

Entrepreneurial Competence and Sustainability of Manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Delta State

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***Abstract:** This study examines the effect of entrepreneurial competence on the sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Delta State Nigeria. The specific objectives are to determine the effect of strategic competency, and to examine the effect of learning competency; on the sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Delta State. The study adopts a survey research approach, using questionnaire administration for data generation from a sample of 327 owners/ manager of the selected manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Delta State Nigeria. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The t-test from regression analysis (statistical package for social science, version 25.0) was used for test of hypothesis. Findings showed that strategic competency ($t= 7.19, p= 0.014, \beta=.813$), and learning competency ($t= 9.02, p= 0.002, \beta=.804$); had significant/positive effect on the sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Delta State Nigeria. The study concludes that entrepreneurial competence (strategic competence and learning competence) can be considered a necessary factor in manufacturing small and medium enterprise competitiveness (in terms of organizational responsiveness and competitiveness) as they have potentials for enhancing the firms sustainability through creating a conducive atmosphere for identifying opportunities across the marketplace and develop viable opportunities. The study recommends, amongst others, that management of manufacturing small and medium enterprises should continuously embrace strategic competence as an enabler through establishing, evaluating and executing firm's strategies, as it will enhance their sustainability towards delivering innovative products and keep the firm in a better competitive posture.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Across the globe, the sustainability of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and its contributions to the economic growth and sustainable development of nations is acknowledged, as they are known for their leading role in promoting grassroots economic and equitable sustainable development. The world has over the years developed into an entrepreneurial economy for creating businesses that are new and unique and also entrepreneurs are applauded for being heroes in developing new economics and industries that are competitive. In an environment which is rapidly evolving in terms of competition and change, embracing entrepreneurial approach with relevant entrepreneurial skills and competencies as a foundation of strategic management is essential (Yakubu *et al.*, 2021). Due to the advent of globalization, the business environment continues to experience various forms of competition. As a result of new technologies, digital businesses are playing out globally where very small businesses have turned into global ones and local players

into world players. This reality no doubt has collapsed all the business bricks and walls and consequently changed the rules of the business game globally. Managers and business owners who desire to establish a sustainable business venture, grow it, and survive in the global business market must think, calculate, and be competently qualified to face the global business jungle (Umar, 2018; Anoke *et al.*, 2022).

It is believed that all successful businesses derive strength from entrepreneurial competencies of managing a given firm (Oyakhire and Makpor, 2021). Thus small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are universally recognized as seedbeds for economic growth and development. In Europe, SMEs create 70% of employment openings and contribute about 50% to 60% of global productivity (Ibidunni *et al.*, 2021). In Nigeria, SMEs are the largest employers of labour and contribute significantly to the development of the economy. Small and medium enterprises achieve these laudable contributions despite their small sizes and limited entrepreneurial competencies. Afolabi *et al.* (2021) observe that while entrepreneurial competencies are necessary for business success, the lack of such competencies significantly hampers SME performance in Nigeria.

The combined utilization of competencies affords SMEs some measure of competitive advantage as well as the chance to survive, thrive and achieve high performance (Danibrahim *et al.*, 2022). Entrepreneurial competencies assist SME owners in recognizing industry opportunities, marshalling resources and delivering products and services effectively and efficiently (Ibidunni *et al.*, 2021). Thus, the enhancement of the competency of entrepreneur will better equip the entrepreneur to tackle various challenges either from the immediate or external environment (Akhigbe and Onuoha, 2020). Competencies of an entrepreneur are the bedrock which enhances the success of firms (Wickramaratne *et al.*, 2014).

Sustainability consists of fulfilling the needs of the current generations without compromising the needs of the future generations, while ensuring a balance between economic growth, environmental care and social wellbeing (Kaigama, 2023). Sustainability link to contemporary entrepreneurial competence can be understood through a set of appropriate competencies used to accomplish key occupational tasks at a satisfactory or superior level (Ituen, 2022). Contemporary entrepreneurial competencies are directly linked to key global occupational tasks and are integrated clusters, owing to the fact that SMEs as clusters, propels economic growth (Oluwabunmi *et al.*, 2024), hence the need for a focus on them to be healthy in competition, requires a look at how to improve on their of domain of specific and generic competencies needed by entrepreneurs for global business success (Ukata and Silas-Dikibo, 2022). Thus, entrepreneur competencies are crucial to achieving long-term sustainability. Consequently, this study seeks to examine the effect of entrepreneur competence on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Delta State Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

With specialized skills and abilities needed to navigate the business environment, projects entrepreneurial competencies as veritable tool. It is observed that in spite of its mention among manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Nigeria and particularly in Delta State, there are observed underutilizations of its gains. Despite the efforts of the government and nongovernmental organizations over the years, there are yet observed failures and shut down of the manufacturing small and medium enterprises, making them even unable to survive over five years of its existence,

and the same is said of in Delta State Nigeria. The survival of the SMEs in Delta State Nigeria has been subjects of concerns to the government, the individuals and those operators of the SMEs.

Observations are that, despite the financial provision and other efforts made by governments and nongovernmental organizations in providing some essential services to manufacturing small and medium enterprises to aid their enterprises, yet the manufacturing small and medium enterprises still find it implausible to survive. Thus, it then call for reasoning that; are these manufacturing enterprises ignoring entrepreneurial competencies (such as strategic and learning competencies) in their business outlay; or that these competencies may have been undermined. Hence, the dynamics of sustainability in the manufacturing small and medium enterprises sub sector leaves so much worry as to what exactly is solely responsible for it. In the light of this, this study examines the effect of entrepreneur competencies on sustainability of manufacturing SMEs in Delta State Nigeria.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the effect of entrepreneur competencies on sustainability of manufacturing SMEs in Delta State Nigeria. The specific objectives are be: to

- i. determine the effect of strategic competency has on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Delta State Nigeria.
- ii. examine the effect of which learning competency on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Delta State Nigeria.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions are stated in line with the objectives of the study:

- i. What effect does strategic competency has on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Delta State Nigeria?
- ii. What is the effect of learning competency on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Delta State Nigeria?

1.5 Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses stated in the null form are tested in this study.

H₀₁: Strategic competency has no significant effect on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Delta State Nigeria?

H₀₂: Learning competency has no significant effect on sustainability of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises in Delta State Nigeria?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Concept of Entrepreneurial Competencies

Competence is the integration and combination of knowledge and skills that can be observed and measured which contributes to enhanced performance, and ultimately lead to entrepreneurial success (Al Mamun and Fazal, 2018). Entrepreneurial competence can be viewed as components that are rooted deeply in one's background and can be acquired from experience (Man and Lau, 2005). Entrepreneurial competencies are components for entrepreneurial activities, which are seen as behavioral elements (Umar *et al.*, 2018). Despite the increase in the interest of entrepreneurship

in Nigeria, experience has shown that traits alone do not often lead to high entrepreneurial performance without taking full advantage of entrepreneurial competence (Agumadu *et al.*, 2022).

Entrepreneurial competencies are crucial to SMEs' creation, management, and performance and their survival and growth and competitiveness (Utoyo *et al.*, 2019). Entrepreneurial competencies refer to a set of skills that are used in establishing and managing businesses (Riyanti *et al.*, 2022). The possessor of these competencies is an entrepreneur who adds and creates the business by organizing resources and opportunities to make profits (Qiu, 2022). Entrepreneurial competencies considered the most vital aspect of the survival, continual growth, and success of the business organization (Klyver and Arenius, 2020; Sakib and Shohoz, 2020).

2.2.2 Dimensions of Entrepreneurial Competencies

Due to the relatively chosen manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises sector in the Delta State, this study focuses on the strategic competency and learning competency. Hazhina-Ahmad *et al.* (2010) opined that there is much scope for identifying several entrepreneurial competency domains and for testing the impacts on the success of SMEs. Having examined the earlier literature on entrepreneurial competencies (Man and Lau, 2005; Khana and Sakib, 2020; Abey *et al.*, 2021; Ferreras *et al.*, 2021; Ibidunni *et al.*, 2021; Salveyra *et al.*, 2021) identified two key entrepreneurial competencies which the study has decided to isolate in this study as follows- strategy competency and learning competency.

i. Strategic Competency

A strategic competency is the competency of a business organization to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage. Strategic competence is the ability of organizations (or more precisely their members) to acquire, store, recall, interpret and act upon information of relevance to longer-term survival and well-being of the organization (Zaia and Al-Mamun, 2018; Agbenyegah and Mahohoma, 2020). Competencies reflect the organization's strategy; that is, they are aligned to short term missions and goals (Baylie and Singh, 2019). Strategic competencies equip people and organizations to take position and move in a highly dynamic context that poses constantly changing challenges to the realization of their aims. Strategic competencies strengthen independence, which empowers employees to contextualize decision making by navigating the multifaceted species of the situation in which they are involved (Man and Lau, 2005; Khana and Sakib, 2020).

ii. Learning Competency

Learning competency can be defined as proactively learning hands-on behaviors, learning from diverse resources and approaches, staying up-to-date, and eventually putting extracted information into practice (Bird, 2019; Sacramento and Tetxeira, 2019). According to Park *et al.*, (2019), learning competency is required for entrepreneurs to help them become adept in the environment. According to Mancinelli and Mazzanti (2009), learning competency is the key competence of the entrepreneurial process since it produces entrepreneurs' knowledge, which lowers potential risks and uncertainties and positively impacts firm performance. The researchers concluded that entrepreneurs learn via failure and business closure.

2.1.3 Concept of Sustainability

Sustainability has been interpreted by Atkinson *et al.* (2007) as an on-going process in which equity; ethical considerations, economy, and ecology have been combined in a way to address the needs of present and future generations of all living beings. Similarly, Diri (2021) defined

corporate sustainability as the responsiveness of an organization towards its work force, community, and the environment which the business operation is carried out. The appropriateness of the concept for this research derives from the fact that it is a framework that advocates the need to integrate economics and ecology not just for the protection of the environment, but also to promote development. This is very relevant to the question of environmental degradation posed by the exploratory and exploitative activities of manufacturing companies (Don-Baridam and Diri, 2022).

2.1.4 Measures of Sustainability

A sustainable business would focus on all three realms of sustainability (economic, social and environmental), which have often been referred to as ‘triple bottom line’ (Don-Baridam and Diri, 2022). For this study, organizational sustainability is measured by competitiveness and organizational responsiveness: which are subsumed in the three realms of sustainability (that is environmental, economic and social sustainability).

i. Competitiveness

Competitiveness is seen as a state in which organizations address dynamism in the external environment and continue to provide satisfactory products/services to customers which are better than the products offered by other players in the industry (Li and Liu 2014; Kaur and Metha, 2016). To Berdine (2008) a company’s competitiveness is defined as a condition which enables a firm to operate in a more efficient or otherwise higher quality manner than its competitors, and which results in benefits accruing. Competitiveness comes as a result of the core competence of an organization, and is one of the outstanding differences between a company and its rivals (Chukwuemeka and Onuoha, 2018).

ii. Organizational Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to ability of recognizing changes and quickly taking advantage and benefiting from them (Hanagandi and Melo, 2018). Responsiveness is the ability of a firm to respond to customers’ needs in terms of quality, speed and flexibility and it is characterized by combined goals such as time, quality and flexibility (Asree *et al.*, 2010). An organization’s sustainability paradigm is often determined by its ability to respond quickly to changes in the business environment. Responsiveness enables organizations to detect market changes quickly, reconfigure their processes to meet new market requirements, share information across organizational units, take maximum advantage of information processing systems, and adopt new product and process technologies ahead of competitors (Hoyt *et al.*, 2007).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This work is driven by the competency theory.

2.2.1 Competence theory

Competence theory is actually the most tangible and reasonable alternative to dominant strategic model of industrial organization. Introduced at a pioneering level by Bain (1959) and successively developed by Porter (1985). They argue that by concentrating excessive attention on product market strategies, the Porter framework neglects the cost of developing the basis of and implementing those very strategies. Resources must be acquired or built before a product market strategy may be implemented. Again, instead of an exclusive outward orientation toward market niches and advantageous cost-revenue combinations, the competence-based perspective also puts

emphasis on building up resources and organizational routines within the firm itself. Organization and production are emphasized, as well as the market.

According to Porter and Kramer (2006) competence theory proposes to bring, to the strategic reflection, new answers to the “longitudinal problem”, which consists of the individualization of the conditions that permit a firm to reach and hold on to a favorable competitive position over time. This problem, however, cannot be separated from the “cross-sectional problem”, aimed at understanding the causes at the base of the firm’s superior performance at a precise instance in time. Montgomery and Collis (2009) believe that the industry or business must remain the principal unit of analysis, as the possession of determinate resources or competencies should be, in any case, compared with those of the competitors: it follows that the firm competitiveness depends both on the attractiveness of the industry in which the firm competes and on its relative position in that industry. Then, if “the essence of strategy is choosing to perform activities differently than rivals do”, the core competencies enable the choice of diversity to be followed, furthermore firms are able to carry out activities at a lower cost or in such a way as to create a greater value for the customer lies in that which Porter calls “drivers” (Porter, 1996).

So, firms need, according to the analogy made by Porter (1996), to be “capabilities predators”, means to move rapidly from one business to another, copying capacities, developing them so as to assume the role of leader, and this is possible with the aid of flexible human resources and transversal management of the firm.

2.3 Review of Related Empirical Studies

Kaigama (2023) examined the influence of entrepreneurial competencies on the sustainable performance of small business by developing causal model using data obtained from small business in north-eastern Nigeria. A quantitative research approach was employed with aid of structural questioners to collect primary data from 307 small business owners/managers. The outcomes indicate that entrepreneurial competence plays an influential role in influencing small business performance. Specifically, relationship competencies; conceptual competencies; organizing competencies; strategic competencies; commitment competencies, and learning competencies; positively influence small business performance.

Ukata and Silas-Dikibo (2022) study investigated contemporary entrepreneurial competencies among undergraduates in Rivers State Polytechnics. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population was 2,555 with a sample size of 332, using Krechie and Morgan Table for determining a sample of a known population. Findings revealed that the level of self-management competencies acquired by undergraduates was at low level and the level of self-management competencies acquired by undergraduates in Rivers state polytechnics were based on (funding, self-management experience and education). Sakib *et al.* (2022) study empirically tested the impact of entrepreneurial competencies on the sustainable performances of SMEs in Bangladesh. The data were obtained from 115 entrepreneurs by a structured questionnaire. The results reveal that the organizing and leading, learning, relationship, and commitment competencies of entrepreneurs have a meaningful impact on SME performance. On the contrary, strategic and opportunity competencies have no effect on the performance of SMEs.

Babayayi *et al.* (2021) examines the competencies required for SME sustainable performance, as influenced by strategic, organizing and opportunity competency in North East Nigeria. Findings showed that engaging in core competencies of strategic thinking, strategic actions and visionary

leadership by the entrepreneur are positively related to SME performance. Engaging in organizing competencies, entrepreneurs require organizing and leading competencies which are positively related to SME performance. Yakubu *et al.* (2021) establish the effect of entrepreneurial skills on financial performance of listed manufacturing industries in Nigeria. The research adopted a research design that is descriptive and a sampling method known as stratified random to get the sample size. The collection of primary data was drawn from direct responses from listed manufacturing industries by using structured questionnaire. Findings indicated that creativity and leadership skills had significant effect on financial performance of manufacturing firms in Nigeria. Shodiya and Ojonike (2021) examined the effect of organizational learning competency on SMEs' performance. The study's population comprised all SME owners operating in Abeokuta North and Abeokuta South local government area. The study's findings revealed that information acquisition, information interpretation, and organizational memory significantly and positively affected SMEs' performance. Agbenyegah and Mahohoma (2020) study determined the impact of the three competencies to understand their impact on small business performance in Durban-South Africa. The study put forward the argument that opportunity, personal and strategic competencies impact on SMEs performance. The findings also provide rich insights to some of the reasons for the rampant small business failures country-wide including Thekwini regions of South Africa. Adamu (2020) examines the effect of entrepreneurial competencies on the performance of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in Benue State, Nigeria. The study focused on selected SMEs in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State. Findings of the study revealed that strategic competencies have significant effect on the performance of SMEs in Benue State. The study also revealed that conceptual competencies have significant effect on the performance of SMEs in Benue State. Finally, the study indicated that opportunity competencies have significant effect on the performance of SMEs in Benue State.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the survey research design. The data were collected in order to establish the effects of the independent on the dependent variables.

This study examined the effect of entrepreneurial competence on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Delta State, Nigeria.

The population of this study comprised of owners/ managers of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises operating in Benue State Nigeria. All manufacturing SMEs engaged in one form of manufacturing were part of this study registered in Delta State Ministries of Industries, Trade and investment; SMEDAN which gave a total of 342 manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises.

Since the population 342 is of a manageable size, all the population served as sample size for this study; thus, census sampling was adopted as all the population serves as the sample for the study.

The data for this study was collected through questionnaire administration. Structured questionnaire was designed to collect responses from the respondents. The questionnaire is divided into two sections (Section A and section B) for ease of administration and convenience. Section A is based on personal data of the respondents while section B contains questions on the study variables using five-point Likert-scale (Likert, 1932) which constitutes strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree.

Reliability was carried out. The test-and re-test method is used to test the dependent and independent variables used in the study. This is a way to assess how well one item's score is internally consistent with composite scores from all other items that remain. A Cronbach alpha of 0.70 and above is considered as reliable (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018).

Primary sources of data for this study were obtained mainly by means of questionnaire. The structured questionnaire was the chief instrument design and was used to collect data on entrepreneurial competencies as the basis for promoting sustainability in manufacturing SMEs in Delta State. The questionnaire was subjected to reliability and validity tests in the course of this study. The result of the pilot study used to modify' the original plan for the study where necessary, while ensuring that the research instruments measured exactly what they were designed for.

The model employed for this study is multiple regression analysis model which involves the independent variable (entrepreneurial competencies), and the dependent variable (firm sustainability). Therefore the following model specifications to test the formulated hypotheses were as follows:

The model for this research is given as

$$FS = f(ECO) = (STR, LER)$$

Where

FS = Firm Sustainability

ECO = Entrepreneurial Competencies

STR= Strategic Competency

LER = Learning Competency

The regression model, thus is given as

$$FS = x + \beta_1 STR + \beta_2 LER + e \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where

x = Intercept of the regression

$\beta_1 - \beta_2$ = parameter estimates

e = error term

A priori expectations are: $\beta_1 > 0, \beta_2 > 0$: it is expected that the analysis based on the model in question will help to test hypothesis H_{01} to H_{02} , answer the two research question for this study and achieve the two objectives.

Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyze data to evaluating the effect among the variables. Inferential statistics used is regression analysis, to analyze data in order to determine the effect of entrepreneurial competencies on sustainability of SMEs in Delta State Nigeria.

The hypotheses formulated for this study was tested using student t-statistics generated from the regression model. The level of significance for the study is 5%, for a two-tailed test. The decision rule was that we accept the null hypothesis if the critical/t-value (± 1.96) is greater than the calculated value, otherwise, we reject the null hypothesis. That is, using the student t-test (t-statistic), we say that a variable is statistically significant if t^* (t-calculated) is greater than the tabulated value of ± 1.96 under 95% (or 5%) confidence levels and it was statistically insignificant if the t^* is less than the tabulated value of ± 1.96 under 95 % (or 5%) confidence levels. Thus;

$H_0: \beta_0 = 0$ (Null hypothesis)

$H_1: \beta_1 \neq 0$ (Alternative hypothesis).

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of three hundred and forty two (342) questionnaires were distributed to respondents in the manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Delta State Nigeria, out of which three hundred and twenty five (327) were successfully filled and returned in analyzable form, recording a 95.6 % return rate.

4.1.1: Respondent Rate

The Table 1 shows and displays information on the response rate of questionnaires distribution and returned.

Table 1: Distribution and Research Returns of Questionnaire

Respondents	Questionnaire Distributed	Percentage Distributed	No of Successfully Filled and Returned	No of Unsuccessfully Filled and Not Returned	Percentage Returned
Owner/Manager	342	100%	327	15	95.6%
Total	342	100%	327	15	95.6%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Regression Analysis

The model used to test the hypotheses designed for this study, explores the effect of entrepreneurial competence on firm sustainability in Delta State Nigeria.

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adj.R Square	Std. Error of Estimate	Durbin Watson
1	.884 ^a	.781	.780	0.875	2.01

a: Predictors (constant), Strategic Competence, Learning Competence.

b. Dependent variable: Firm Sustainability

Source: SPSS printout (Version 25.0 for windows output), 2024.

Table 3: Regression Coefficient Result

Model	Beta	T	Sig
1 (Constant)	1.0411	11.99	.000
Strategic Comp.	.813	7.19	.014
Learning Comp.	.804	9.02	.002

Dependent variable: Firm Sustainability

Source: SPSS regression print out (version 25.0 for windows output), 2024.

Table 4: ANOVA^b for the overall significance of the model

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	100.006	2	50.003	24.19	.000 ^a
Residual	134.550	325	0.414		
Total	234.556	327			

a. Predictors: (constant); STR, LER

Dependent variable: FS

Regression Model Explained and Discussion of Findings

In the model, Strategic Competence and Learning Competence.; were used to predict the firms' sustainability. The F-statistics of regression model showed that the result is significant, as indicated by a value of the *F*-statistic, 24.19 and it is significant at the 5.0 percent level. The coefficient of determination (R-square), indicates that the model is reasonably fit in prediction, that is, 78.1 % change in manufacturing small and medium enterprises sustainability was jointly due to Strategic Competence and Learning Competence., while 21.9 % unaccounted variations was captured by the white noise error term. It showed that Strategic Competence and Learning Competence.; had significant effect on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Delta State Nigeria.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis one:

H₀₁: Strategic competence has no significant effect on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Delta State Nigeria.

From table 3, the (R²) statistic was 0 .781. Taking into the record the contribution of the explanatory variable in sustainability, from table 2, the beta value for strategic competence was 0.813. The beta value apparently indicated that the predictor variable of strategic competence had a positive effect on sustainability (t-computed 7.19 > t-critical 1.960, p=0.014< .05). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The findings of this investigation also agree with that of Kaigama *et al.* (2023), Babayayi *et al.* (2021), Yakubu *et al.* (2021), Agbenyegah and Mahohoma, (2020), Adamu (2020), amongst others; who all avers that entrepreneur's capacity to track the progress of strategic goals and set work

priorities that are aligned with corporate objectives by recognizing long-term issues, dangers, or opportunities, and matching present actions to strategic objectives; creates avenues for sustaining competitiveness. They also argue that matching the results to the strategic goals, redesign the business to fully fulfill long-term objectives, and analyze the costs and advantages of strategic measures; which help in broadening business understanding and thus enhance sustainability.

Therefore, this study concludes that there is a positive/significant effect of strategic competence on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Delta State Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: Learning competence has no significant effect on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Delta State Nigeria.

From table 2, the (R^2) statistic was 0 .781. Taking into the record the contribution of the explanatory variable in sustainability, from table 3, the beta value for learning competence was 0.804. The beta value apparently indicated that the predictor variable of learning competence had a positive effect on sustainability (t -computed 9.02 > t -critical 1.960, $p=0.002 < .05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The findings of this investigation also agree with Kaigama (2023), Ukata and Silas-Dikibo (2022), Sakib *et al.* (2022), Shodiya and Ojonike (2021), amongst others; who all avers that as an essential element in implementing the company's vision and the culture of encouraging a right learning setting is essential for obtaining more fantastic organizational overall performance and sustainable competitive advantage for SMEs. They argue that learning competency performs an essential function in any enterprise success or existence within an extremely competitive market because it significantly affects organizational performance and competitive advantage; as it creates a mechanism for matching resources and skills gained by minimizing time and costs in determining market demands, meeting customer demands, and addressing environmental changes. Thus, learning competency also stimulate entrepreneurs to pay attention to certain obligations required to improve learning, including training, seminars, weekly meetings, teamwork, and collaborative tasks to articulate its mission, vision, and objectives,

Therefore, this study concludes that there is a positive/significant effect of learning competence on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Delta State Nigeria

Conclusion

This study concludes that entrepreneurial competence (strategic competence and learning competence) can be considered a necessary factor in manufacturing small and medium enterprises sustainability (in terms of organizational responsiveness and competitiveness) as they have potentials for enhancing the firms sustainability through creating a conducive atmosphere for identifying opportunities across the marketplace and develop viable opportunities. Entrepreneurial competence can be seen to have implications for manufacturing small and medium enterprises to be able to enhance their response to customers and environmental needs swiftly and increase their competitiveness. Hence, entrepreneurial competence has positive and significant effect on sustainability of manufacturing small and medium enterprises in Delta State Nigeria.

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings and conclusions above, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Management of manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises should continuously embrace strategic competence as an enabler through establishing, evaluating and executing firm's strategies, as it will enhance their sustainability towards delivering innovative products and keep the firm in a better competitive posture,
- ii. Manufacturing Small and Medium Enterprises management should create an enabling environment for learning competence to strive by learning from diverse resources and approaches and putting extracted information into practice; as this will enhance the organizations' prowess for better innovativeness, responsiveness and improved competition.

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