to focus on building strategies for growth. Ndikubwimana (2016) stressed that adherence to the corporate practices and policies only cannot achieve productive results. The owners of SMEs must recognize the need to deliver solutions for growth and pursue change management focusing on growth.

Osunde (2016) argued that the growth of SMEs is related to the size of the business, the financial structure, and the capacity of productivity. The entrepreneurial spirit drives the growth of an SME venture. Taneja et al. (2016) discovered that the entrepreneurs' core strength and the relationship with the customers are the most significant success factors that can determine the direction of the business. Lack of formal organizational structure can affect the ability of the business to grow. García-Palma and Molina (2016) concluded that without a formal management structure, an entrepreneur undertakes several roles within the company diluting the core focus of driving and developing the growth of the business. The lack of a clear management

structure may cause poor decision making and impact the growths of the business.

Gancarczyk et al. (2017) concluded that owners of SMEs with sound leadership vision, experience, and good business approach can create and developing their businesses.

Owners of SMEs need to explore the root causes of the challenges they face so that it doesn't affect their growth. Maresch, Harms, Kailer, and Wimmer-Wurm (2016) stressed the importance of managing the customer satisfaction to achieve competitive advantage in the market. Owners of SMEs must be kept informed about the demands of their customers and the changes in the market to sustain their businesses. Dey and Mason (2018) concluded that coherent SMEs policies, leadership skills, and the availability of financial resources the financial services are a welcome relief to the factors inhibiting the growth of SMEs in developing economies. Hilson et al. (2018) stressed that owners of SMEs must adopt professional procurement ethics and formalize their business operations to be reliable and credible business partners to attract investments and partnerships from larger corporations.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurial studies have developed significantly to show the greater research depth, rigor, and breadth (Zahra & Wright, 2015). A strong body of knowledge for entrepreneurship was developed around the need for entrepreneurs to possess personality features and superior skills that empower them to efficiently compete and survive in harsh economic business environment. Coulibaly, Erbao, and Metuge (2018) defined entrepreneurship as a superior creative human process, which mobilizes resources from one level of productivity to another. The value of entrepreneurship is to create and sustain

financial wealth. Entrepreneurship is a fast-growing field of study under increasing attention. The role of the entrepreneurs is crucial in generating ideas and developing new economic activities that help to produce goods and services in the market. The role of entrepreneurs in the economy started to be documented in the 1970s and people shown their appreciation for the importance of SMEs in the 1980s (Vilcov & Dimitrescu, 2015). In developing countries, a key challenge and vital cog in developing the SMEs is the formalisation of the informal sector. Urbano and Aparicio (2016) revealed that in the USA, SMEs created over 80% jobs in the market. Since then this pattern has been kept until today. Prieger, Bampoky, Blanco, and Liu (2016) revealed that in the USA, SMEs generate more than half of the country's GDP and over 50% of the country's exports. Bliemel, McCarthy, and Maine, (2016) postulated that in developing countries, entrepreneurship is the engine that moves the economies and sustains capitalism.

Papulová and Papula (2015) found that the outcomes of organizational success, emerging from productive entrepreneurship has led academic and administrative attention on concepts of entrepreneurial competencies and entrepreneurial characteristics. Entrepreneurship contributes to the quality of products and is at the center of the function of economies. Wu and Huarng (2015) found the roles of entrepreneurship in developing economies, which include contributing to enhancing economic growth, rural economic activity, poverty alleviation, and social justice. Entrepreneurs are an efficient process in alleviating poverty through enhancement of the employment opportunities in developing economies. Keskin, Gümüşsoy, and Aktekin (2015) propounded that entrepreneurship is an important economic mechanism through which inadequacies in economies are

recognized and mitigated. Entrepreneurship can increase the gross domestic product (GDP) of an economy. The competence of entrepreneurs has helped them to create the positive impact in the business performance (Jiang, Liu, Fey, & Jiang, 2018).

Entrepreneurs have different personalities and they have different challenges from the early stage entrepreneurs. Barazandeh, Parvizian, Alizadeh, and Khosravi (2015) posited that entrepreneurs need to be more competent and skillful to meet the business needs in the market. Entrepreneurs have access to technology and there are various methods to enhance their businesses. Farani, Karimi, and Motaghd (2017) suggested that entrepreneurship development can be stimulated using supporting policies and through business innovative activities which inspire change and support the people interested to venture into business. Most successful entrepreneurs have undergone various training programs to develop their skills and knowledge.

Suárez-Ortega et al. (2016) advocated for policies and training programs designed for promoting and develop entrepreneurship in developing countries. Zvarivadza (2018) examined the challenges faced by SMEs in Zimbabwe and concluded that lack of government subsidies, lack of affordable financial support from the financial institutions, and unstable macroeconomic environment hindered the development and growth of the entrepreneurs. Gümüşay and Bohné (2018) stressed there is a positive relationship between the entrepreneurial competencies and the firm performance. The nature of entrepreneurial competencies can help to improve business's performance. Mohammed, Ibrahim, and Shah (2017) discussed the competencies of entrepreneurs which include opportunity, relationship competency, organization, commitment competency, and the

conceptual competencies. Networking activities aim to aid the entrepreneur to affect the success and performance of the business.

Arafeh (2016) postulated that networking activities include sharing experiences, role models, information, support, and motivation. Development of inter-organizational network has influenced the performance of the entrepreneurs which support effective growth of small business (Panigrahi, 2016). Entrepreneurs with the technical abilities, relevant skills, and resources can achieve profitability and growth. García-Palma and Molina (2016) concluded that the self-assessed competencies of an entrepreneur have a significant relationship to the business growth and its performance. Austin and Nauta (2015) discussed terms positively associated with the entrepreneurial competencies, which include personal qualities, self-confidence, and innovativeness.

In the developing countries, entrepreneurship is key, but it has not been explored to realize its full potentials (Ivanovic-Djukic & Lepojevic, 2015). An understanding of distinctions of practices of entrepreneurs in developed and developing countries is important for developing private sector in emerging markets. Volчек, Saarenketo, and Jantunen (2015) expressed that the entrepreneurship practiced in developing countries differs from the developed countries. Most foreign investors are interested in SMEs with growth potential, with a high capacity to develop and create sustainable economic growth. Fatoki (2018) asserted that the differences between high growing SMEs in the developing and developed markets lies in the incompetence of markets in the developing countries. Entrepreneurs in developing countries try to respond to inefficiencies in the market, but they often lack adequate resources. Avina and Adikara (2016) advocated for

policymakers in developing economies to promulgate policies that support entrepreneurship activities and promote the growths of SMEs. Avina and Adikara (2016) found that entrepreneurs in the emerging markets have opportunities larger in scope than in industrialized economies. Entrepreneurs in the developing markets can pursue the portfolio approach to strategy, to proficiently manage their businesses (Williams, Martinez-Perez, & Kedir, 2016). The entrepreneurs in the emerging economies face different opportunities and challenges than in developed economies. The differences in circumstances within the developing markets and the developed markets are fixed in the economies in which they operate (Özşahin & Üçler, 2017). SMEs in most developing economies lack the stability of established markets and the consistency offered in such markets.

Therefore, the opportunities for SMEs in the developing markets are challenging. Kim (2018) revealed that SMEs in the developing economies rely on informal sources of finance to start their businesses and need a revolutionary change, but they lack requisite skills to effect the required change. Ha, Chau, and Hieu (2016) revealed that in the developed countries, most business start-ups have top management teams assembled with shared experiences but varied complementary skills. Ferdousi (2015) revealed that most sponsors of entrepreneurship ventures look for carefully selected, complete teams that include experienced management team.

Transition

In Section 1, I discussed the background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, the nature of the study which showed the reason for using a

qualitative method and descriptive multiple case study design. The section also comprised (a) the research question (b) interview questions, (c) conceptual framework, (d) assumptions, (e) limitations, and (f) delimitations of the study. The significance of the study and a review of professional and academic literature were also covered in Section 1. The review of the literature incorporated the previous literature about the following sections and subsections (a) systems theory, (b) small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including subsections small and medium enterprise in Harare and Leadership of small and medium enterprises, (c) contribution of small and medium enterprises to the economic and social development, (d) factors inhibiting growth of small and medium enterprises, and (e) small and medium enterprises success strategies, and (f) entrepreneurship.

Section 2 comprises the business problem which also includes (a) the purpose, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) the research participants, (d) research design and methodology of the study, (e) the population of study and sampling, (f) ethical research, (g) data collection instruments and technique, (h) data organization technique, (i) data analysis, and (j) reliability and validity. Section 3 covers the introduction which includes the purpose statement, research question, presentation, and findings. Section 3 also includes application to professional practice, the implications for positive social change, the recommendations for action and further study, and the reflections of the researcher.

Section 2: The Project

SMEs are the backbone of sustainable economies. In Zimbabwe, most SMEs are not growing and do not survive in business longer than 5 years (Majoni et al., 2016). Owners of SMEs must learn the strategies others use to sustain their businesses. Section 2 comprises the purpose statement of the study, my role as a researcher, the participants, and the chosen research methodology and design.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies owners of SMEs use to sustain their businesses. The targeted population consisted of 5 owners of SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe who have successfully implemented strategies to sustain their businesses for over 5 years. The findings from the study could lead to positive social change for SMEs and the communities by helping owners create growth strategies and sustainability to increase revenues for the economy and create long-term job opportunities for the communities. The findings from the study could catalyze positive social change by improving workforce capabilities, create a greater awareness of success of entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe, and increase the interest of financial institutions in lending to SMEs.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, I was the instrument for data collection (see Sutton & Austin, 2015). I took notes, decided what topics to record, and set the agenda on which questions to ask. It is through this human instrument that data are mediated, rather than a questionnaire of a machine. The role of the researcher is to select the suitable

methodology and research design of the study, choose the research participants, and gather and analyze data. The data gathering process involved semistructured interviews and the gathering of corporate financial documents from the owners of SMEs who have implemented strategies to sustain their businesses. I used semistructured interview questions (Appendix A), which were prepared to conduct one-on-one, face-to-face interviews. Reliability in a qualitative research study lies with consistency (Leung, 2015). One-on-one interviews are suitable for an exploration of complex issues. Patton (2015) postulated that face-to-face interviews are suitable to uncover people's beliefs, attitudes, experiences, understanding motives, feelings, and meanings. Semistructured interviews are in-depth interviews where the respondents must answer open-ended questions prepared in advance (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Using the face-to-face interview allows the interviewer to control the interview and keep the interviewee focused and on track to completion. Qualitative interviews have long been an essential research method. Using interviews in qualitative research is suited for researchers who need to develop theories and studies to understand complex situations or the reasons that affect behaviors (Bullock, 2016). Interviews should be audiotaped and transcribed to ensure accurate an analysis of data (Noble & Smith, 2015). I audiotaped the interviews with the research participants and transcribed data for analysis. To complement the face-to-face interviews, I reviewed the company financial documents, including annual financial results, cash flow statements, and sales reports. These documents were provided to me by the interviewees. The company documents were screened to select those related to the study at hand. I was interested in the

truthfulness, relevance, and sense of the documents. Thomas (2016) articulated the general principles of handling documents: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. I am not a leader of an SME, and I have not worked for an SME in Harare. In the United States of America, the Belmont Report (1979) published ethical principles and the guidelines for protecting human subjects and concisely described the mandates for reviews of studies that involve human research participants. I observed the fundamental elements of ethical principles and guidelines, including (a) the principles of respect of persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice. Qualitative researchers should engage in epoche to bracket judgments about the study phenomena to mitigate potential bias (Patton, 2015). I mitigated the bias and any preconceived notions I might have had and controlled any reactions to the interview responses to mitigate bias. I also mitigated personal bias during the interviews. I followed the interview protocol (Appendix A) to conduct the interviews with all the participants. The interview protocol is a critical instrument of inquiry used in qualitative research to guide the interviewer during the interview (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Participants

The participants of the study comprised five owners of SMEs, purposefully selected. Purposive sampling is nonprobability selection using characteristics of the population, research question, or the objective of the research (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2015). In a purposive sampling, the sizes are often determined using theoretical saturation, and they are most successful when data review and analysis are done with data collection (Leung, 2015). The selection criteria for participants included

the following: (a) The participants were the owners of SME businesses, (b) the SMEs were profitable for 5 years or more, (c) the owners of SME businesses were based in Harare, and (d) the participants were over the age of 18. I sought approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that I followed codes of ethical guidelines and avoided violations of human rights. The approval number for this study is 03-05-19-0640459, and it expires on March 4, 2020. In Zimbabwe, English is an official language; therefore, I did not require an interpreter. I searched successful SME businesses from an online business directory and made telephone calls to 10 potential participants; then, I sent invitations via email, explaining the intent of the study, including the research participant informed consent form for participants to read and confirm their willingness to participate.

I then selected the first 5 participants who replied to my emails and were willing to honestly share experiences to acquire the accurate data. Before data collection, it is important to form a positive research relationship with participants by communicating that their participation in the research is important. Using the informed consent is an ethical and legal obligation for researchers who conduct studies that involve the participation of the people (Nusbaum, Douglas, Damus, Paasche-Orlow, & Estrella-Luna, 2017). The informed consent process involves informing the participants regarding important aspects of research for participants to decide. The participants must voluntarily confirm their willingness to participate in the study. The strategy for establishing a working relationship with the participants is through engagement and trust. Interaction and communication with the participants are important ways of creating the relationship

or state of having trust and mutual responsiveness (Dennis, 2014). Productive communication starts with trust and understanding.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

I used the qualitative research method for this study. Research methods for academic studies include mixed, qualitative, and quantitative methods (Leppink, 2017). In qualitative methods, researchers gather and analyze nonstatistical data to interpret meanings and understand social life through the targeted populations (Yazan, 2015). In quantitative methods, researchers include measurements, statistical, or numerical analysis of data using computational techniques to test the hypothesis of variables' relationships or differences (Snelson, 2016). In the mixed method, researchers combine quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments and processes (Kealy, 2016). Because there were no statistical variables to measure, quantitative or mixed methods were not appropriate for the study.

The qualitative method was suitable for this study because it enables the exploration of complexities of behavior and processes from the viewpoint of participants regarding a contemporary phenomenon. Qualitative research makes discoveries, confirms or refutes ideas, controls events, and develops theories about the events of the lives of the people (Gentles et al., 2016). Qualitative research includes empirical, inductive, and interpretative situations within a specific context. The advantage of using a qualitative method is that researchers use small sample sizes, which can reduce the cost of conducting the research. A qualitative approach was an appropriate methodology for this

study because using this method enabled me to understand and respond to the questions in the complex nature of the study.

Research Design

I used the descriptive multiple case study research design for this qualitative study. Research designs for qualitative studies include (a) case study, (b) ethnography, (c) narrative, and (d) phenomenology (Liu, 2016). An ethnographic approach involves observing the culture of participants as part of field work (Mannay & Morgan, 2015). Because observing a culture was not the purpose of this study, ethnography was not a viable design. Narrative studies include written or spoken words or a visual representation of the people under study (Godden, 2017). Phenomenological approaches involve the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). Because there was no storytelling or focus on the understanding of participants' perceptions, narrative and phenomenology were not viable.

A case study was an appropriate research design because the design is robust, particularly when a holistic and in-depth exploration is required (see Ponelis, 2015). A case study was suitable for this study because it is useful in understanding what strategies owners of SMEs use to sustain their businesses. A case study is appropriate for gaining more understanding of little known situations, making it convenient for creating or providing a preliminary support for the hypotheses (Patton, 2015). The case study research design was appropriate for this study because it allowed me to explore and understand the complex issues through sources of behavior or ideas. In a case study, data are collected from different sources using different methods; the research may continue

for an extended period, so developments regarding the social phenomena can be studied as they happen (Gentles et al., 2015). Case study research design is rich in detail and flexible for me to analyze the strategies owners of SME in Harare, Zimbabwe use to sustain their businesses for over 5 years.

Data saturation. I conducted interviews, reviewed the company financial documents, and used member checking with all research participants until I reached data saturation. In qualitative research, data saturation occurs when there is no more new information or themes observed from completing additional interviews or cases (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Qualitative researchers use saturation as a criterion to stop data collection and analysis. The data saturation point is complex for qualitative researchers to determine if they have the information only on what they have found (Tran, Porcher, Tran, & Ravaud, 2017).

Population and Sampling

In this qualitative multiple case study, I used a purposive population size sample of five participants who were the owners of SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe that have been profitable and sustained their businesses for over 5 years. The strategies for purposive sampling are nonprobability actions to allow the categories of cases in a sample to be represented in the study (Galvin, 2015). Purposive sampling allows the researcher to identify, select, and collect several information cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). Qualitative researchers make sampling choices that enable them to deepen understanding of the phenomenon they are studying. Purposive sampling is used when the researcher tries to include participants who represent a broad range of

perspectives, or when the researcher wishes to include only participants who meet very narrow or specific criteria (Patton, 2015). The significant part of a descriptive multiple case study is to determine a suitable sample size of the study. Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2016) suggested that the adequacy of information power in the size of the sample mostly depends on (a) the research aim, (b) the specificity of the sample, (c) the use of the theory, (d) the quality of the dialogue, and (d) the strategy used for analysis. I used methodological triangulation and member checking with 5 participants to reach the data saturation.

Boddy (2016) concluded that the larger information power the sample holds, the lower number of participants is needed, and vice versa. The selection criteria used included participants who were the owners of SME businesses, the SME's have been profitable for 5 years or more, the owners of SMEs were based in Harare, and the participants were over 18. I conducted the interviews at the venues where participants selected and were convenient for them, at their business locations, in closed rooms. Participants who choose the research sites may feel more empowered and liberated so may give fuller answers during the interview (Rosenthal, 2016).

Ethical Research

I obtained approval from the IRB at Walden University before I conducted the study. I observed the fundamental elements of ethical principles and guidelines which include the principles for respect of persons, beneficence, and justice (Belmont Report, 1979). I invited the participants through emails explaining the intent of the study including the participants' informed consent form, which they needed to read and

understand. The participants' needed to reply to my emails with *I consent* back confirming their availability and willingness to participate in the study. The consent form included sample questions, information that I would conduct a review on their company financial documents for the study and clarify that their participation was voluntary. If the participants wanted to withdraw from participating in the study, they could do so at any stage of the research process. The participant's consent forms must contain enough detail for potential participants to make an informed decision about participating (Ennis & Wykes, 2016). In addition, the informed consent form included information that participants' names were confidential and were not shared, there were no incentives or compensation in participating in the study, and that I would provide all participants a 1-2-page summary of the findings of the study.

The reasons for the informed consent form include to inform the participants about any reasonably foreseeable factors that may influence their willingness to participate, to understand the purpose of the research, and the expected duration and procedures (Nusbaum et al., 2017). In a qualitative research, the contact between a researcher and a participant can be difficult (Roberts, 2015). Therefore, it is essential to formulate specific ethical guidelines in this respect. The researcher must minimize the possibility of intrusion into the confidentiality of the research participants (Dongre & Sankaran, 2016). I ensured confidentiality by storing data in a personal password protected external hard drive in a locked cupboard which I have only access to and I will delete data 5 years after completion of the study. Researchers should assure that the collected data is confidential to protect the participants' rights and to avoid causing any

harm (Petkov & Kaoullas, 2015). I ensured that the participants understood the purpose of the study and their names were not recorded, I labeled them as Participant 1 through to Participant 5.

Data Collection Instruments

In this qualitative multiple case study, I was the data collection instrument. When researchers are instruments of data collection, they can get into contact with the participants and gain more understanding about their feelings and thoughts regarding the subject under the study (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Using a case study research design in a qualitative study enables the researcher to have the opportunity and strength of using several research methods (Yazan, 2015). I used semistructured interviews to collect data from all the participants. Using the face-to-face interviews to collect data in a research enables the researcher to create a working relationship with the research participants and gain their cooperation (Merriam, 2014).

Using the interview method in a research can enable the researchers to produce high response rate and can clarify ambiguous answers and ask follow-up questions to get more understanding. Leung (2015) suggested that the main disadvantage of using interviews for data collection is that, it is expensive and time consuming when a large sample size is used. The interviewer develops and follows an interview protocol when conducting the interviews with the participants. I used the interview protocol to guide the interview (Appendix A). I utilized the company financial documents data to support and triangulate semistructured interview data. I followed the case study protocol, which include the following sections (a) an outline study, (b) field actions and procedures, and

(c) questions of the case study which I needed to remember during data collection as a researcher (Rule & John, 2015). In a qualitative research, the trustworthiness and dependability of results of the study is the bedrock of high-quality (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). To ensure trustworthiness, validity, and reliability of research, I incorporated member checking in the study. Using member checks in a qualitative research can improve the credibility, validity, and the accuracy of the study (Thomas, 2016). I sent 1-2 page of my transcribed data to the participants to check for errors, or missing information. The process included removing unwanted data and replacing it with important information.

I used Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) NVivo 12 Pro software to sort and synthesize the verified data and create codes, categories, and themes for analysis. The NVivo 12 Pro software has features which include coding of characters, texts, and multimedia enabled functions which are key in the management of qualitative data (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). Analyzed data can be in any form which include: interview transcripts, notes from the field, videos, and pictures. Data analysis helps qualitative researchers to detect, analyze, and report the themes in meaningful texts.

Data Collection Technique

The overarching research question of the study was as follows: What strategies do owners of SMEs use to sustain their businesses? The data collection techniques of this study included face-to-face semistructured interviews and reviewing of company financial documents. I followed the interview protocol (Appendix A) to conduct

semistructured interviews with the purposefully selected owners of SMEs in Harare. Face-to-face interviews are appropriate for researchers who seek to gain an understanding and uncover in-depth meanings of the study (Lewis, 2015). Qualitative researchers who use the face-to-face interview method recognize the potential significance of the context. Semistructured interviews follow participatory and emancipatory models (Snelson, 2016). For this study, I set-up convenient times and place for face-to-face interviews in advance using emails and telephone to allow the participants to get prepared. I created flexible schedules with all participants allocating them longer time slots, to cover for any unforeseeable events. I called again to confirm the date, time, and the place of the interviews before the scheduled date of the interview. On arrival at the interview location, I noted the surroundings, demographic, and participant interactions in my pocket book.

Participants need a relaxing and comfortable environment to discuss their experiences (Ranney et al., 2015). I created a comfortable environment for all the participants by starting with a small talk before the interviews and briefly explained to them about their participation in the research, the ethical considerations, and the confidentiality of the information they shared with me and asked them if they had questions before the interview started. I turned on the audio recorder and then asked the initial probing questions. The interview questions (Appendix A), were used to collect data from the participants. After the interview, I asked the participants if they had questions, and then switched off the recorder and thanked them for their participation. I collected the company financial documents immediately after the interviews. After transcribing the interview data, I emailed 1-2 page of my analysis to the participants for

member checks. I stopped reviewing and analyzing data when I reached the data saturation.

Data Organization Technique

I used audio recording application on my iPhone XS Max to record the views of the participants and software application audio recording option installed on my HP Spectre Laptop for back up. All devices were tested for functionality before the interview dates. I collected company financial documents data by reviewing and recording on a small notebook with a pen. I performed data cleansing by removing unnecessary information and remain with clean data which I then entered in the NVivo 12 Pro software for creating codes, data segmentation, sorting, and to develop categories.

In qualitative data analysis, using NVivo software helps to expedite coding and data analysis (Woods et al., 2016). I stored hard copies of data in a locked cabinet and electronic data in a password-protected external hard drive, which I kept in a locked cabinet and will be deleted 5 years after completion of the study. I ensured that no one else had access to the stored data. The IRB requirements were observed during data collection and storage.

Data Analysis

In this qualitative multiple case study, I analyzed data using the five-phased cycle of data analysis recommended by Yin (2018) which included (a) compiling data, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting the information, and (e) concluding. I used the CAQDAS- NVivo 12 Pro software to sort, integrate, and synthesize the data collected. The advantages of using NVivo 12 Pro software include the high compatibility

of the software to research designs and it is easy to use (Wassef, Tuomi, Finn, & Sullivan-Bolyai, 2015). The software applies to different data analysis methods and qualitative research designs which include the grounded theory, the discourse analysis, an ethnography, phenomenology, and the mixed methods (Zamawe, 2015). The data analysis includes interview transcriptions, field notes, and data from company documents. Methodological triangulation is appropriate in augmenting the credibility of the semistructured interviews and documentation data for the study. Patton (2015) postulated that the fundamental tenet of methodological triangulation is the application of several methods of data sources in the qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. Renz, Carrington, and Badger (2018) articulated the 4 categories of triangulation, which include (a) methodological triangulation, (b), investigator triangulation, (c) data triangulation, and (d) theoretical triangulation.

I transcribed the data, giving each manuscript labels such as Participant 1 up to Participant 5 and documentation data labels 1 to 5 and then send my interpretations to the participants for member checking procedure. After member checking, I then entered the data in the NVivo 12 Pro software to create codes and identify frequent themes from data. The NVivo 12 Pro software is a vital qualitative data analysis instrument that saves time during the data analysis process (Zamawe, 2015). The interpretation and data analysis process begun with my review of the transcribed interviews recorded and documents related to the research question. I then interpreted the data and developed the research conclusions. The general systems theory was the conceptual framework chosen to ground

the study. Teece (2018) asserted that the general systems theory is an open complex of elements interacting with their environments.

Reliability and Validity

Petkov and Kaoullas (2015) explained that issues of validity and reliability of research instruments are significant to the findings of scientific research. The issues of validity and reliability in research serve as the guarantees of results of participants' performances. Yin (2018) posited that meticulous attention to issues of validity and reliability in the study can distinguish good research from the poorly prepared research. Yazan (2015) asserted that in a qualitative research, reliability is concerned with the repeatability, the stability, and the consistency of the accounts of the participants and the ability of the researcher to accurately collect and record data.

Patton postulated that validity refers to how much the research reflects the specific concepts it aims to investigate. Validity shows the capability of qualitative research method to produce the same outcomes when repeatedly tested (Mohamad, Sulaiman, Sern, & Salleh, 2015). In a qualitative research method, there are no statistical computations or validity calculations, the researcher uses different methods applicable to the human subject to understand the phenomena (Petkov & Kaoullas, 2015). Researchers must address issues of validity and reliability in their studies because the accuracy, dependability, and credibility of the research information depend on it.

Reliability

Leung (2015) posited that qualitative researchers need to exercise sound judgement when assessing reliability on applying research methods and the integrity of their conclusions of studies. I followed the interview protocol (Appendix A) to conduct semistructured face-to-face interviews with all participants and I reviewed the company financial data from the participants. After the interviews, the participants could check the transcribed data to verify the accuracy of data and remove unnecessary chunks of data replacing with more relevant data until I reached saturation. Qualitative researchers combine methodological strategies and research designs to assess the trustworthiness of the findings of their studies. The dependability of the results of my study was augmented using member checking and NVivo 12 Pro data analysis software. Besides recording interviews, I took notes to clarify the points.

Validity

Leung explained that validity in a qualitative research means *the appropriateness* of the tools, processes, and the data used in the study. Validity is concerned with the accuracy and truthfulness of scientific findings. A valid qualitative research should provide accurate findings appropriate to be transferred to the population of interest (Mohamad et al., 2015). The findings must be believable, consistent, applicable, and credible to be useful to readers and other researchers. To complement the semistructured face-to-face interview data, I collected and reviewed company financial documents. The credibility of findings in a qualitative research need the participants and the readers to be convinced about the authenticity of the study (Noble & Smith, 2015). The

methodological triangulation of semistructured face-to-face interview data, company financial documents, and participant member checking augmented the credibility of the results of the study. Member checking is a qualitative research technique for exploring the credibility of research outcomes (Thomas, 2016). I sent 1-2 page of my interpretations to the participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences. Confirmability refers to where the research participants involved in the research confirm the outcome of the study (Noble & Smith, 2015). The confirmability of this study included (a) I provided the participants with enough time for the interviews, (b) I determined saturation when there was no more new relevant information, (c) I established the frequencies of words and themes within NVivo 12 Pro for accurate analysis, and (d) I sent 1-2 page of my interpretation to the participants for member check. Transferability is a criterion where the applicability of the findings in one context to the other contexts or settings are transferred (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The responsibility of transferability remains that of the person assigned the task of generalizing. I meticulously adhered to the data collection and analysis techniques for the research design, followed the interview protocol guide (Appendix A) in conducting interviews with all the participants.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I presented the purpose statement of the research study, the role of the researcher, included the selected participants, the research methodology and design. I then covered the (a) population and sampling method, (b) ethical research, (c) data collection instruments, technique and organization, and (d) data analysis techniques.

Section 2 includes the discussion on the methods and techniques for safeguarding the reliability and validity of the study.

Section 3 begins with an introduction including the purpose statement, the research question, and the presentation of findings. Section 3 further includes (a) application to professional practice, (b) implications for social change, (c) recommendations for action, (d) recommendations for further research, (e) researcher reflections, and (f) the conclusion of the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

I begin this section by introducing the study, including the purpose of the study, the research question, and a summary of the findings. Section 3 includes (a) the presentation of findings, (b) the application to professional practice, (c) the implications for social change, (d) the recommendations for action, (e) the recommendations for further research, (f) reflections, and (g) the research conclusion.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies owners of SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe use to survive in business. SMEs are a vehicle through which the local knowledge is promoted, and local raw materials are used that would otherwise be neglected (Peprah et al., 2016). SMEs have the potential to contribute substantially to the economy and can provide a strong foundation for the growth of new industries and strengthen existing businesses to promote wealth creation and productivity in the economy. However, in Zimbabwe, SMEs comprise almost 94% of the business population but contribute only 50% to the economy (Majoni et al., 2016).

The data collection of the study included face-to-face interviews with five owners of SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe who have implemented strategies to sustain their business for over 5 years. Using face-to-face interviews allows the interviewer to control the interview and keep the interviewee focused and on track to completion (Patton, 2015). I included the review of company financial documents provided by the participants as another method for collecting data for methodological triangulation. The actual names of research participants or company names were not included in the data collection. Once I

reached the data saturation point, I used NVivo 12 Pro software to categorize and identify common themes. Four themes emerged from data analysis: (a) passion and dedication of the leader, (b) offering quality products and services in the market, (c) customer satisfaction, and (d) employing staff with the right skills.

Presentation of the Findings

I used semistructured interviews and company financial documents, including income statements, cash flow, and profit and loss statements from participants for methodological triangulation. I used an audio recording application on my iPhone XS Max to record the views of the participants and a software application audio recording option installed on my HP Spectre Laptop for back up. All devices were tested for functionality before the interview dates. I collected company financial documents data by reviewing and recording on a small notebook with a pen. I transcribed the data, giving each manuscript labels such as Participant 1 up to Participant 5 and documentation data labels 1 to 5, and I sent my interpretations of data to the individual participants for the member-checking procedure.

The data were collected to address the following overarching research question: What strategies do owners of SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe use to sustain their businesses? Most of the data collected came from semistructured interviews with participants. I reached the data saturation point when the interviews and the review of company financial documents no longer produced new information. Fusch and Ness (2015) posited that the data saturation point is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study. After member-checking, I entered the data in NVivo 12 Pro software for Windows

to create codes, data segmentation, sorting, categories, and frequent themes from data. By using NVivo 12 Pro, the following four themes emerged: (a) passion and dedication, (b) quality of products and services, (c) customer satisfaction, and (d) employing staff with the right skills. The first theme that emerged involved the importance of passion and dedication for owners of SMEs to increase production, gain profitability, and succeed in business. The second theme included the importance of offering quality products and reliable services to the customers for the business to be distinguished in the market and to gain competitive advantage. The third theme included the importance of owners of SMEs to better position their products and services in the market to meet and surpass the customers' expectations. The fourth theme included the importance of hiring staff with the right skills for the business. The themes aligned to the conceptual framework and the literature on effective SME business practices.

Theme Identification, Analysis, and Findings

The research participants were the owners of SMEs who have succeeded in implementing effective strategies to sustain their businesses for over 5 years. The participants indicated they faced a myriad of challenges in starting and operating their businesses. Some challenges included inadequate capital, limited market access, poor infrastructure, inadequate knowledge and skills, and rapid changes in technology. Participant 2 and Participant 4 mentioned government bureaucracy, corruption, and regulatory environments to have presented bottlenecks in their initial stages of starting their businesses. Many academics have stressed the importance of SMEs in developing economies (Ndiaye, Abdul Razak, Nagayev, & Ng, 2018; Tahir, Razak, & Rentah, 2018).

In the literature review, I discussed the key success factors and the aspects that inhibit the growth of SMEs, and I identified a deficiency in knowledge about the business practices that require owners of SMEs to develop and sustain their businesses in Zimbabwe.

Participants and Their Businesses

The participants for this study were owners of SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe involved in different business sectors, including (a) a travel and tourism owner, (b) a cake bakery owner, (c) an apparel business owner, (d) a daycare center owner, and (e) a retail business owner. The study addressed the high failure rate of SMEs in Zimbabwe. The overarching research question aimed to address the strategies owners of SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe use to sustain their businesses. Owners of SMEs align with the general systems theory; they develop and implement strategies to provide goods and services to support the communities at a profit (Teece, 2018). All the five participants were in Harare, Zimbabwe.

I asked each individual participant six semistructured open-ended interview questions, following the interview protocol (Appendix A). All five participants responded to the six interview questions. I thanked each individual participant for participating in my research at the end of the interviews and collected the company financial documents. I transcribed the data and conducted member-checking. Using member checks in qualitative research can improve the credibility, validity, and the accuracy of the study (Thomas, 2016). Participant 1, a travel and tourism owner, worked in the industry for 10 years before starting her own small business. The best way to ensure success of a small business is to obtain industry experience before committing to a new venture

(Rajapathirana & Hui, 2018). Participant 1 successfully owned the business for 8 years. Participant 2, the cake bakery owner, previously operated at home before moving in the city center, and she has been successfully operating for 10 years. Participant 3, the apparel business owner, worked in the industry for 8 years before leaving her job to start her own venture and has been successfully operating for 6 years. Participant 4, the daycare center owner, worked in the government as an educator for 20 years before starting her own daycare after her retirement and has been successfully running a daycare for 15 years. The participating owners of SMEs shared their experiences that aligned with the literature on effective business practices. Baporikar (2017) posited that starting a company can be one of the most rewarding, exhilarating, and interesting opportunities for leaders with experience in the field.

Participant 5, the retail business owner, started buying fresh produce such as fruits and vegetables from the farmers and supplied to the supermarkets until he raised enough capital to open his first shop and then expanded by opening more shops in other sites. Starting a business requires preparation, knowledge of the industry, research, and a solid plan of action (Taneja et al., 2016). Participant 5 has been successful for 16 years. The findings of the study were in line with the literature and the conceptual framework of general systems theory.

Participants' Education and Professional Background

Answers to the first interview question revealed that all five participants have completed their undergraduate degrees. The effects of the education and professional background indicated that training and human resource development is necessary for a

formidable workforce. Mamabolo, Kerrin, and Kele (2017) propounded that training and education have continued to positively affect the productivity and profitability of small businesses in Sub-Saharan Africa. One out of the five participants had completed her Master's degree. One participant was still pursuing her Master's degree, and three other participants had Bachelor's degrees. Heikkilä, Bouwman, and Heikkilä (2018) revealed that knowledge acquired through formal education enriches the entrepreneur's human capital and has repercussions on the maintenance and the major growth of the venture. This aligned with the data collected for this study. As the business grows, business operations become more complex, and better planning and knowledge are necessary.

Effective SME Sustainability Strategies

All participating owners of SMEs revealed that they faced challenges in starting and operating their businesses and gained profitability and sustained their businesses for over 5 years, attributing much of the success to their passion and dedication to their work. All participants mentioned the hiring staff with the right skills as a strategy to sustain the business (see Table 1). All participants mentioned customer satisfaction as the key to gain profitability and sustainability in business. Except Participant 2, other participants all agreed that they used rigorous recruitment and selection processes that guarantee the perfect match between their business needs and the candidate profiles to hire staff with the right skills. This is supported by the existing body of knowledge that indicates that owners of SMEs with formal hiring processes in place attract and retain quality employees and increase the chances of success for their businesses (McRobert, Hill, Smale, Hay, & Van der Windt, 2018). All the participants agreed that offering

quality products and reliable services in the market was the key to their business success. Participant 1 shared that offering quality products and reliable services in the market increases customer satisfaction. Eklof, Podkorytova, and Malova (2018) asserted that satisfied customers demonstrate loyal behavior, which leads to an increase in financial outcomes for the firm. Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 5 mentioned right pricing as a strategy they used to attract customers. Except for Participant 4, all the other participants used social media marketing to expose their businesses, products, and services to new eyes and to maintain their presence in the market. Schwemmer and Ziewiecki (2018) propounded that using social media can help owners of SMEs to find customers already talking about their business information they can leverage to reach even more people. Except for Participant 1 and Participant 4, other the participants mentioned creativity as one of the key success factors to sustain the business for over 5 years.

Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 5 mentioned the ability of the owners to understand the product market fit as one of the most important objectives for owners of SMEs to sustain their businesses. Participant 3 and Participant 5 mentioned planning as a critical element for surviving in business. Participant 5 revealed that he used networking to set his business beside competitors to survive in business. Puig, Gonzalez-Loureiro, and Ghauri (2018) posited that leaders must try to be different and accelerative from their competitors to achieve their goals and become market leaders. Except for Participant 4, other participants revealed that they conduct market research and development using customer surveys to ensure there is a market for what they offer and

prepare new suitable strategies to meet the market needs. All participants showed that they made implementation plans for easy execution of their business strategies. Heikkilä et al. (2018) concluded that leaders and top management of organizations must pay more attention to strategy implementation due to the higher failure rates that occur at this stage. This aligned with the findings of this study. Participant 5 indicated that he regularly conducts product promotions as one of the best practices to sustain his business. Participant 2, Participant 3, and Participant 5 mentioned corporate identity as an important element for best practices that influence their business strategies to sustain their businesses (see Table 1). The owners of SMEs showed that corporate identity should not just emerge as a leading concern during situations of major organizational change. Balmer (2017) concluded that corporate identity management and maintenance should always be on a leadership agenda and radar. The data indicated that changes in the business environment can influence the growth of SMEs negatively or positively. The existing body of knowledge indicates that the internal and external environments of a business are important for the growth and sustainability of SMEs (Sitharam & Hoque, 2016).

Table 1

Effective SME Sustainability Strategies

| Code | Number of participants | % |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|-----|
| Employing staff with the right skills | 5 | 100 |
| Customer satisfaction | 5 | 100 |
| Formal recruitment process | 4 | 80 |
| Quality products and services | 5 | 100 |
| Right pricing | 3 | 60 |
| Use of social media | 4 | 80 |
| Creativity | 3 | 60 |
| Market fit | 3 | 60 |
| Planning | 2 | 40 |
| Networking | 1 | 20 |
| Market research and development | 4 | 80 |
| Product promotions | 1 | 20 |
| Corporate identity | 3 | 60 |

Theme 1: Passion and Dedication

The first theme that emerged revealed the importance of passion and dedication for owners of SMEs to succeed in business. All five participants mentioned passion and dedication as a success factor in developing and surviving in business. The participating owners of SMEs indicated that they were highly motivated individuals, they faced many challenges which inhibited the growth and development of their businesses and continued to strive and succeeded. The theme, *passion and dedication* aligned with the literature on effective business strategies. Fisher, Merlot, and Johnson (2018) posited that passion and dedication are the biggest drivers for an entrepreneur's motivation. Passion and dedication are the drivers that keep the owners of SMEs pushing forward

with perseverance every day. Participant 4 revealed that the belief of the owners of SMEs in their businesses allows them to see it through to the end. Bhansing, Hitters, and Wijngaarden (2018) concluded that without passion and dedication, it becomes almost impossible for small business owners to overcome the odds of victory when failure is almost guaranteed. Passion evokes belief, which is one of the strongest emotions an entrepreneur can experience (Participant 5). The findings of this study aligned with the literature. Dedication is the engine to creative ideas that help the owners of SMEs to keep shifting gears from objectives and creativity to get them to their destinations (Warnick, Murnieks, McMullen, & Brooks, 2018). Owners of SMEs must continue to have a positive vibe throughout the challenging decisions they pursue in business (Participant 5). Passionate leaders become absorbed in their businesses, which shows a great deal of dedication. Hachana, Berraies, and Ftiti (2018) posited that passion promotes desire, and the owners of SMEs have the desire to succeed in their endeavors by putting their hearts and souls into their ideas. A passionate owner of SME is driven, takes initiative, will work long hours, and is persistent when faced with obstacles.

Theme 2: Quality Products and Services

The second theme included the importance for owners of SMEs to offer quality products and reliable services in the market. All five participants mentioned *quality products and services* as critical for their businesses to be distinguished in the market and gain competitive advantage. The theme *quality products and services* aligned with the existing body of knowledge. Providing quality products and reliable services in the market can help increase the reputation of the business for consistently delivering the

customer experience *above and beyond* (Sithole, Sithole, & Chirimuta, 2018). “I carefully manage the quality of the products that I offer in the market, those who fail to meet customers' expectation, may risk driving customers away to look for alternatives” (Participant 1). Pierre and Fernandez (2018) propounded that the quality of products is critical to satisfying the customers and retaining their loyalty, so they continue to buy. All the participating owners of SMEs showed a strong understanding of the reasons to make quality a top priority of their business strategies. The trust, credibility, and loyalty that comes from happy customers build repeat sales and ignite positive recommendations about a product that helps a business to reach new customers (Fisher et al., 2018). The poor quality of products in the market can increase the costs of operating a business (Participant 5). Mukherjee (2018) posited that quality of the products can help small business owners to contribute to long-term revenue and profitability.

Participant 3 mentioned that she operates her business in a crowded market and the quality of her product is the key differentiator and it reflects on her business' reputation. Cherkos, Zegeye, Tilahun, and Avvari (2017) posited that the growing importance of digital marketing tools such as social media means that customers and prospects can easily share both favorable opinions and criticism of the product quality on social media forums. Participant 3 explained that a strong reputation for the quality of the products can be an important differentiator in competitive markets. Rajapathirana, and Hui (2018) propounded that poor quality of products in the market can lead to negative publicity and damage the reputation of the business. This aligned with the findings of the study. Owners of SMEs need to consistently deliver their promises to the customers.

Theme 3: Customer Satisfaction

The third emergent theme included the importance for owners of SMEs to better position their products in the market. All five participants mentioned *customer satisfaction* as a critical strategy to gain profitability and sustainability in business. Participant 1 explained that she uses customer satisfaction to measure how her business' products and services meet or surpass the customers' expectations to survive in the market. The theme customer satisfaction aligned with the existing body of knowledge. The owners of SMEs must exhibit varying strategies to satisfy their customers, remain viable, and survive in the market (Sleep, Lam, & Hulland, 2018). All the participating owners of SMEs showed their knowledge of the importance of implementing creative and decisive strategies to catch up with the prevailing winning marketing strategic practices suitable for their economic environment.

Khajeh Nobar and Rostamzadeh (2018) posited that obtaining the attention of prospective customers, gaining their interest, and converting them can cost more than retaining existing customers. This aligned with the findings of this study. Participant 3 explained that she focuses and spends her business resources on keeping existing customers satisfied with quality goods and services. Bahadur, Aziz, and Zulfiqar (2018) posited that customers choose the company that made them satisfied even if it offers higher prices over a cheap but low-quality product or service option. Participant 5 revealed that customer satisfaction is important because it provides him with the metrics he uses to manage and improve his business strategies. Obi et al. (2018) propounded that in a competitive marketplace where businesses compete for customers, customer

satisfaction becomes a key differentiator. The performance of the participating owners of SMEs showed that they used customer satisfaction as a key element of their business strategies. Tseng (2019) concluded that customer satisfaction is the best indicator of how likely a customer will make a purchase.

Theme 4: Employing Staff With the Right Skills

The fourth theme included the importance of hiring staff with the right skills for their businesses. All participants mentioned *hiring staff with the right skills* as a key business survival strategy. The theme *hiring staff with the right skills* aligned with the existing body of knowledge. Narteh (2018) propounded that having the right quality of employees is central to the success of a business. The participating owners of SMEs showed their knowledge of the importance of hiring employees with the right skills. Participant 1 explained that the most important step to finding the right employees is to know what she wants and craft accurate job descriptions. Burcharth, Knudsen, and Søndergaard, (2017) posited that having the right staff can mean the difference between long-term, sustainable growth, and failure.

Larger businesses may cope with staffing hiccups, but these difficulties can have a greater impact on SMEs with fewer resources. Participant 2 explained that he aims at delivering quality work for his business needs and having employees committed to the same goals is the key. Happy clients and a lasting reputation depend on hiring the right employees (Gong & Yi, 2018). This aligned with the findings of this study. Participant 3 revealed that employees can influence the culture of the business, the right employees work hard, they are loyal, and can inspire others to do the same. Wilkinson, Gollan,

Kalfa, and Xu (2018) posited that employees are the pillars of the business and play a critical role in determining its long-term growth potential. The right experience, the right work ethics, and the right social skills have a significant impact on business growth (Narteh, 2018). The quality of employees does more than simply ensuring a company has enough bodies to handle the work. It can also directly affect a company's culture and a company's financial worth.

Findings Tied to Conceptual Framework

Von Bertalanffy introduced the systems theory in the 1930s to show the interrelationships and connections between separate disciplines (Drack & Pouvreau, 2015). General system theory was developed to suit different environments. Von Bertalanffy (1968) suggested that the system is an open complex of elements interacting within their environments. Systems theorists seek to gain a holistic view of an area of human activity. The environment in which a phenomenon is observed is part of this holistic approach and the subsystems which interact within the larger system (Teece, 2018).

I used the general systems theory to provide the lens for understanding the findings of the study and assists in the growth and survival of SMEs. An organization is a system which has integrated parts that must be coordinated for efficiency and effectiveness (Chikere & Nwoka, (2015). Owners of SMEs operate in a volatile business environment, they face challenges in their day-to-day operations. I used this process to coordinate business retention, expand the outreach thus creating real economic growth, and applied the systems approach to yield significant insights into the operations of

owners of SMEs. The general systems theory is valid to use when making business decisions in SMEs that pursue sustainability and growth goals (Rousseau, 2015). I used an approach that utilized themes that rely on entrepreneurial thinking and behavior. The general systems theory is related to the study as it provided the potential means for understanding the processes for implementing strategies for developing and sustaining SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe. Porvazník and Ljudvigová (2016) revealed that in systems theory, leaders pursue multiple goals, link with all departments within the business to operate as a singular unit and get feedback from both outside and inside the organization. The conceptual framework enabled articulation of the concept from the literature in a way it bore relevance to the applied business topic. Systems thinking can guide owners of SMEs in implementing business strategies to achieve their goals that may help to gain profitability (Chikere & Nwoka, 2015). I used the general systems theory to help provide answers to the challenges faced by the owners of SME.

Findings Tied to the Existing Literature on Effective Business Practice

There are challenges and success relating to the owners of SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe. The study highlighted some factors that inhibit the growth and development of SMEs which include poor government policies, inadequate access to finance, and lack of government support (Kulemeka et al., 2015). The government needs to put in place support mechanisms and policies aimed at promoting the growths and development of SMEs. Small businesses have sustained many economies worldwide. In Zimbabwe, the small businesses have shown resilience and held forth in sustaining livelihoods and the economy when the bigger corporates were in distress and others closed businesses due to

economic challenges (Wadesango, 2015). The government needs to be involved and provide small business development and training, technology transfer, provision of workspace, market development and trade promotion, the creation of a conducive legal framework, and access to finance. The performance of participating owners of SMEs showed that they strongly understood their markets. This aligned with the literature on effective business practices. Sitharam and Hoque (2016) asserted that entrepreneurs often ignore the need for market research but knowing that their products are commercially viable is the difference between a successful business and a hobby. To ensure quality of the findings, I compared the results of the study with the literature review, emphasized the themes drawn from the responses to my overarching research question, and used the literature to review the research process to detail the information that the participants gave as shown in (Youtie, Bozeman, Jabbehdari, & Kao, 2017). The report aligned with the ideas to the problem and helped to identify the methodology used in the study, as suggested by Woods et al. (2016).

Applications to Professional Practice

An enriched understanding of the strategies owners of SMEs use to remain in business might assist businesses to compete more effectively. Owners of SME must strongly understand the strategies for achieving profitability and remain in business for over 5 years (Durendez et al., 2016). Owners of SMEs who are knowledgeable could be able to manage the intricacies of starting a business, leading to maximizing workforce capabilities to increase revenues to support the communities, local state, and the governments. Owners of SMEs who consider successful methods other owners use to

remain in business longer than 5 years may gain valuable insight from the findings of this study. Creating a sustainable competitive advantage by identifying strategies for remaining in business for over 5 years may be the most important goal of any organization and may be the most important single attribute on which a business can place its focus (Chen & Zhang, 2015). The long-term success of an SME can be determined by the ability of the owner or the leader to maintain competitive advantage, even in the most unpredictable economic times (Pletnev & Barkhatov, 2016). The findings from my study may help owners of similar SMEs to understand the potential opportunities for identifying and improving key business processes for achieving profitability and sustainability in business for over 5 years.

Implications for Social Change

In Zimbabwe SMEs create more employment opportunities and generate more revenue for the economy. The ability to effect positive social change starts with the owners of SMEs crafting, modelling, harmonizing, and directing sustainability activities and efforts for emerging opportunities (Szczepańska-Woszczyna & Kurowska-Pysz, 2016). The findings of the study might lead to positive social change for SMEs and the communities by helping owners of SMEs to create growth strategies and sustain their businesses longer than 5 years, increase revenues for the country, and career opportunities for the communities. An increase in the number of people working in a country can increase the gross domestic product (GDP) and raise more opportunities for economic expansion (Karadag, 2016). The findings of the study might catalyze positive

social change by improving workforce capabilities and increasing revenues to support the communities, local state, and governments.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive multiple case study was to explore the strategies owners of SMEs in Zimbabwe use to sustain their businesses for over 5 years. SMEs are important for the country's social and economic development through employment creation and revenue generation (Lobacz & Glodek, 2015). The owners of SMEs and potential business start-up owners must pay attention to the results because they might gain the knowledge for achieving profitability and sustain competitive advantage for their businesses from the findings of the study. Owners of SMEs who are knowledgeable could be able to manage the intricacies of starting a business, leading to maximizing workforce capabilities to increase revenues to support the communities, local state, and the governments.

In addition, I recommend that the SMEDCO in Harare and the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises in Zimbabwe must pay attention to the results and share the results with owners of SMEs and potential business start-up owners. I will provide all the research participants with 1-2 pages of my analysis of the results and advise them that my final doctoral research study will be published if they are interested to read. My recommendations could relate to owners of SMEs and potential business start-up owners in other developing countries interested in strategies other owners of SMEs use to sustain their businesses for over 5 years.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this qualitative multiple case study, the major limitation was that the literature focused on strategies owners of SMEs use to remain in business longer than 5 years were relatively scarce and the number of newly published studies examining strategies of SMEs in Zimbabwe has diminished within the last 5 years. Recommendations for future research studies include exploration of strategies of SMEs to achieve profitability in other geographical locations. The data saturation point was reached after the interviews with 5 participants. The second limitation was that the willingness of the research participants to be candid in their responses in this research and the third limitation was including only owners of SMEs that have implemented strategies to sustain their businesses longer than 5 years. I further suggest studies regarding strategies of SMEs which involve other research methodologies, designs, and including high samples not limited to those who have implemented strategies.

Reflections

My experience in the DBA doctoral study process was both a challenging and interesting learning experience. Earning a doctorate degree was always a personal challenge and a way to prove something to myself. I have acquired a deeper understanding of the strategies owners of SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe use to sustain their businesses for over 5 years. I have done everything a researcher could do to minimize bias which included following the interview protocol (Appendix A), mitigating bias and any preconceived notion which I might have before conducting the interviews, I followed the Walden IRB guidelines, and facilitated the state of epoche during semistructured

interviews. I conducted semistructured interviews with 5 research participants. I am not a leader of an SME and I have not worked for an SME in Harare. During data collection, all the participants were cooperative and showed their willingness to provide satisfactory answers to the questions. I have never realized the effort and energy the owners of SMEs put in their businesses daily. Their strong desire, commitment, and enthusiasm were motivating to learn. I have developed a keen interest to establish my own small business that will focus on providing consultancy services to SMEs and large corporations to enhance their supply chain performance through strategic planning, process reengineering, and technology implementation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies owners of SMEs use to sustain their businesses. I collected data using semistructured interviews with five owners of SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe and reviewed their company financial documents for methodological triangulation. I reached data saturation when there were no new themes or information coming from the participants. Four main themes were revealed from the coding and analysis of data, which I then linked to the general system theory, the literature and the existing body of knowledge. The findings of the study revealed that (a) passion and dedication of the owners of SMEs, (b) offering quality products and reliable services in the market, (c) customer satisfaction, and (d) employing staff with the right skills may be critical for profitability, sustainable development, and survival of SMEs in Harare, Zimbabwe.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Participant Pseudonym: _____

Interview Date: _____ Total Time _____

| What to do | What to say |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce self to participant • Go over the contents of the consent form answer questions, and or concerns of participant. | <p>A. Good day Mr/ Mrs XXX. My name is Donnemore Majukwa, a doctoral student in the department of Business and Administration of Walden University conducting a research on Sustainability Strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises in Zimbabwe.</p> <p>B. Thank you for your time to honor the invitation to participate in this study.</p> <p>C. I believe you have read and understood the content of the agreement in the informed consent form. If you have questions or concerns, I will be glad to attend to them before the start of the interview.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn on recording devices • Follow procedures to introduce participants with pseudonym / coded identification; note the date and time • Begin interview with question #1; follow through to final question • Follow up with additional questions • End the interview sequence, discuss member checking with participant • Thank the participant for their part in the study. Reiterate contact number for follow up questions or concerns from participants • End of the interview protocol. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How has your educational and professional background prepared you to operate an SME? 2. What strategies do you use to sustain your business? 3. What are the steps to consider when applying new strategies to gain profitability? 4. What business practices have influenced your strategies to sustain your business? 5. How, if at all, have the changes in the SME sector influenced your strategies to sustain your business? 6. What else do you want to share about the strategies to sustain the business? |

| | |
|---|---|
| Wrap up interview thanking participant for sharing his experience and time. | Thanks for sparing time to share your experiences with me. I will transcribe the interview data and return to you within the next 2 days for a review of the process to ensure the correctness of the interview data. |
| Schedule follow-up member checking interview | I would appreciate we agree on time to meet and review the recordings and interpretation of interviews for approximately 45 minutes or less. |
