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Abstract

Purpose: This study examined the influence of entrepreneurial self-efficacy on competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Methodology: The study adopted a cross sectional survey research design. The population for this study was 300 owners/managers of small and medium scale enterprises in Bayelsa State that are registered with the Small and Medium Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN). Primary data was collated using structured questionnaire. A sample size of 171 was obtained using the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula. The reliability of the instrument was achieved by the use of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70. The inferential statistics absorbed three parametric inferential tests- Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient (PPMC), One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Simple Regression Analysis. Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient (PPMC) was used test the relationship between the variables, ANOVA was employed to test the differences in means of responses on the variables, while by means of simple regression, the study tested the effect of entrepreneurial self-efficacy on

competitive advantage. The tests were carried out at a 0.05 significance level.

Findings: Findings from the study revealed that entrepreneurial self-efficacy significantly influences competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrate that entrepreneurial self-efficacy plays a significant role in influencing the competitive advantage of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The study shed light on the importance of individuals' beliefs in their own abilities to effectively engage in entrepreneurial activities and how these beliefs impact the competitive positioning of their businesses.

Recommendation: Therefore, the study recommends that there is need to encourage and support aspiring and existing SME owners to develop and enhance their entrepreneurial self-confidence. This can be achieved through entrepreneurship education and training programs, mentorship initiatives, and networking opportunities that focus on building self-belief, risk-taking abilities, and resilience.

Keyword: *Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy, Competitive Advantage, Cost Leadership, Market Focus, Differentiation*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is a challenging but rewarding endeavor that requires unique sets of skills and qualities. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is a very important factor in the success of entrepreneurs. It refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully start and run a business. Self-efficacy is an important determinant of entrepreneurial intention, which is the intention to start and grow a business. Studies have shown that people with high levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy are more likely to pursue entrepreneurship, and those with low levels are less likely to do so (Shen, Wang, Hua & Zhang, 2021). Entrepreneurial self-efficacy has also been found to have a positive effect on entrepreneurial performance, as it enables entrepreneurs to overcome the challenges and obstacles they face in their business ventures (Soomro & Shah, 2022). Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is however not a fixed trait and so can be developed over time through experience and education (Adeniyi, Derera & Gamede, 2022). Therefore, it is important for individuals who aspire to become entrepreneurs to work on developing their entrepreneurial self-efficacy, as it can greatly impact their success as entrepreneurs.

In today's highly competitive business environment, it is essential for firms to establish and maintain a competitive advantage to survive and succeed in the market. Competitive advantage is defined as the ability of a firm to outperform its competitors in terms of profitability or market share (Srivastava, Franklin, & Martinette, 2013). It is a key factor that differentiates one firm from another and enables it to create value for its customers, investors, and stakeholders. According to Srivastava *et al.* (2013), competitive advantage can be achieved through various means such as innovation, cost leadership, differentiation, and customer focus. Innovation allows firms to introduce or improve new products/services or even enhance packaging that meet the changing needs and expectations of customers, while cost leadership enables firms to offer products or services at a lower cost than their competitors.

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) can also refer to an individual's belief in their ability to perform entrepreneurial tasks successfully. It is an essential factor in the creation of a competitive advantage for entrepreneurs. According to Wei, Chen, Zhang and Zhang (2020), individuals with high ESE are more likely to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities, persist in the face of obstacles, and recover from setbacks. This resilience is important for entrepreneurs who face numerous challenges in starting and growing a business. Moreover, individuals with high ESE tend to have a proactive mindset, seeking out opportunities and taking action to capitalize on them. This behaviour is critical for entrepreneurs as they need to be able to identify and exploit market gaps to create a competitive advantage. In addition, ESE has a positive impact on an individual's ability to network and build business relationships, which is essential for accessing resources and creating partnerships that enhance the competitiveness of a business (Riedo, Kraiczy & Hack, 2019). Finally, individuals with high ESE have a greater willingness to take risks, which is necessary for entrepreneurs as they need to be willing to take calculated risks to create a competitive advantage.

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is a vital factor in gaining a competitive advantage in the business world. Individuals who possess high levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy have the confidence, skills, and knowledge necessary to identify and exploit opportunities, innovate, and adapt to changing market conditions (Mancha & Shankaranarayanan, 2021). By enhancing their entrepreneurial self-efficacy, businesses can create a culture of innovation and creativity that can help them stay ahead of the competition. Therefore, it is essential for entrepreneurs and business leaders to invest in developing their own entrepreneurial self-efficacy and that of their employees to ensure long-term success and growth. The purpose of this study was to examine

the influence of entrepreneurial self-efficacy on competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Research Conceptual Model

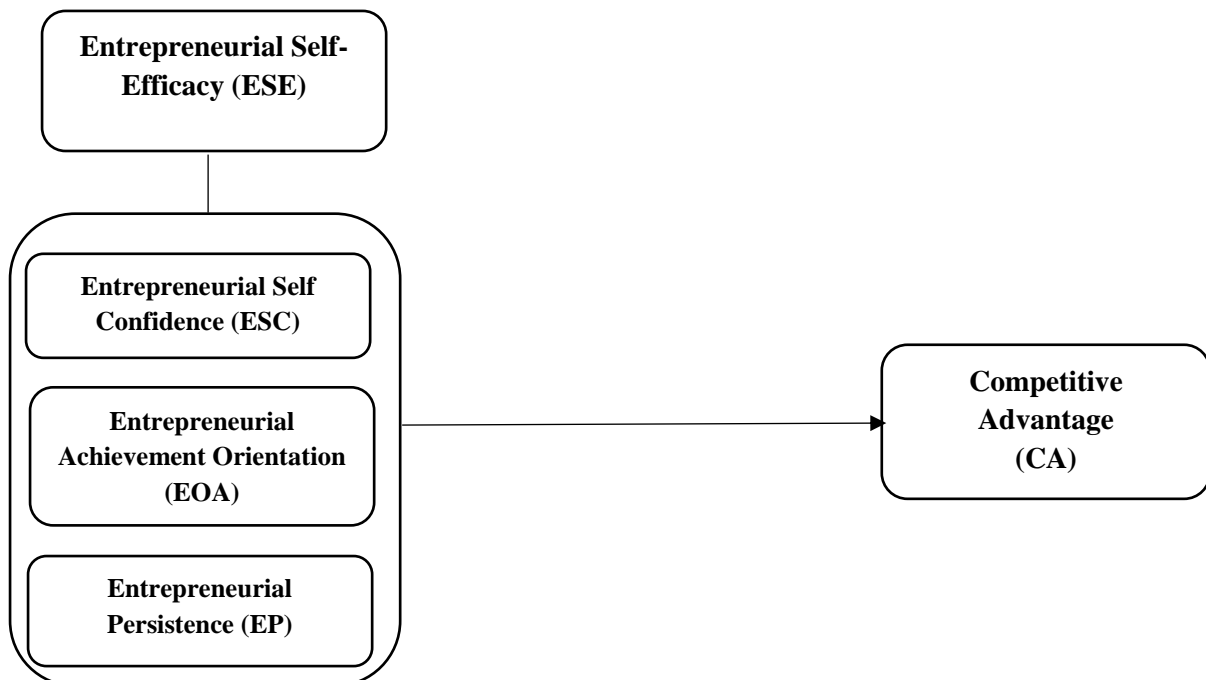


Figure 1: Conceptual Model for the Relationship between Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy and Competitive Advantage

Source: Desk Research (2023)

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of planned behaviour by Ajzen & Fishbein (1980) in psychology links one's beliefs and behaviour. The theory states that attitude toward behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control, together shape an individual's behavioural intentions and behaviours (mindset). In the entrepreneurial milieu, the theory is anchored on the argument that commitment to entrepreneurial activities is based on the premise that much of human behaviour (mindset) is planned and is followed by intention toward that behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Dhliwayo & Vunren (2007) defined entrepreneurial mindset as a set of personal or behaviour, trait, perception, value, opportunity that is connected to pursuing of opportunities in the market.

According to Igwe, Ogbo, Agbaeze, Abugu, Ezenwakwelu and Okwo (2020) within the context of entrepreneurship, the theory of planned behaviour asserts that entrepreneurial intention is dependent on an individual's attitude, toward the desirability of an entrepreneurial career, subjective norms including perceived family expectations, and beliefs to perform the behaviour, and perceived behavioural control or the perceived ability to execute the intended behaviour of entering entrepreneurship. He went further to say that theory of planned intentions is a function of three sets of factors, attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. This implies that entrepreneurial intention is dependent on an individual's attitude toward the desirability of an entrepreneurial career (Ajzen, 1991).

Attitude describes beliefs and perceptions regarding the personal desirability to engage in entrepreneurial endeavour or the readiness or tendency to react effectively in response to the risks that lie ahead in a business (Igwe, *et al.*, 2020). Subjective norms relate to the individual's perceptions about values beliefs and norms held by people who they respect or regard as important and the individuals' desire to comply with those norms, (Igwe, *et al.*, 2020). Ajzen (1991) in his research, concluded that individual's attitudes constitute the important factors affecting their entrepreneurial intentions. Douglas and Shephard (2000) however argued that entrepreneurial decision might come from utility maximizing career choice of an individual. They developed a model which they assert that people will choose to become an entrepreneur if the total satisfaction they expect to derive from the entrepreneurial activities far exceed the expected utility from their best employment they can find in the market.

Perceived behavioural control (PBC) is similar to the concept of self-efficacy of Bandura (1986). It is expressed as the individual's personal belief about being able to execute planned behaviour and the perception that the behaviour is within the decision maker's control. Consequently, it is believed that entrepreneurial activity may be predicted more accurately by studying intention, mindset, behaviour rather than personality traits, demographic characteristics, or situational factors (Igwe, *et al.*, 2020). He went further to assert that such behaviour control may be seen from individuals' selection of entrepreneurship business rather than work for someone else, because he believes in his ability to self-manage own enterprise, leadership and human resources (Utami, 2017).

The theory is relevant to this study because the TPB provides a framework for understanding the factors that influence individuals' behavioural intentions. In the context of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and competitive advantage, the theory can help identify the beliefs, attitudes, and subjective norms that shape individuals' intentions to engage in entrepreneurial activities and pursue competitive advantages. The TPB has been widely used and validated in various domains to predict and understand human behaviour. Its applicability has been demonstrated in studies on entrepreneurial intentions, decision-making, and behaviour. By using the TPB framework, researchers can establish a strong theoretical foundation to examine the relationships between entrepreneurial self-efficacy, competitive advantage, and behavioural outcomes.

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE)

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy refers to the extent that individuals believe they have sufficient capabilities to perform various tasks of entrepreneurship (Liu, Lin, Zhao & Zhao, 2019). Entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) has been identified as a critical determinant of business success. ESE refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully start and manage a business (Srimulyani & Hermanto, 2022). This belief plays a significant role in shaping an entrepreneur's attitudes, behaviours, and decision-making processes. Research has consistently shown that high levels of ESE are positively associated with entrepreneurial intentions, opportunity recognition, and venture creation (Srimulyani & Hermanto, 2022). Moreover, entrepreneurs with higher ESE are more likely to persevere through challenging situations and setbacks, leading to greater business success in the long run (Al Issa, 2020). In contrast, entrepreneurs with low ESE may experience self-doubt and may be more likely to give up on their ventures prematurely.

Thus, self-efficacy can also be the level of confidence shown by an individual towards the undertaking of a task (Srimulyani & Hermanto, 2022). This construct can either be generalized into a variety of tasks or can be tailored to specific tasks. Self-efficacy shown by an individual towards entrepreneurship is known as entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Suyati & Rozikin, 2021).

Past studies have shown that individuals with high scores on this skill have higher intentions of establishing enterprises, exert more effort into the enterprise formation process and succeed at a higher rate than those that score low

Thus, self-efficacy is defined here as an individual's belief in and desire to effectively achieve certain targets and tasks (Krueger and Tormasello, 1998). An individual's attitudes reflect his or her desire to perceive potential opportunities. For example, individuals with prior successful experiences and high self-efficacy tend to demonstrate increased motivation to seek out opportunities (Park, 2005; Pech & Cameron, 2006). Empirical studies have demonstrated that higher self-efficacy leads to better recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities (Ozgen, 2003). ESE refers to the self-confidence intensity of entrepreneurs on whether their own entrepreneurial skills can complete various entrepreneurial activities, reflecting the belief that entrepreneurs are equipped with the competency to influence their surroundings and succeed through corresponding actions (Liu, Lin, Zhao & Zhao, 2019).

Some more studies have shown that there is a strong relationship between an individual's level of self-efficacy and their likelihood to engage in activities that are linked to entrepreneurship such as writing a business plan or saving money with intentions of investing it to start a business in the future (Sequeira, Mueller, & McGee, 2007). So, individuals who have more positive perceptions regarding the outcome of starting a business, tend to have a more favourable attitude towards the behaviour and the intention of starting a business (Joensuu-Salo, Viljamaa & Varamäki, 2022).

Entrepreneurial Self- Confidence (ESC)

Self-confidence is a key factor that affects an entrepreneur's success in their business endeavours. According to Kirkwood (2009), self-confidence is defined as the belief in one's own abilities, capacities, and judgments. Building self-confidence is especially important for entrepreneurs because they are often faced with challenges and uncertainties in their business ventures. One strategy to build self-confidence as an entrepreneur is to focus on one's strengths and accomplishments. This can be achieved by reflecting on past successes and acknowledging personal achievements. Another strategy is to surround oneself with positive and supportive people, such as mentors and peers, who can provide constructive feedback and encouragement. Additionally, setting realistic goals and breaking them down into smaller, achievable steps can help boost confidence and motivation.

Entrepreneurship requires a great deal of self-confidence and self-belief, as it involves taking risks and making decisions with scarce and often incomplete and limited information. However, many entrepreneurs struggle with self-doubt, which can hinder their success. According to Harris (2011), self-doubt can lead to procrastination, fear of failure, and a lack of motivation, which can ultimately lead to missed opportunities. To overcome self-doubt, entrepreneurs must first identify the root cause of their insecurities, which may stem from past failures or negative feedback from others. Once the cause is identified, entrepreneurs can work on reframing their negative thoughts and beliefs into more positive ones. This can be achieved through techniques such as positive self-talk, visualization, and seeking support from mentors or peers. Additionally, setting achievable goals and celebrating small successes can help to build confidence and momentum. Finally, it is important for entrepreneurs to remember that failure is a natural part of the entrepreneurial journey and that setbacks should be viewed as learning opportunities rather than reasons to give up. By implementing these strategies, entrepreneurs can boost their self-confidence and overcome self-doubt, ultimately increasing their chances of success.

Entrepreneurial Achievement Orientation (EAO)

Entrepreneurial achievement orientation refers to an individual's mindset and inclination towards setting and accomplishing challenging goals in an entrepreneurial context (Xue, Qian, Qian & Li, 2021). It reflects the drive, motivation, and determination to strive for success and achieve significant outcomes in one's entrepreneurial endeavours. Entrepreneurial achievement orientation (EAO) is a significant construct in entrepreneurship research, which refers to the extent to which an individual is motivated to achieve success in their entrepreneurial endeavors. EAO has been found to be a significant predictor of entrepreneurial success (Sagie & Elizur, 1999). Entrepreneurs with a high level of EAO tend to be more successful in identifying and exploiting new business opportunities, dealing with uncertainty and ambiguity, and adapting to changing business environments. Thus, understanding the concept of EAO and its dimensions is vital for entrepreneurs to develop and enhance their entrepreneurial skills and competencies. Achievement orientation is a significant factor that influences the success of entrepreneurship. According to Utsch and Rauch (2000), entrepreneurs with a high achievement orientation are more likely to succeed compared to those with low achievement orientation. Achievement-oriented entrepreneurs tend to be more focused on their goals, determined, and persistent in their pursuit of success. These individuals are also more willing to take risks and are better equipped to handle failure. In addition, achievement-oriented individuals have a strong desire for feedback and are motivated by a need for accomplishment. This motivation drives them to seek out opportunities and take calculated risks to achieve their goals. Consequently, the achievement orientation of an entrepreneur can impact their success by influencing their behaviours, attitudes, and motivation. This highlights the importance of recognizing the role of achievement orientation in entrepreneurship and its impact on the success of entrepreneurial ventures.

Entrepreneurial Persistence (EP)

Entrepreneurial persistence can be defined as the ability of entrepreneurs to persist in the pursuit of their goals despite facing challenging and uncertain situations (Pietersen & Botha, 2021). Persistence is an essential quality that every entrepreneur must possess in order to succeed in their ventures. This is because entrepreneurship is riddled with obstacles and setbacks that can easily discourage even the most resilient individuals. Entrepreneurial persistence is an essential characteristic that enables entrepreneurs to overcome obstacles and challenges while pursuing their business goals. Fayolle and Gailly (2015) define entrepreneurial persistence as the ability to continue pursuing a goal or vision in the face of adversity, setbacks, and failures. This definition highlights the importance of perseverance and determination in the entrepreneurial process. This characteristic is vital because entrepreneurs face numerous challenges such as financial constraints, market competition, and uncertainty. However, persistent entrepreneurs are more likely to succeed in the long run because they learn from their failures and remain focused on their long-term goals. Fayolle and Gailly (2015) argue that entrepreneurial persistence is not just about perseverance but also about adaptability.

Persistent entrepreneurs are not afraid to pivot and change their strategies when necessary. This adaptability helps them navigate through unexpected challenges and capitalize on new opportunities. Therefore, entrepreneurial persistence is a multifaceted characteristic that includes perseverance, determination, and adaptability. It is a vital characteristic that enables entrepreneurs to overcome obstacles and achieve their business goals in the face of adversity.

Competitive Advantage (CA)

Competitive advantage simply means having an edge over the competition (Ehmke, 2008). A firm has a competitive advantage when it is able to create more economic value than its rivals

(Rothaermel, 2008). Brodoux (2007) defined competitive advantage as superior differentiation and/or lower costs by comparison with the marginal (breakeven) competitor in the product market. A firm is seen to have a competitive advantage over its competitors if it creates more economic value than the marginal competitors in its product market.

The notion of competitive advantage is entrenched in value creation, unique resources, innovation and distribution which is at the heart of the firm's performance. Hui-Ling (2014) viewed competitive advantage as a set of attributes than an organisation develops or possesses to outperform its competitors. Ahmad and Khalaf (2010) depicted competitive advantage as the adeptness of the organisation to engage in value-added activities which allows it to attain a position of relative advantage over its rivals. Heizer and Render (2006) portrayed a competitive advantage as the creation of a system with an inimitable advantage over competitors. Day and Wensley (2008) averred that competitive advantage is a strategic configuration to assist the company in maintaining its viability over its competitors. Sarprong and Tandoh (2015) recognized competitive advantage as the ability to offer unique services dissimilar to competitors by exploiting organisational strengths so as to add value that will be difficult for competitors to imitate. The position of Sarprong and Tandoh (2015) corresponds with that of Dressler (2004) that competitive advantage can only be attainable and achievable when services offered have unique characteristics that agree to key buying criteria of a substantial number of customers.

Empirical Review

Studying entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) enables us to predict how well entrepreneurs are likely to perform with respect to different entrepreneurial tasks. A logical leap, then, is to consider whether franchisee performance is explained by franchisee ESE. During their initial development of the ESE construct, Chen et al. (1998) found no correlation between a firm's performance and the founder's ESE. Although the pool of research on this subject remains shallow, several other studies (Anna et al., 2000; Choe et al., 2013; Hmieleski & Corbett, 2008), contradict Chen et al.'s (1998) finding and empirically link the construct of self-efficacy to performance.

More recent research using the Chen *et al.* (1998) ESE scale has also successfully linked ESE to firm performance. For instance, using self-reported performance data of technology entrepreneurs, Forbes (2005) found a positive correlation between a total ESE score and overall revenue performance of these firms. However, Forbes (2005) did not analyze the individual ESE dimensions impact on performance. Other research has also linked the business founder's self-confidence with positive firm performance (Choe *et al.*, 2013; Hmieleski and Corbett, 2008).

Existing studies have proved that ESE contributes greatly to the prediction of entrepreneurial intention and promotion of entrepreneurial performance (Caines *et al.*, 2019). Bandura (1991) proposed that personal choice, effort, and behaviour are affected by self-cognition of their abilities, which suggests that ESE can also be a predictor of behaviours associated with innovation behaviour (Barakat *et al.*, 2014). Recent research has shown that entrepreneurs with higher ESE are more likely to set innovation-related goals for their companies and more willing to exhibit innovative behaviour (Chen & Zhou, 2017). Nevertheless, few entrepreneurs really translate their ESE into innovative behaviour in practice, even though many people are confident in the performance of innovation and the achievement of entrepreneurial goals before action (Markman & Baron, 2003). Many entrepreneurs quit after suffering various entrepreneurial risks and challenges, as well as psychological pressure and emotional exhaustion (Kasouf *et al.*, 2015). However, previous studies mostly focused on the direct

impacts of ESE on innovative behaviour (Ahlin *et al.*, 2013; Barakat *et al.*, 2014; Chen & Zhou, 2017).

From the foregoing discourse, the study hypothesised thus:

H₀₁: Entrepreneurial self-confidence does not significantly influence competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

H₀₂: Entrepreneurial achievement orientation does not significantly influence competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

H₀₃: Entrepreneurial persistence does not significantly influence competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross sectional survey research design. Primary data was collated using structured questionnaire. The population for this study was 300 owners/managers of small and medium scale enterprises in Bayelsa State that are registered with the Small and Medium Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN). A sample size of 171 was obtained using the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula. The reliability of the instrument was achieved by the use of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70. The inferential statistics absorbed three parametric inferential tests-Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient (PPMC), One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Simple Regression Analysis. Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient (PPMC) was used test the relationship between the variables, ANOVA was employed to test the differences in means of responses on the variables, while by means of simple regressions, and the study tested the effect of entrepreneurial self-efficacy on competitive advantage. The tests were carried out at a 0.05 significance level.

4.0 FINDINGS

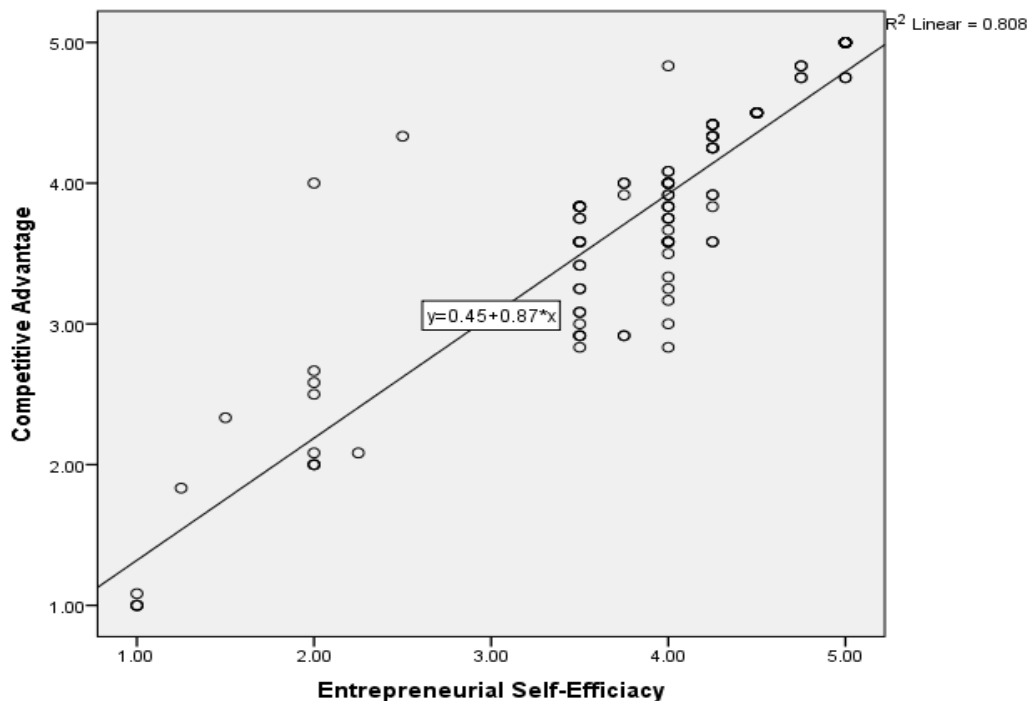


Figure 2: Scatter Plot for Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy and Competitive Advantage

Figure 2 shows a very strong relationship between entrepreneurial self-efficacy (independent variable) and competitive advantage (dependent variable). The scatter plot graph shows that the linear value of (0.702) depicting a very strong viable and positive relationship between the two constructs. The implication is that an increase in entrepreneurial self-efficacy simultaneously brings about an increase in the level of competitive advantage. The scatter diagram has provided vivid evaluation of the closeness of the relationship among the pairs of variables through the nature of their concentration.

Table 1: Correlation Showing Direction of Relationship for Entrepreneurial Self-efficacy and Competitive Advantage

		Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy	Competitive Advantage
Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	1	.899**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	146	146
Competitive Advantage	Pearson Correlation	.899**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	1	118

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Version 23.0 Output

Table 1, shows that entrepreneurial self-efficacy has a very strong and positive relationship with competitive advantage ($r = 0.899$). The correlation is positive, implying that when entrepreneurial self-efficacy increases, SMEs in Bayelsa State experience a corresponding increase in their competitive advantage. The significance (p - value) is ($0.000 < (0.05)$ level of significance; hence the researcher concludes that there is a very strong positive relationship between entrepreneurial self-efficacy and competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.972 ^a	.946	.945	.24066

a. Predictors: (Constant), Persistence, Self-Confidence, Achievement Orientation

Source: SPSS Version 23.0 Output

This sub-section examined the relative influence of entrepreneurial self- efficacy on competitive advantage. The co-efficient of determination (R^2) showed relatively the highest number of significant variables in conformity with a priori expectation. Table 2 depicts a linear regression analysis of entrepreneurial self- efficacy and competitive advantage. It was found that the R value is (0.972), R square (0.946), adjusted R (0.945) and the standard error of the estimate value is (0. 24066). The high R value revealed that entrepreneurial self- efficacy accounted for (94.6%) change in competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State while the remaining 5.4 % is explained by other factors outside the model.

Table 3: ANOVAa

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	143.234	3	47.745	824.353	.000 ^b
	Residual	8.224	142	.058		
	Total	151.459	145			

a. Dependent Variable: Competitive Advantage

b. Predictors: (Constant), Persistence, Self-Confidence, Achievement Orientation

Source: SPSS version 23.0 Output

Furthermore, in Table 3, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed a regression sum of square value of (143.234) which is higher than the residual sum of squares value of (8.224). This implies that the model involving the entrepreneurial self -efficacy accounted for most of the variations in the competitive advantage. The F calculated value of (824.353) depicts the significance and reliability of the model developed through the regression analysis results. In addition, the significant P-value of (0.000) is smaller than (0.05). This implies that there is significant evidence to extrapolate that entrepreneurial risk-taking is related to sales growth. This proposes that the model is measured to be fit and entrepreneurial self -efficacy influences competitive advantage.

Test of Hypotheses

The multiple-regression analysis was used to test the three research hypotheses on whether to reject or accept the null hypotheses. Therefore, this section tested and interpreted the hypotheses formulated in this study. The decision rule in the test of hypotheses is to accept the null hypothesis where the t-calculated is less than (<) the t-tabulated 0.05 significance level. Thus, where t-calculated is greater (>) t-tabulated, then the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis accepted.

Table 4: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	.183	.074	2.496	.014	
	Self-Confidence	.105	.030	.125	3.470	.001
	Achievement Orientation	.298	.033	.337	9.020	.000
	Persistence	.530	.048	.566	11.149	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Competitive Advantage

Source: SPSS Version 23.0 Output

H₀₁: Entrepreneurial self-confidence does not significantly influence competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

Table 4 shows that entrepreneurial self-confidence has a calculated t-value of 3.470 and a corresponding sig. value/probability value (PV) of 0.000. From the decision rule, since t-calculated = 3.470 is greater than t-tabulated $(_{0.05, 258}) = 1.96$; then the null hypothesis is rejected; and therefore, entrepreneurial self-confidence significantly influences competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State Nigeria. Thus, this finding implies that an increase in ($\beta = 0.105$) of competitive advantage was attributed to a unit increase in entrepreneurial self-confidence of SMEs in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

H0₂: Entrepreneurial achievement orientation does not significantly influence competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

Table 4 shows that entrepreneurial achievement orientation has a calculated t-value of 9.020 and a corresponding sig. value/probability value (PV) of 0.000. From the decision rule, since $t_{\text{calculated}} = 9.020$ is greater than $t_{\text{tabulated}} (0.05, 258) = 1.96$; then the null hypothesis is rejected; and therefore, entrepreneurial achievement orientation significantly influences competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State Nigeria. Thus, this finding implies that an increase in ($\beta = 0.298$) of competitive advantage was attributed to a unit increase in entrepreneurial achievement orientation of SMEs in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

H0₃: Entrepreneurial persistence does not significantly influence competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

Table 4 shows that entrepreneurial persistence has a calculated t-value of 11.149 and a corresponding sig. value/probability value (PV) of 0.000. From the decision rule, since $t_{\text{calculated}} = 11.149$ is greater than $t_{\text{tabulated}} (0.05, 258) = 1.96$; then the null hypothesis is rejected; and therefore, entrepreneurial persistence significantly influences competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State Nigeria. Thus, this finding implies that an increase in ($\beta = 0.530$) of competitive advantage was attributed to a unit increase in entrepreneurial persistence of SMEs in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The result revealed that there is a positive significant influence of entrepreneurial self- efficacy on competitive advantage of SMEs in Bayelsa State. The current finding disagrees with the earlier finding of Chen et al. (1998) who found no correlation between a firm's performance and the founder's ESE but supports Forbes (2005) who found a positive correlation between a total ESE score and overall revenue performance of these firms. However, Forbes (2005) did not analyze the individual ESE dimensions impact on performance. Other research has also linked the business founder's self-confidence with positive firm performance (Choe et al., 2013; Hmieleski and Corbett, 2008).

Similarly, the findings confirm the previous study of Adim and Poi (2019) who examined the relationship between entrepreneurial risk-taking and performance of women entrepreneurs in Rivers State and found that there is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial risk-taking and performance of women entrepreneurs in Rivers State. The study thus concludes that entrepreneurial risk-taking enhance the performance of women entrepreneurs in Rivers State with regards to contribution to household sustenance and contribution to employment generation.

The finding equally agrees with the study conducted by Nga and Shamuganathan (2010) who examined the impact of entrepreneurial self-efficacy on the competitive advantage of small and medium-sized enterprises in Malaysia. The results indicated a positive relationship between entrepreneurial self-efficacy and competitive advantage. Entrepreneurs with higher levels of self-efficacy were found to be more proactive in seeking opportunities, making strategic decisions, and effectively utilizing resources, thereby gaining a competitive edge. In a study by Liñán and Santos (2007) on entrepreneurial intentions and self-efficacy, it was found that self-efficacy positively influenced the likelihood of individuals starting a business. This suggests that individuals with higher self-efficacy are more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities, which can ultimately contribute to the competitive advantage of their ventures. Another study by Rauch and Frese (2007) explored the relationship between self-efficacy, innovation behaviour, and the performance of entrepreneurs. The findings revealed that entrepreneurs with

higher self-efficacy levels were more inclined to engage in innovative behaviours, leading to enhanced competitive advantage and business performance.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study highlight a positive and significant influence of entrepreneurial self-efficacy on the competitive advantage of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Bayelsa State. This implies that when entrepreneurs have a strong belief in their own abilities and skills related to entrepreneurship, it can lead to enhanced competitive advantages for their businesses. The finding has practical implications for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and support organizations in Bayelsa State.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need to encourage and support aspiring and existing SME owners in to develop and enhance their entrepreneurial self-confidence. This can be achieved through entrepreneurship education and training programs, mentorship initiatives, and networking opportunities that focus on building self-belief, risk-taking abilities, and resilience.
2. SME owners/ managers should encourage and foster a culture of achievement orientation. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns, training programs, and mentorship initiatives that emphasize the importance of setting challenging goals, taking calculated risks, and pursuing excellence.
3. SME owners/ managers should promote the importance of entrepreneurial persistence by emphasising the need to stay committed, determined, and resilient in the face of challenges and setbacks. This can be done through entrepreneurship education programs, workshops, and mentorship initiatives that highlight real-life examples of successful entrepreneurs who have demonstrated persistence.

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