



## **ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP AND COMPETITIVENESS OF SMALL BUSINESS IN NORTH CENTRAL, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the effect of entrepreneurial leadership on the competitiveness of small businesses in Jalingo, Taraba State, Nigeria. Specifically, it focuses on assessing the effect of entrepreneurial leadership attributes such as innovation, adaptability, and resource allocation on the competitiveness of small businesses. The study adopted a quantitative research design, conducting a cross-sectional survey to gather data from small business owners and managers operating in Jalingo, Taraba State, Nigeria. The study's population consists of 1,779 registered small businesses, and the sample size of 327 small businesses is determined using the Taro Yamane formula. Small businesses from various sectors, including manufacturing, accommodation and food services, agriculture, wholesale/retail trade, construction, and education, are included. Data is collected through questionnaires, utilizing a stratified random sampling technique. The instruments' reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, and face validity is ensured through expert reviews. Multiple regression analysis, facilitated by SPSSv23, was employed to analyse the data. The findings reveal a moderate association between entrepreneurial leadership and competitiveness. The results show that innovation, adaptability, and resource allocation significantly affect small business competitiveness. Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that small business owners in Jalingo, Taraba State, Nigeria, focus on fostering entrepreneurial leadership attributes, particularly innovation, adaptability, and resource allocation, to enhance their competitiveness.*

**Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Leadership, Business, Competitiveness, Small Scale**



## INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing and highly competitive business environment, the role of entrepreneurial leadership in enhancing an organization's competitiveness has garnered significant attention from both scholars and practitioners. Small businesses are the backbone of the Nigerian economy, contributing significantly to economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction. The country boost of a diverse range of small businesses which operates across the country, however, understanding the dynamics of their operations especially as it relates to leadership has been of scholarly interest, not just in Nigeria but globally. Entrepreneurial leadership represents a dynamic and multifaceted approach to leadership that combines the visionary and risk-taking qualities of entrepreneurs with the strategic and operational skills of effective leaders (Sari & Ahmad, 2022). This unique leadership style is essential for organizations striving to remain competitive and thrive in the face of constant change.

Entrepreneurial leadership encompasses a set of leadership qualities and behaviours that are often associated with entrepreneurs (Al-Mutairi, 2019). It goes beyond traditional leadership by emphasizing a proactive, innovative, and risk-tolerant approach to decision-making. Entrepreneurial leaders are visionaries who inspire and empower their teams to think creatively, take calculated risks, and seize new opportunities (Breyer-Mayländer & Zerres, 2023). They are adaptable, resourceful, and focused on achieving long-term organizational goals. Key dimensions of entrepreneurial leadership include innovation, adaptability, strategic thinking, resource allocation, and risk management (Sari & Ahmad, 2022).

Competitiveness refers to an organization's ability to excel in the marketplace by consistently delivering superior products or services, achieving operational efficiency, and adapting to changes and challenges (Greco & Matta, 2021). It is a multifaceted concept that encompasses factors such as market positioning, cost-effectiveness, product quality, customer satisfaction, and innovation. Competitiveness is crucial for the long-term sustainability and growth of businesses in a globalized world characterized by evolving customer preferences, emerging technologies, and increased competition (Nwewi et al., 2017).

The study on entrepreneurial leadership and competitiveness arises from a pressing need to understand how leadership practices influence an organization's competitive advantage (Sari & Ahmad, 2022). In today's hyper-competitive business environment, traditional leadership models often fall short in providing the strategic agility and innovation required for sustainable success. Entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial leaders have demonstrated the capacity to drive innovation, foster adaptability, and propel organizations to the forefront of their industries.

However, while the significance of entrepreneurial leadership in enhancing competitiveness is widely acknowledged, there remains a need for in-depth research to explore the nuances and intricacies of this relationship. Existing studies have provided valuable insights, but there are gaps in the literature that warrant further investigation. These gaps may include a more detailed analysis



of the specific leadership behaviours and practices that contribute to competitiveness, the impact of cultural and contextual factors on entrepreneurial leadership, and the measurement and evaluation of competitiveness within various industries and sectors.

By addressing these gaps, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how entrepreneurial leadership can be harnessed to improve organizational competitiveness. Such knowledge will be invaluable for organizations seeking to develop leadership capabilities that drive innovation, enhance adaptability, and ultimately secure a competitive edge in a dynamic business environment. The broad objective of this study is to examine the influence of entrepreneurial leadership on competitiveness of small businesses, while the specific objectives are to: assess the effect of innovation on the competitiveness of small businesses; examine how adaptability affects the competitiveness of small businesses; and investigate how resource allocation affects the competitiveness of small businesses.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Resource-Based View (RBV), a theory initially formulated by Jay Barney (1991), offers a compelling framework for understanding the dynamics of entrepreneurial leadership and competitiveness. At its core, RBV posits that a firm's ability to maintain a competitive edge hinges on the distinctiveness and value of its internal resources and capabilities. These resources must be rare, difficult to replicate, valuable, and irreplaceable to grant a firm a sustainable competitive advantage (Lee & Yun, 2020). RBV emphasizes that businesses should focus on their internal strengths rather than trying to imitate others (Assensoh-Kodua, 2019).

It is suitable for this study as our study explore how entrepreneurial leaders, through their unique style of leadership, position their organizations in the marketplace. This positioning could involve the way their leadership skills are leveraged in branding, marketing, or the differentiation of their products or services, further solidifying their competitive stance (Lee & Yun, 2020). In essence, Resource-Based View (RBV) becomes the theoretical underpinning of our study, guiding us to understand how entrepreneurial leadership, with its distinctive skills and visionary qualities, shapes the competitive landscape of organizations. By analysing how these leaders contribute to the creation and utilization of unique resources and capabilities, we gain a deeper appreciation of the enduring competitive advantages they foster in their respective markets.

### **Entrepreneurial Leadership**

Entrepreneurial leadership is a leadership style and approach that is characterized by the willingness and ability of a leader to identify and pursue entrepreneurial opportunities, take calculated risks, and drive innovation within an organization or business (Al-Mutairi, 2019). Entrepreneurial leadership is often associated with start-up ventures and small businesses, where leaders need to be agile, innovative, and risk-tolerant to succeed in competitive and rapidly



changing markets (Breyer-Mayländer & Zerres, 2023). However, these principles can also be applied in larger organizations to foster innovation, drive growth, and adapt to changing industry landscapes. Entrepreneurial leaders play a crucial role in shaping the future of their organizations and driving them toward sustainable success.

Entrepreneurial leadership is a fascinating and dynamic concept that brings to mind the image of individuals who possess a unique blend of vision, courage, and innovation. It is not just a style of leadership; it is a mindset, a way of approaching challenges and opportunities, and it can be found in various settings, from start-ups to established organizations (Breyer-Mayländer & Zerres, 2023). One of the central tenets of entrepreneurial leadership is the ability to see opportunities where others might see obstacles. These leaders have a knack for identifying gaps in the market, unmet needs, or potential areas for growth. This visionary quality is what sets them apart from traditional leaders. They do not wait for the future to happen; they shape it. Entrepreneurial leadership is a captivating narrative of visionaries, risk-takers, and innovators who do not just navigate the business world; they shape it and this could help improve their business competitiveness (Sari & Ahmad, 2022).

### **Small Business Competitiveness**

Small businesses are the backbone of many economies, fostering job creation, innovation, and economic growth (Adekunle, 2011). Small business competitiveness refers to the ability of small businesses to effectively compete in the marketplace, deliver value to customers, and thrive in the face of competition from larger corporations and other small businesses (Jusni et al., 2023). It is a critical factor for the success and sustainability of small enterprises. One of the key advantages of small businesses is their ability to adapt quickly to changing market conditions. This adaptability allows them to innovate and respond to customer needs in ways that larger corporations may find challenging (Oduyoye et al., 2013). By fostering a culture of creativity and a willingness to pivot, small businesses can outmanoeuvre competitors.

Competitiveness is a central concern for small businesses in today's globalized marketplace. While they may lack the vast resources and economies of scale that larger corporations enjoy, small businesses can gain a competitive edge through strategic agility and a nimble response to changing market conditions (Jardon, 2018). By staying close to their customers and being attuned to their needs, small businesses can offer more personalized and unique products and services, often outperforming larger competitors in terms of customer satisfaction. They are often more inclined to take calculated risks, experiment with new ideas, and introduce innovative products or services that address emerging market trends. In doing so, they can carve out niche markets or disrupt existing industries (Oduyoye et al., 2013). Small businesses that invest in research and development, stay open to emerging technologies, and foster a culture of innovation position themselves for sustained competitiveness in an ever-evolving business landscape (Jusni et al.,



2023). This study assessed the measures of entrepreneurial leadership, which are the dimensions of innovation, resource allocation and adaptability on small business competitiveness.

### **Innovation and Small Business Competitiveness**

Chinedum et al. (2019) shared that innovation is the driving force behind societal progress, economic growth, and technological advancement. It is the process of introducing new ideas, methods, products, or services that challenge the status quo and lead to positive change (Egbetokun et al., 2015). The relentless pursuit of innovation has shaped the world we live in today, revolutionizing industries and improving the quality of life for individuals and communities. One of the key aspects of innovation is its ability to solve complex problems (Pezzuto, 2019). Innovation plays a fundamental role in driving economic growth. When businesses and entrepreneurs embrace innovative ideas, they create new markets and employment opportunities. Additionally, the competitive advantage gained through innovation can lead to increased market share and profitability (Olaopa et al., 2017).

One of the driving factors behind innovation is competition (Chinedum et al., 2019). In a globalized world, businesses and nations are in a constant race to stay ahead. The fear of falling behind or losing market share often motivates organizations to invest in research and development to remain competitive. This competitive pressure has led to remarkable advancements in technology, science, and industry, benefiting consumers and society as a whole (Chinedum et al., 2019). Embracing and nurturing a culture of innovation is essential for individuals, organizations, and nations to remain at the forefront of positive change and development. As we move into the future, it is clear that innovation will continue to be the catalyst for transformative advancements and improvements in our lives. Hence, we propose that:

**H<sub>1</sub>: Innovation has significant effect on the competitiveness of small businesses.**

### **Adaptability and Small Business Competitiveness**

According to Ogunkoya et al. (2021) adaptability goes beyond mere reaction to change; it involves a proactive embrace of new circumstances, a quest for opportunities to grow, and the development of skills to navigate novel challenges effectively. At the individual level, adaptability is a personal attribute that shapes how we approach life's ever-shifting circumstances. It is a mind-set that encourages flexibility and a willingness to step out of one's comfort zone. By recognizing that change is a constant, individuals can develop the resilience to bounce back from setbacks, learn from experiences, and continuously improve themselves (Adegbayibi, 2021). The embrace of adaptability also fosters a growth mind-set, where challenges are seen as opportunities for personal development, and obstacles become stepping stones to success.



In addition to its significance at the individual and organizational levels, adaptability is of paramount importance for societies and nations (Anthony, 2016; Isichei et al., 2023). It plays a pivotal role in addressing global challenges, such as climate change, economic instability, and public health crises. Adaptability involves rethinking strategies and developing innovative solutions to build resilient systems that can withstand and recover from adversities (Apriliyanti & Alon, 2017). Societies must adapt by implementing sustainable practices, investing in renewable energy, and creating climate-resilient infrastructure. Adapting to technological changes requires digital literacy and the ability to learn and retrain for new roles. Within the context of adaptability, cognitive adaptability is a crucial dimension. Hence, we propose that:

**H<sub>2</sub>: Adaptability has significant effect on the competitiveness of small businesses.**

### **Resource Allocation and Small Business Competitiveness**

Resource allocation is a multidimensional and essential aspect of management and decision-making, encompassing a wide range of resources, including financial, human, time, and material resources (Odusote & Akpa, 2022). The process of resource allocation is instrumental in determining how these limited resources are distributed among various tasks, projects, or needs within an organization, aiming to achieve specific goals and objectives efficiently. Effective resource allocation begins with the identification of priorities and a clear understanding of the organization's goals. This step is crucial as it helps align resource allocation decisions with the broader strategic direction of the organization (Etor et al., 2020; Afunwa et al., 2020). Whether it's a business seeking to expand its product line, a government agency working on public infrastructure or a non-profit organization striving to meet community needs, resource allocation is the key to translating goals into action.

According to Suzuki and Takada, (2023), one of the primary objectives of resource allocation is to maximize the return on investment. By allocating resources where they can have the most significant impact, organizations can achieve greater efficiency and productivity. This can involve allocating financial resources to projects with a high potential for return, assigning skilled personnel to critical tasks, and optimizing the use of time to meet deadlines and deliver on commitments (Etor et al., 2020). Resource allocation is often a complex process, as it requires careful consideration of competing priorities and constraints, and it involves making trade-offs among various needs and objectives (Suzuki & Takada, 2023; Agu et al., 2018). Effective resource allocation requires careful planning, communication, adaptability, and, in many cases, the use of technology and data-driven insights to optimize decision-making. Balancing the equitable distribution of resources while maximizing their impact is central to the success of organizations and the achievement of broader societal goals. Hence, we propose that:

**H<sub>3</sub>: Resource allocation has significant effect on the competitiveness of small businesses.**





## **METHODOLOGY**

The study used a quantitative research design, which entails a cross-sectional survey to gather data from small business owners and managers operating in Jalingo, Taraba state, Nigeria. Information obtained for the small and medium scale development agency (SMEDAN) report of 2017 indicates that there are 1779 small businesses in Jalingo, Taraba state. This are the number of registered small businesses in the state. The study population therefore is 1779 small businesses. The sample size for the study is 327 small businesses. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane formula. Small businesses selected for this study cuts across various sectors, such as manufacturing, accommodation and food services, agriculture, wholesale/retail trade, construction and education sector. The primary data source was used and the method of collection was the use of questionnaire. The questionnaires aligned with the research questions and objectives. To ensure the representation of diverse sectors within the state, we employed a stratified random sampling technique. Questionnaires was administered in person. Reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach alpha. The result from the analysis shows a good reliability coefficient index, as it ranges between 0.721 to 0.811 for the variables, which indicates high reliability of the study scales. Face validity was also carried out, as three experts in entrepreneurship and a professional business manager were tasked to assist with vetting the instrument before it was distributed. The comments of the reviewers were then analysed and incorporated to the final instrument before it administered to the respondents. Multiple regression with the aid of SPSSv23 was used to analyse the data. This choice of this technique is because it is suitable for analysing study with multi independent variable and single dependent variable.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The instrument distributed were three hundred and twenty-seven (327), which is the study sample size. The questionnaires were coded into excel sheet before it was transferred to the SPSS package for analysis. Out of the three hundred and twenty-seven (327) distributed questionnaires, only three hundred (300) were retrieved without issues/errors with the questionnaires, which is 91% of the distributed questionnaire. Given a return rate of 91%, which is high, the study conducted other analysis based on the available questionnaires. The demographic distribution of the respondents shows the male are 198(66%) and the females were 102(34%). Finally, the researcher tested for the fundamental assumption of multiple regression technique. The assumption of normality, heterosacidity, linearity and autocorrelation were all tested and the result produced a satisfying fulfilment of the criteria, thus, justifying the use of the technique.



**Table 1: Coefficients on the effect of entrepreneurial leadership and competitiveness of small businesses**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.101	.283		3.898	.000
Innovation	.141	.055	.139	2.545	.011
Adaptability	.219	.069	.187	3.151	.002
Resource allocation	.306	.061	.298	5.011	.000

**a. Dependent Variable: Competitiveness**

**R = 0.492; R<sup>2</sup> = 0.242; F = 31.468; p < 0.05**

The above table 1 shows the regression result for the study on entrepreneurial leadership effect on the competitiveness of small businesses in Jalingo Taraba state, Nigeria. The result shows that there is a moderate association that exist linking entrepreneurial leadership and competitiveness of the small businesses in Jalingo, Taraba state, Nigeria. It is then imperative for small business owners to consider building a strong leadership capacity, as it critical to their competitiveness and this is evident with the moderate R-value of .492, which means there is a 49.2% shared relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and competitiveness of small businesses in Jalingo, Taraba State, Nigeria. The extent of changes in the competitiveness of small business in the state that can be accounted for by the changes in the leadership style was examined, as exemplified from the R-square result. The R-squared obtained showed that 24.2% of changes in the competitiveness of small businesses in the Jalingo will be as a result of changes in the entrepreneurial leadership adopted by the small business owners. Model fit was assessed as shown from the f-value result of 31.468, p < 0.05, hence given the p-value is less than 0.05, it then implies the model is fit. This implies that the study theoretical argument is confirmed to have been satisfied.

**Test of Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis One**

**H<sub>1</sub>: Innovation has significant effect on the competitiveness of small businesses.**

The result as shown in table 1 above indicates that innovation has significant effect on the competitiveness of small businesses in Jalingo. Give the ( $\beta = .139$ , t-value = 2.545; p < 0.05) p-value is less than 0.05, the researcher accepts the alternate hypothesis and reject the null, thus, hypothesis one is rejected. This implies that innovation has significant effect on the competitiveness of small businesses. This result agrees with the work of Chinedum et al. (2019)





and Olaopa et al. (2017) that confirmed that innovation is a significant driver of small business competitiveness.

### **Hypothesis Two**

**H<sub>2</sub>: Adaptability has significant effect on the competitiveness of small businesses.**

The result as shown in table 1 above indicates that adaptability has significant effect on the competitiveness of small businesses in Jalingo. Give the ( $\beta = .187$ , t-value = 3.151;  $p < 0.05$ ) p-value is less than 0.05, the researcher accepts the alternate hypothesis and reject the null, thus, hypothesis one is rejected. This implies that adaptability has significant effect on the competitiveness of small businesses. The result aligns with the work of Ogunkoya et al. (2021) and Anthony (2016) that shared that ability to adapt in the face of turbulence is critical strength factor for businesses anywhere in the world.

### **Hypothesis Three**

**H<sub>3</sub>: Resource allocation has significant effect on the competitiveness of small businesses.**

The result as shown in table 1 above indicates that resource allocation has significant effect on the competitiveness of small businesses in Jalingo. Give the ( $\beta = .298$ , t-value = 5.011;  $p < 0.05$ ) p-value is less than 0.05, the researcher accepts the alternate hypothesis and reject the null, thus, hypothesis one is rejected. This implies that resource allocation has significant effect on the competitiveness of small businesses. This work finding is supported with the work of Odusote and Akpa, (2022) and Etor et al. (2020) that shared that effective resource allocation is critical for firms that desire to drive improved performance.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the study findings, the study concludes that entrepreneurial leadership has positive effect on small business competitiveness. The study also concludes that entrepreneurial leaders can play a pivotal role in identifying, developing, and leveraging unique resources and capabilities within their organizations. These resources often include intellectual property, a highly skilled workforce, proprietary technologies, and innovative products or services. The study concludes that entrepreneurial leaders can contribute to the development of resources and capabilities that provide their organizations with a sustained competitive advantage. Their long-term focus on value creation, innovation, and talent development ensures that their assets are not easily replicated by competitors. Lastly, we also conclude that entrepreneurial leaders can actively manage and adapt their unique resources to respond to changing market conditions. Their skills and vision guide resource allocation, strategic decision-making, and the creation of a learning culture, allowing for dynamic resource utilization.



Based on the study's findings, several recommendations emerge for practitioners and organizations seeking to enhance their competitiveness through entrepreneurial leadership.

- i. Foster Entrepreneurial Leadership Development: Organizations should invest in leadership development programs that nurture entrepreneurial skills, vision, and innovation. This can be achieved through training, mentorship, and creating a culture that values and rewards entrepreneurial thinking.
- ii. Entrepreneurial leaders should maintain a strategic emphasis on long-term value creation rather than short-term gains. By doing so, they can build and sustain unique resources and capabilities that drive competitiveness.
- iii. Creating an environment that encourages innovation and creativity is vital. Entrepreneurial leaders should actively promote and support a culture where employees are encouraged to generate and implement novel ideas.
- iv. Entrepreneurial leaders should continue to refine their resource management strategies. This includes effective resource allocation, flexibility in adapting to market changes, and a commitment to organizational learning.

The study underscores the significant impact of entrepreneurial leadership on organizational competitiveness. By leveraging the insights provided by the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory, organizations can strategically harness their unique resources and capabilities to gain and sustain a competitive edge in a dynamic business environment. The recommendations offered here provide a roadmap for organizations and entrepreneurial leaders to enhance their competitive positions and achieve long-term success.

In essence, entrepreneurial leadership is not merely a theoretical concept but a tangible asset that organizations can cultivate to thrive in an increasingly competitive landscape. As entrepreneurial leaders foster innovation, resource development, and a culture of adaptability, they pave the way for their organizations to secure a lasting competitive advantage. By embracing these insights and recommendations, organizations can unlock the full potential of entrepreneurial leadership, ensuring their place at the forefront of their respective industries and markets.

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