

## Workers Competence Management and Survival of SME'S in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State

**Tuodolo, Daniel Patrick**

Assistant Lecturer

Department of Management

Faculty of Management Sciences, Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State

danieltuodolo@ndu.edu.ng

+2347067953356

**Odo, Tare Love**

Department of Office and Information Management

Faculty of Management Sciences, Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State

odotarelove@ndu.edu.ng

+2348068126819

DOI 10.56201/ijeblm.vol.11.no3.2025.pg215.231

---

### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this research is to examine the empirical relationship between workers competence management and survival of SME's in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. Cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. Data was collected through a survey questionnaire from eighty four (84) employees drawn from five (5) selected SME's operating in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. The statistical analysis was conducted using Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient to test the hypotheses. The findings of the study indicate that workers competence management has a positive and significant relationship with the sustainability of SME's in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state. The study recommends that management of SME's should constantly engage their staff on competence management training that will develop their competence level so as to sustain the organization.*

**Keywords:** *SME Sustainability, Employee Competence Management, Human Capital Development, Adaptability and Competitiveness.*

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria being a developing country faces high rates of unemployment and poverty. These economic hardship has led to entrepreneurship whereby many people with small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) started business. SMEs plays critical roles in job creation, income distribution, poverty alleviation and economic growth because they account for a significant proportion of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Adegbite, 2021; Ogujiuba, 2020). Because of their colossal impact on national development, the sustainability and viability of SMEs have become topical issues of enormous importance

to researchers, industry players and policy-makers alike (Adebisi & Oni, 2019). The sustainability of how SMEs help reduce social injustices that are related to poverty and unemployment is also essential in the sense that they are of course quite important for maintaining economic stability.

But, the economic atmosphere in which small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operate in Nigeria, particularly in Bayelsa State, is very turbulent and characterized by intense competition, economic uncertainty, high operational cost, infrastructural deficit and inconsistent policies (Ebitu, 2020). Factors such as erratic electric power supply, inflationary pressures and limited access to finance often compound the problems faced by SMEs and put them at risk of survival (Obi, 2022). Such complications prove difficult for many SMEs to handle, leading to company failures and lowered contribution towards economic growth (Olokoyo et al., 2021). It is also essential that SME ensures their survival by adopting creative strategies to enhance resilience and adaptation in an increasingly dynamic business environment (Akinyemi & Adejumo, 2021).

According to Oke & Alaka (2020), human capital is critical for the sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) since firms require personnel who possess capabilities to advance performance, innovation, and sustainability in the long run. Zsolnai (2015:3) defines a sustainable organization as one which manages employees' capacities appropriately preserving the equilibrium between social duty and economic winning. The reality is that when company leadership prioritizes maximizing profits over developing their people who ultimately create company culture, they risk not only long-term sustainability but also the overall health of the company (Hanaysha, 2016). In light of this, academics have highlighted the necessity for business executives to develop strong competencies that allow them to build organizational resilience, adjust to market changes, and guarantee long-term growth (Ezenwakwelu & Chukwuma, 2021).

Enhancing employee capabilities is crucial for increasing strategic growth, productivity, and adaptability (Tripathi & Agrawal, 2019). In order to improve performance and competitiveness, competency management entails matching personnel abilities, attitudes, and knowledge with corporate objectives (Ellström & Kock, 2018). Businesses that make investments in the development of their human capital typically see improvements in performance and innovation (Akpotu & Ozioko, 2020). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that competency-based training and development initiatives have a major positive impact on company sustainability, organizational efficacy, and employee engagement (Bishwas, 2021).

In order to increase workers' productivity and organizational sustainability, Nigerian SMEs must give utmost priority to effective competence management because the global business environment is becoming more sophisticated (Evwierhurhoma & Oga, 2020). Internationalization, technological development, along with legal development, is making

the business environment more volatile, and this requires proactive action to circumvent challenges and maximize opportunities (Umoh & Amah, 2019). Through ensuring that staff members have the skills and expertise necessary to meet the demands of a job, successful competency management eliminates inefficiencies, minimizes waste, and enhances overall business performance (Nasina & Doris, 2021).

Previous studies have analyzed the influence of employee competence development on job performance and discussed how it fosters creativity, job satisfaction, and business success (Ellström & Kock, 2018). Empirical writings on employee competence management and long-term SME sustainability in Bayelsa State are very scarce, however. It is necessary to fill this gap in order to come up with evidence-based policies and anticipatory measures that will enhance the survival and longevity of SMEs. In an attempt to enable company managers, policymakers, and researchers to have something meaningful, this research seeks to examine the relationship between employees' competence management and the survival of SMEs in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

SMEs are critical to economic growth, job creation, and poverty alleviation, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria (Adebayo & Okonkwo, 2022; Eneh, 2021). Nevertheless, human resource issues—especially those relating to workers' productivity, retention, and competence—are increasingly threatening their long-term viability (Ogujiuba & Okezie, 2022). A skilled and committed workforce capable of adapting to dynamic business environments is paramount to the success of SMEs, yet most of the SMEs in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, are confronted with severe employee issues that make their survival and competitiveness an uphill task (Chukwuma & Ezenwakwelu, 2022).

Among the most significant human resource challenges that confront SMEs is the high rate of turnover among Yenagoa workers. Awful working conditions, no professional development opportunities, and low salaries explain the reality that the majority of SMEs cannot maintain skilled employees (Okeke & Nwosu, 2021). High employee turnover rates compromise the stability and development of SMEs since they result in high training and recruitment expenses, frequent interruption of business operations, and loss of essential institutional knowledge (Akinyemy & Adejumo, 2022). Additionally, exiting employees tend to expose competitors to trade secrets, business information, and plans, an element that promotes competition in the market and lowers the competitive edge of SMEs (Ezenwakwelu & Chukwuma, 2022).

In addition, another key problem for SMEs is employees' disengagement and discommitment. Most SME employees are unmotivated and do not feel a sense of ownership, often prioritizing personal agendas over organizational objectives (Evwierhurhoma & Oga, 2022). This mismatch leads to inefficiency, poor customer service, and too many workplace conflicts that adversely affect business performance (Uzonwanne, 2022). In addition, the absence of performance management systems and

rewards for high performers aggravates this situation by leading employees to believe that their efforts do not yield fruits, further lowering productivity and engagement (Umoh & Amah, 2021).

Additionally, underdevelopment of skills and low staff competence are some of the threats to the survival of SMEs. Technical skill, problem-solving capability, and customer handling skill are needed for business growth and operational effectiveness, which the majority of Yenagoa SME workers do not possess (Akpotu & Ozioko, 2021). The absence of systematic training initiatives and capacity development strategies has led to a skills gap that reduces productivity and service quality (Nasina & Doris, 2021). As most of the employees are not interested or not able to keep up with technological advancements, this weakness is particularly realized in increasing difficulties SMEs face in implementing available business technologies, further diminishing operational efficiency (Ezenwa et al., 2023).

Most SMEs in Yenagoa continue to neglect strategic workforce management practices that facilitate skill acquisition, employee retention, and enhanced productivity amidst growing complexities in business environments (Olokoyo et al., 2023). Palmer and Bui (2023) note that deliberate investment in employees' competency management will enhance the competitiveness of SMEs. For SMEs in Yenagoa to be made sustainable in the long term, these workforce challenges need to be resolved. To provide practical knowledge to business practitioners, lawmakers, and researchers alike, this research seeks to explore the empirical relationship between employee competence management and SME survival.

### **Research Objectives**

The study main objective is to examine the empirical relationship between workers competence management and survival of SME's in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state. The specific objectives are:

1. To ascertain the relationship between competence development and adaptability of SME's in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state.
2. To examine the relationship between competence development and competitiveness of SME's in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state.
3. To evaluate the relationship between competence monitoring and adaptability of SME's in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state.
4. To examine the relationship between competence monitoring and competitiveness of SME's in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state.

### **Hypotheses**

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between competence development and adaptability of SME's in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between competence development and competitiveness of SME's in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant relationship between competence monitoring and adaptability of SME's in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant relationship between competence monitoring and competitiveness of SME's in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state.

## **LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### **Worker Competence Management**

A key component of human resource development is worker competence management, which includes the methodical identification, evaluation, and improvement of employee skills, knowledge, and abilities to match organizational goals (Murdiono et al., 2024). Successful competence management not only improves individual performance but also propels organizational success by encouraging a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability. Recent research has shown that work competencies have a significant impact on job performance; among Chinese university counselors, Cao et al. (2024) found that knowledge, skills, traits, and motivations are all significantly correlated with job performance. This emphasizes the significance of a comprehensive approach to competence management that takes into account different aspects of employee capabilities.

Additionally, the dynamic nature of contemporary workplaces demands continuous competence development. Ellström (2006), competence-in-use—the successful application of knowledge and skills in work performance—is affected by job characteristics and individual capacities. In accordance with this view, organizations ought to offer conditions for enabling the practical application of competencies, thereby enhancing performance. Successful competence management is particularly critical in the environment of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) since, according to a study by Murdiono et al. (2024), factors like competence, discipline, and integrity are primary drivers of employees' performance. Since SMEs are generally confronted with limited resources, strategic competence management can serve as a driver of productivity and competitive edge sustainer.

### **Components of Worker Competence Management**

#### **Competency Development**

Competency development, according to De Vos et al. (2011), is the systematic enhancement of employees' skills, knowledge, and abilities to more closely match company goals and react to evolving market demands. Competency development, according to Bach & Sulikova (2019), is enhancing, restructuring, and refreshing an individual's professional, systematic, social, and personal action possibilities. The strategy is necessary for SMEs to be competitive and innovative. Systematic and formal methods of competence development are highlighted as necessary by Kock and Ellström (2011), who are convinced that systematic methods can yield improved outcomes. Oztemel and Ozel (2021) also highlight the necessity of having systematic models of assessment and development by presenting a conceptual framework to evaluate the competency levels of

SMEs. SMEs need to build organizational competence in the area of digital transformation to compete under the evolving market scenario (Gómez et al., 2020). SMEs are able to enhance their flexibility, innovation, and sustainable development through investing in competency development.

#### Competence Monitoring in SMEs

In SMEs, competency monitoring comprises the ongoing evaluation of workers' competencies to guarantee alignment with company goals and adaptability to market shifts (Morales-Gamboa & Sucar, 2020). This continuous assessment enables SMEs to quickly detect skill gaps and carry out focused improvements. Competency monitoring, according to Zeb-Obipi (2017), is the process of imparting the required information and determining how it is applied by assessing the competent performance of employees. This ongoing assessment of employees' competencies is intended to give management input regarding the effective and efficient use or application of employees' competencies inside the company. It also gives feedback on how well the goals established during workers' competence planning and development are being met, and when appropriate progress has not been accomplished, corrective action is taken right away to address any irregularities.

Kock and Ellström (2011) emphasize the importance of formalized competence development strategies, such as rigorous monitoring to assess training programs' efficacy and make required modifications. Festing and Schäfer (2014) describe a multilevel approach to competence management, which emphasizes the significance of taking organizational, team, and individual levels into account while tracking competencies within creative SMEs.

#### **SME's Survival**

In the business world, survival—which is frequently used interchangeably with sustainability—refers to an organization's capacity to continue operations throughout time while adjusting to market, environmental, and financial problems (Hedström, 2021). Maintaining financial viability, competitiveness, and adaptability in a business climate that is becoming more and more dynamic is essential for small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) to survive. Brinckmann et al. (2019) believe that the adoption of innovation, optimization of resources, and strategic management are all linked directly to SME survival.

Since SMEs account for GDP growth, economic diversification, and employment creation, their survival is crucial. In most developing economies, SMEs create the lion's share of employment and constitute over 90% of businesses (World Bank, 2022). Financial constraints, competitiveness in the market, legal barriers, and technological upheaval, however, strive to destabilize their survival (Gherghina et al., 2020). The ability of SMEs to overcome these obstacles determines their survival and overall impact on economic growth.



As per studies, there are a number of factors that contribute significantly to the survival of SMEs, such as managerial capacity, access to financial capital, and application of digital transformation strategies (Mishrif & Khan, 2023). Further, during economic crises, supporting mechanisms like business networks and governmental policies are pivotal to SME survival (Adam & Alarifi, 2021). The survival of SMEs is important for economic resilience and sustainable development because SMEs are susceptible to market fluctuations.

### **Measures of Sustainability**

#### Adaptability

Flexibility, as Reeves and Deimler (2012) characterize it, is an organization's capacity to respond to environmental shifts in a manner that preserves performance and competitiveness. Due to their limited resources and exposure to market fluctuations, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) must be capable of changing. Modern firms are exposed to increasingly frequent change, and thus there is a necessity to develop the competencies necessary for rapid adaptation to stay competitive (Al-Haddad et al., 2024). Companies wanting to use disruption as a source of competitive advantage need to develop an agile and resilient workforce (McKinsey & Company, 2023). SMEs can negotiate uncertainty, capture new opportunities, and enable long-term survival through the process of flexibility development.

#### Competitiveness in SMEs

A firm's capacity to offer products or services that have the capability of meeting or even exceeding the demand of the market in a bid to sustain or enhance its share in the market is referred to as competitiveness (Mroziwski, 2011). SMEs must link their in-house capabilities with the external market's expectations in order to compete, as cited by Oluwaseun and Olumide (2023). They must also ensure an innovative environment, flexibility, and sustainable competitive advantage. Competitive advantage needs to be sustained by an organization through dynamic capabilities, which are the ability to integrate, create, and reconfigure internal and external competencies in order to address rapidly changing environments (Teece, 2024). SMEs can enhance their competitiveness and ensure their survival and development in the rapidly changing business environment of the present by focusing on the following factors.

### **Theoretical Review: Human Capital Theory**

The Human Capital Theory was formulated by economists Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker in the 1960s. It holds that expenditure on education, training, and healthcare makes a person more productive, thereby their economic worth (Becker, 1962; Schultz, 1961). Under this hypothesis, human abilities behave as physical capital, and deliberate investment yields dividends in the form of higher productivity and financial returns.

The Human Capital Theory highlights the significance of competency in personnel to the success of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). As SMEs are often short of finance, human capital optimization is essential to their feasibility and competitiveness.

Developing a competent workforce enhances innovativeness, enhances operational efficiency, and makes the firm more resilient overall. Companies are well-placed to deal with changing consumer needs, economic uncertainty, and industry change when they actively direct their human resources. Human capital theory aligns with competency management, which involves the intentional development and monitoring of employee competencies. Small and medium-sized enterprises can enhance worker productivity and flexibility by building a culture of learning and continuous skill development. Flexibility is the key to long-term sustainability and competitiveness. Hence, a theoretical explanation of how strategic investment in employee development aids the survival and growth of SMEs is given by using human capital theory to explain competence management.

### **Empirical Review**

Nwinyokpugi and Dinee (2022) spoke about business sustainability and employees' competence in the context of Rivers State's banking sector. A sample was taken from the 420 permanent employees of the banks that were targeted. 201 sampled respondents were achieved through the use of the Krejcie and Morgan sampling determination table. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistical statistics were used to analyze data that was gathered using the closed-ended, 4-point Likert scale questionnaire. For clarity purposes, the evidence was presented using SPSS 20.0. The study findings indicated a strong positive correlation between the areas of staff competency that were evaluated and the long-term viability of the banking industry in Rivers State. In order to improve organizational performance, the study emphasized the need to develop competences in areas of communication, empathy, adaptability, social relations, and technical skill. Venn, Perez Salgado, and Vandenbussche (2022) conducted an empirical investigation lasting two years to identify the key competencies for sustainable development among senior sustainability practitioners in Flanders, Belgium.

Data were collected through workshops, interviews, and web-based questionnaires within an iterative action-reflection process, following an action research design. Sustainability research competencies and sustainability intervention competencies were the two complementary competency sets revealed by the study. Professionals can learn about sustainability issues and devise methods of enhancing change due to these clusters. The authors recommend integrating these competences into higher education courses, human resource management, and sustainability science courses. Barnabas and Ujadughele, in their study in 2023, examined "Worker Competence Planning and Organizational Resilience of Fast-Food Companies in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State." The research employed a survey design and sampled employees from specific Yenagoa fast-food chains. There was a positive relationship between organizational resilience and effective competence planning. To enhance their resilience against a dynamic business environment, it was recommended that fast-food businesses invest in systematic competence planning. In the systematic review "Action Competence in Sustainable Development (ACiSD)," Batsa, Li, and Khajuria (2024) focused on building sustainability competencies through action-orientated activities. In the review of several education projects, the importance of



including hands-on, action-orientated learning to build action readiness, complete knowledge, and openness to alternative perspectives was highlighted. Schools must include more experiential learning experiences, the authors opine, for building these competences efficiently.

## METHODOLOGY

The study design used was a cross-sectional survey. Selected small and medium-sized businesses in Yenagoa that are included in the SMEDAN Schedule (2022), have been in business for at least seven (7) years, and employ at least fifteen (15) employees make up the study's population. Five (5) of these SME's that fit the aforementioned requirements make up the entire population, which consists of eighty-four (84) employees. Data was gathered using a closed-ended questionnaire labeled and scored on a Likert scale (1–5). With the use of SPSS, the acquired data was descriptively analyzed using inferential statistics (Spearman Rank Correlational Coefficient).

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The result below is the SPSS outcome on the study dimensions and measures from the independent and dependent variables.

### Correlation Outcome between Competency Development and Adaptability.

#### Correlation

			Competence development	Adaptability
Spearman's rho	Competence development	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.777**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	84	84
	Adaptability	Correlation Coefficient	.777**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	84	84

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

Source: SPSS, 2025.

From the correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.777$ , the study outcome shows that there is a high positive and significant relationship between competence development and adaptability. Additionally, the significance level of this relationship is observed to be  $p = 0.00$ , which is less than or equal to the 0.01 threshold ( $p \leq 0.01$ ). This statistically significant result means that we can confidently reject the null hypothesis that stated there is no relationship between competence development and adaptability. This supports the findings of Smith

and Johnson's (2021) study, which indicated that competence development is essential for improving workers' ability to adjust to shifting work situations. Their study, which looked at professional training programs in fast-paced industries, found that individuals' capacity to adapt to organizational changes and skill gain were strongly positively correlated.

**Correlation Outcome between Competence development and Competitiveness.**  
**Correlation**

			Competence Development	Competitiveness
Spearman's rho	Competence Development	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.948**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	84	84
	Competitiveness	Correlation Coefficient	.948**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	84	84

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

Source: SPSS, 2025.

From the correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.948$ , the study outcome shows that there is a very high positive and significant relationship between competence development and competitiveness. Additionally, the significance level of this relationship is observed to be  $p = 0.00$ , which is less than or equal to the 0.01 threshold ( $p \leq 0.01$ ). The null hypothesis, which claimed that competence development and competitiveness have no relationship, can be rejected in light of this statistically significant result. This claim is supported by study by Garcia and Martinez (2020), which discovered that businesses that put a high priority on competence development have a major competitive advantage in the marketplace. Their analysis of high-achieving companies showed that ongoing skill development promotes creativity, productivity, and general competitiveness in the marketplace. This is consistent with current research, which highlights the importance of competence development in fostering organizational competitiveness.

### Correlation Outcome of Competence Monitoring and Adaptability. Correlation

			Competence Monitoring	Adaptability
Spearman's rho	Competence Monitoring	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.468**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	84	84
	Adaptability	Correlation Coefficient	.468**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	84	84

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

Source: SPSS, 2025.

From the correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.468$ , the study outcome shows that there is a positive and significant relationship between competence monitoring and adaptability. Additionally, the significance level of this relationship is observed to be  $p = 0.00$ , which is less than or equal to the 0.01 threshold ( $p \leq 0.01$ ). The null hypothesis, according to which competence monitoring and adaptability are unrelated, can be rejected in light of this statistically significant finding. This result is in line with research by Brown and Taylor (2019), who highlighted how ongoing competence monitoring improves workers' capacity to adjust to changing job requirements. According to their research, companies that routinely evaluate and improve the skills of their workforce report better levels of adaptability, which helps them react well to shifting market conditions.

### Correlation Outcome of Competence Monitoring and Competitiveness. Correlation

			Competence Monitoring	Competitiveness
Spearman's rho	Competence Monitoring	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.670**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	84	84
	Competitiveness	Correlation Coefficient	.670**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	84	84

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

Source: SPSS, 2025.

From the correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.670$ , the study outcome shows that there is a high positive and significant relationship between competence monitoring and competitiveness. Furthermore, the significance level of this relationship is observed to be  $p = 0.00$ , which is less than or equal to the 0.01 threshold ( $p \leq 0.01$ ). Given this statistically significant outcome, the null hypothesis—which held that competence monitoring and competitiveness are unrelated—is rejected. This result is consistent with Williams and Chen's (2021) research, which showed that companies that regularly assess employee competency have a competitive edge. The relationship between competence monitoring and competitiveness is further supported by their study, which indicated that systematic tracking of skills and performance helps businesses to discover gaps, improve workforce capabilities, and retain a strong market position.

### **Conclusion**

The study was carried out to investigate the relationship between worker competency management and survival of SME's in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state. From the data generated and analyzed, there were some clear findings which revealed that there is a significant relationship between all the dimensions of worker competency management and measures of SME's survival. In summary, the study has demonstrated an empirical connection between the survival of SMEs in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state, and worker competency management.

### **Recommendations**

1. To ensure long-term organizational success, management of SMEs should place a high priority on competence development programs that improve staff members' capacity to adjust to new responsibilities and shifting business circumstances.
2. Since ongoing learning encourages creativity and resilience in a cutthroat market, management of SMEs should consistently provide competence management training to their employees in order to improve their abilities and maintain the company.
3. To stay afloat, competitive, and relevant in the industry, Bayelsa State SMEs' management should periodically reassess the number of employees and their degree of competence. This will allow them to successfully respond to shifting market needs.
4. To track staff skill development and maintain industrial competitiveness, management of SMEs in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, should put in place a systematic competence monitoring system.

## References

- Adam, N. A., & Alarifi, G. (2021). Innovation practices for survival of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the COVID-19 times: The role of external support. *Journal of Innovation & Entrepreneurship*, 10(1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13731-021-00156-6>
- Adebayo, F., & Okonkwo, E. (2022). SME development and economic transformation in Nigeria. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Business Development*, 9(3), 134-152.
- Adebisi, T., & Oni, K. (2019). Sustainability of small and medium enterprises in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *African Journal of Management Studies*, 12(1), 101-119.
- Adegbite, A. (2021). The role of SMEs in Nigeria's economic growth. *Journal of Business and Economic Development*, 8(2), 45-59.
- Akinyemi, B., & Adejumo, S. (2021). The impact of innovation strategies on SME survival in Nigeria. *International Journal of Small Business Management*, 14(2), 75-92.
- Akinyemi, B., & Adejumo, S. (2022). Employee retention and SME performance in Nigeria: The mediating role of compensation and career development. *Human Resource Development Review*, 11(2), 112-129.
- Akpotu, C., & Ozioko, R. (2020). Human capital development and firm performance: Evidence from Nigerian SMEs. *Nigerian Journal of Business Administration*, 18(4), 233-251.
- Akpotu, C., & Ozioko, R. (2021). The role of employee competence in SME growth: A critical review. *Management Science Review*, 7(2), 94-112.
- Al-Haddad, S., Nour, A. N., & Ali, S. A. (2024). Organizational adaptability in a digital era: Strategies for sustainable business success. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 45(2), 112-128.
- Bach, A., & Sulikova, R. (2019). Competence development as a key factor for professional growth. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 11(5), 88-97.
- Barnabas, T., & Ujadughele, P. (2023). Worker competence planning and organizational resilience of fast-food companies in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. *Journal of Business Resilience*, 18(3), 45-62.
- Batsa, N., Li, X., & Khajuria, R. (2024). Action competence in sustainable development (ACiSD): A systematic review of action-oriented sustainability education. *Sustainability Science*, 19(1), 77-94.
- Becker, G. S. (1962). Investment in human capital: A theoretical analysis. *Journal of Political Economy*, 70(5), 9-49.

- Bishwas, R. (2021). The influence of competency-based training on employee engagement and corporate sustainability. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*, 12(1), 42-60.
- Brinckmann, J., Dew, N., Read, S., Mayer-Haug, K., & Grichnik, D. (2019). Of those who plan: A meta-analysis of the relationship between business planning and performance. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 34(1), 34-50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2018.08.002>
- Brown, P., & Taylor, A. (2019). Continuous competence monitoring and employee adaptability: A longitudinal analysis. *Human Resource Development International*, 22(4), 329-345.
- Cao, L., Wang, X., & Zhang, J. (2024). The impact of work competencies on job performance: Evidence from university counselors in China. *Asian Journal of Educational Research*, 16(1), 22-38.
- Chukwuma, P., & Ezenwakwelu, C. (2022). Workforce-related challenges in SMEs: A case study of Bayelsa State. *African Journal of Business and Economic Research*, 10(2), 177-192.
- De Vos, A., De Hauw, S., & Van der Heijden, B. I. (2011). Competency development and career success: The mediating role of employability. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 79(2), 438-447.
- Ebitu, E. (2020). Economic uncertainties and the survival of small businesses in Nigeria. *Journal of Economic Policy Studies*, 14(3), 78-94.
- Ellström, P. E. (2006). The meaning and role of reflection in work and education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 25(2), 127-143.
- Ellström, P. E., & Kock, H. (2018). Competence management in organizations: Theoretical perspectives and practical implications. *Scandinavian Journal of Business Research*, 20(1), 89-105.
- Eneh, O. (2021). The role of SMEs in employment generation and poverty alleviation in Nigeria. *Economic and Business Review*, 15(2), 73-88.
- Evwierhurmoma, E., & Oga, T. (2020). Competence management and organizational sustainability in Nigerian SMEs. *Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 13(4), 98-115.
- Evwierhurmoma, E., & Oga, T. (2022). Employee motivation and SME productivity: A study of workforce engagement. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(1), 65-81.



- Ezenwa, O., Okafor, U., & Adeyemi, B. (2023). Technology adoption and workforce productivity in Nigerian SMEs. *Journal of Technological Development*, 9(3), 120-136.
- Ezenwakwelu, C., & Chukwuma, P. (2021). Corporate leadership competencies and SME growth: A strategic approach. *Journal of Business Leadership and Innovation*, 8(2), 55-72.
- Festing, M., & Schäfer, L. (2014). Generational challenges to talent management: A framework for talent retention based on competence management. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 24(3), 290-305.
- Garcia, R., & Martinez, J. (2020). Competence development and competitive advantage in high-performing firms. *Strategic Management Review*, 15(2), 211-229.
- Gherghina, Ș. C., Botezatu, M. A., Hosszu, A., & Simionescu, L. N. (2020). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs): The engine of economic growth through investments and innovation. *Sustainability*, 12(1), 347. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12010347>
- Gómez, J., Costa, M., & Cazorla, A. (2020). Digital transformation and SME competence development. *Journal of Digital Business*, 10(1), 15-31.
- Hanaysha, J. (2016). Employee commitment and sustainability in organizations: The mediating role of competency development. *International Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 12(4), 210-225.
- Hedström, G. (2021). Organizational survival in uncertain environments: A strategic management perspective. *Journal of Business Sustainability*, 28(3), 55-71.
- Kock, H., & Ellström, P. (2011). Formal and integrated strategies for competence development in SMEs. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 23(4), 235-250.
- McKinsey & Company. (2023). The state of organizations 2023: Ten shifts transforming organizations. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com>
- Mishrif, A., & Khan, T. (2023). Digital transformation and SME sustainability: Strategic imperatives for the post-pandemic era. *Technology and Innovation Management Review*, 24(4), 78-95.
- Morales-Gamboa, A., & Sucar, L. (2020). Competence monitoring in SMEs: A strategic approach. *International Journal of Small Business Studies*, 17(1), 75-89.
- Mroziewski, M. (2011). Determinants of competitiveness in SMEs: A conceptual model. *Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 20(1), 21-36.

- Murdiono, A., Kurniawan, R., & Setiawan, A. (2024). Competence, discipline, and integrity: Their effects on employee performance in SMEs. *Journal of Business Ethics and Performance*, 19(2), 65-83.
- Nasina, M., & Doris, A. (2021). Competence management and business performance: A study of Nigerian SMEs. *Business and Management Research Journal*, 14(3), 210-225.
- Nwinyokpugi, P. N., & Dinee, B. (2022). Employee competence and business sustainability in the banking sector in Rivers State. *Nigerian Journal of Management Research*, 12(1), 32-48.
- Obi, C. (2022). Inflationary pressures and SME survival in Nigeria: A critical analysis. *Journal of Economic Trends*, 11(2), 98-112.
- Ogujiuba, K. (2020). SMEs and economic development in Nigeria: A review. *African Journal of Economic Policy*, 9(1), 33-48.
- Ogujiuba, K., & Okezie, B. (2022). Workforce challenges and SME performance in Nigeria. *International Journal of Small Business Economics*, 15(4), 101-119.
- Okeke, P., & Nwosu, C. (2021). Employee retention strategies in SMEs: The role of compensation and career development. *Human Resource Management Review*, 13(2), 189-205.
- Olokoyo, F., Adewumi, J., & Adebayo, T. (2021). Business sustainability and SME survival in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Business Economics*, 17(3), 129-146.
- Olokoyo, F., Adewumi, J., & Adebayo, T. (2023). Workforce strategic management and SME growth: An empirical perspective. *Journal of Business and Development Studies*, 20(1), 72-89.
- Oluwaseun, F., & Olumide, A. (2023). Achieving competitiveness in SMEs: The role of dynamic capabilities. *International Journal of Business Research*, 17(4), 89-105.
- Oztemel, E., & Ozel, E. (2021). Measuring competency levels of SMEs: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Industrial Management*, 14(1), 98-115.
- Palmer, J., & Biu, L. (2023). Strengthening SMEs' competitive ability through workforce competence management. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and SME Management*, 12(2), 55-73.
- Reeves, M., & Deimler, M. (2012). Adaptability: The new competitive advantage. *Harvard Business Review*, 90(7-8), 134-141.
- Schultz, T. W. (1961). Investment in human capital. *American Economic Review*, 51(1), 1-17.

- Smith, J., & Johnson, L. (2021). Competence development and employee adaptability: Insights from dynamic industries. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 33(6), 502-518.
- Teece, D. J. (2024). Dynamic capabilities and organizational competitiveness: A framework for business transformation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 45(1), 15-34.
- Tripathi, S., & Agrawal, S. (2019). Competency-based training for workforce development: A systematic review. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 23(3), 175-192.
- Umoh, G., & Amah, E. (2019). Regulatory challenges and SME sustainability in Nigeria. *Journal of Business Regulation and Policy*, 10(3), 115-132.
- Umoh, G., & Amah, E. (2021). Performance management and employee motivation in SMEs. *Nigerian Journal of Business Research*, 16(1), 58-74.
- Uzonwanne, C. (2022). Employee disengagement and organizational performance in SMEs: A case study of Bayelsa State. *African Journal of Business and Management*, 18(2), 77-92.
- Venn, R., Perez Salgado, F., & Vandenbussche, B. (2022). Key competencies for sustainable development: A two-year empirical study. *Sustainability Journal*, 14(3), 113-128.
- Williams, D., & Chen, H. (2021). Competence monitoring and competitive advantage: A systematic review. *Journal of Business Performance*, 26(4), 195-210.
- World Bank. (2022). *Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) finance: Improving SMEs' access to finance and finding innovative solutions to unlock sources of capital*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org>
- Zeb-Obipi, I. (2017). Competence monitoring and organizational performance. *Journal of Management Development*, 24(4), 112-128.
- Zsolnai, L. (2015). The ethical foundations of sustainable business. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 132(2), 321-333.