

# Entrepreneurial Leadership and Performance of Small Scale Enterprises in Nigeria

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## Abstract

*The study examined the effect of entrepreneurial leadership on the performance of small scale enterprises in Nigeria. The study's specific objective was to ascertain the extent to which situational entrepreneurial leadership and innovative entrepreneurial leadership affect operating efficiency. Descriptive survey research design was used in the study. The study population comprised 71,288 small-scale enterprise operators in Nigeria. Since studying the entire population was impractical, a sample size of 399 was determined using the Taro Yamane formula at a 5% margin of error. Primary data were gathered through a structured questionnaire designed using a five-point Likert scale. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. The study found the following: situational entrepreneurial leadership has a positive and significant effect on operating efficiency of small scale enterprises in Nigeria ( $\beta = 0.304$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ); innovative entrepreneurial leadership has a positive and significant effect on operating efficiency of small scale enterprises in Nigeria ( $\beta = 0.418$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). In conclusion, entrepreneurial leadership is not just a managerial attribute but a critical factor in optimizing operations within small enterprises, which often struggle with limited resources and volatile environments. The study recommends owners and managers of small-scale enterprises in Nigeria should actively adopt situational entrepreneurial leadership by tailoring their leadership approaches to suit specific business conditions, employee capabilities, and emerging challenges. This involves assessing each situation independently and responding with the most appropriate leadership behavior, whether directive, supportive, or delegative.*

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurial Leadership, Firm Performance, Situational Entrepreneurial Leadership, Innovative Entrepreneurial Leadership, Operating Efficiency*

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## 1.0 Introduction

Small-scale enterprises play a vital role in the growth and development of most emerging economies, including Nigeria. These businesses are often recognized as engines of employment generation, income distribution, poverty reduction, and grassroots economic development (Avordeh et al., 2024). In recent years, the business environment has become increasingly unpredictable, shaped by technological disruption, market instability, policy changes, and intense competition (Okoli, 2024; Idagu & Friday, 2025). These shifts demand a higher level of adaptability and innovation, particularly for small businesses that often operate with limited resources. As a result, attention has shifted toward leadership as a determining factor in whether a business can survive and grow under such conditions (Nawaz et al., 2025). It is no longer enough for entrepreneurs to simply possess technical skills or business knowledge; their leadership approach plays a critical role in shaping organizational direction, influencing employee behavior, and ensuring the achievement of operational goals. Within this setting, the

focus on entrepreneurial leadership has gained momentum, especially in relation to how it influences firm performance and operational efficiency (Putri et al., 2025).

In today's competitive business environment, the relevance of entrepreneurial leadership to firm performance cannot be overemphasized. Unlike traditional leadership styles that rely on fixed procedures and formal hierarchies, entrepreneurial leadership places a strong emphasis on opportunity recognition, adaptability, and proactive decision-making (Rehman et al., 2025). Firms that are led by individuals with entrepreneurial leadership qualities tend to be more flexible, innovative, and forward-thinking in how they respond to market changes. These qualities are especially necessary in small-scale enterprises, where rapid decisions must be made and where there is often no room for bureaucratic delays. The performance of a firm in this kind of environment is not only measured by profitability but also by how efficiently it manages its operations (Nworie & Mba, 2022), retains customers, and maintains a competitive edge. As businesses across Nigeria continue to navigate economic uncertainty, inflationary pressures, and infrastructure gaps, the need for a leadership style that promotes innovation, efficiency, and resilience becomes even more relevant. Awashreh and Hamid (2025) argued that entrepreneurial leadership serves as a bridge between opportunity and execution, allowing small firms to align their goals with market realities in order to improve performance.

Entrepreneurial leadership affects firm performance in many ways. It influences how resources are allocated, how decisions are made, and how employees are motivated to contribute to organizational goals (Razzaque et al., 2024). Leaders who adopt entrepreneurial approaches are more likely to encourage creativity, take calculated risks, and promote a culture of continuous learning. These characteristics have a direct impact on how well a firm can perform in terms of productivity, profitability, and customer satisfaction. For small-scale enterprises, where success often hinges on speed, adaptability, and lean operations, the leadership style adopted by the owner or manager can be the difference between growth and failure. Specifically, situational entrepreneurial leadership allows leaders to adapt their style based on the demands of a given moment, making it easier to respond to internal and external pressures (Putta, 2025). Innovative entrepreneurial leadership, on the other hand, drives the search for new solutions, products, and processes, which are essential for staying relevant in today's fast-changing markets. When leadership encourages experimentation and supports employees in trying new approaches, it becomes easier for the business to improve its processes, reduce waste, and operate more efficiently (Jundulloh et al., 2024). However, in many small-scale enterprises in Nigeria, this form of leadership is either lacking or poorly applied. Business owners often rely on rigid, outdated leadership methods that do not reflect the changing demands of the market. Instead of adapting their leadership approach to match current business realities, some entrepreneurs operate with little flexibility and are hesitant to embrace innovation (Getaneh et al., 2024). In several cases, leaders do not respond effectively to challenges, such as technological change, customer expectations, and staff development needs. This has resulted in many small businesses operating inefficiently, with high levels of waste, poor customer service, and low staff morale (Omeihe & Omeihe, 2023). Leadership decisions are sometimes based on personal instincts rather than on thoughtful analysis or teamwork, which limits the ability of the business to grow or withstand external shocks.

As a result of these challenges, many small businesses in Nigeria experience poor performance, frequent operational setbacks, and a short lifespan. The lack of effective entrepreneurial leadership leads to missed opportunities, declining competitiveness, and low productivity (Sultan et al., 2024). Businesses that could have expanded and created more jobs end up shutting down due to avoidable errors in leadership. Inconsistent decision-making, failure to motivate employees, and resistance to new ways of working all contribute to weak performance outcomes. This situation affects not only the businesses themselves but also the wider economy, as it limits the contributions these enterprises can make to national development.

Therefore, it becomes necessary to understand how situational and innovative entrepreneurial leadership styles can improve the operating efficiency and performance of small-scale enterprises in Nigeria.

### **1.1 Objective of the study**

The main aim of the study is to examine the effect of entrepreneurial leadership on the performance of small scale enterprises in Nigeria. The study's specific objectives are as follows:

1. To ascertain the extent to which situational entrepreneurial leadership affects operating efficiency of small scale enterprises in Nigeria.
2. To determine the extent to which innovative entrepreneurial leadership affects operating efficiency of small scale enterprises in Nigeria.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptual Review**

#### **2.1.1 Entrepreneurial Leadership**

Entrepreneurial leadership refers to a leadership style that combines the qualities of an entrepreneur and a leader (Nawaz et al., 2025). It involves the ability to recognize opportunities, take calculated risks, and drive innovation while simultaneously inspiring and guiding others toward achieving a shared vision. This kind of leadership blends the creative and proactive spirit of entrepreneurship with the structured guidance often expected from leaders in organizations (Putri et al., 2025). This leadership style connotes not just managing people or resources but it is rooted in a mindset that seeks change, improvement, and growth. Individuals who display this kind of leadership are forward-looking, imaginative, and willing to challenge traditional ways of doing things (Rehman et al., 2025). They do not wait for change to happen; instead, they initiate actions that open new possibilities. Their ability to influence others stems from their clarity of purpose, enthusiasm for progress, and readiness to tackle uncertainty.

Unlike traditional leadership approaches that may focus primarily on control or consistency, entrepreneurial leadership thrives in dynamic environments. It encourages adaptability and fosters a culture where employees are motivated to think creatively and take ownership of their tasks. Such leaders are comfortable navigating through ambiguity and are usually driven by the potential for long-term gains rather than short-term comfort (Razzaque et al., 2024). Entrepreneurial leadership is particularly useful in business environments where innovation, competition, and rapid change are constant features. It suits start-ups, small businesses, and even larger firms trying to reinvent themselves. In essence, this leadership style empowers people and organizations to pursue new paths, embrace experimentation, and build value through original ideas (Jundulloh et al., 2024). It transforms leadership from mere oversight into a tool for creating lasting change and driving success.

#### **2.1.2 Situational Entrepreneurial Leadership**

Situational entrepreneurial leadership refers to a flexible leadership approach where entrepreneurial leaders adapt their behavior based on the context they are dealing with (Putta, 2025). Instead of sticking to one fixed style, this type of leadership responds to the specific challenges, opportunities, and people involved in a situation. It recognizes that the right leadership response in one circumstance may not be suitable in another (Sunarso, 2024). This form of leadership places strong emphasis on environmental awareness. A situational entrepreneurial leader carefully observes what is happening around them and adjusts their actions accordingly. Whether it means being hands-on during a crisis or stepping back to let a skilled team operate independently, the goal is always to make decisions that suit the present

conditions. Such leadership does not ignore risk but manages it by reading the situation and selecting the best course of action (Xuecheng&Iqbal, 2022).

In entrepreneurial settings, where change is rapid and outcomes are uncertain, this kind of leadership becomes especially valuable. The ability to adapt quickly without losing focus on innovation and growth makes situational entrepreneurial leadership different from more rigid styles (Alhassan, 2023). It embraces flexibility without compromising the drive to pursue opportunities or solve problems creatively. This leadership type supports the idea that no single method works all the time (Trevisol et al., 2019). Situational entrepreneurial leadership encourages leaders to be both reflective and action-oriented. It demands emotional intelligence, practical judgment, and the confidence to switch strategies when needed. Ultimately, it is about understanding when to push, when to listen, and when to change direction to keep the business or team moving forward successfully (Putta, 2025).

### **2.1.3 Innovative Entrepreneurial Leadership**

Innovative entrepreneurial leadership is a form of leadership that emphasizes creativity, originality, and the continuous generation of new ideas (Lazarova et al., 2015). It is marked by a leader's ability to encourage innovation within an organization while also driving business growth and competitiveness. This leadership style is not limited to product or service creation: it also includes innovation in processes, strategies, customer relationships, and workplace culture (Kadwa&Barnard, 2019). Leaders who adopt this style are often curious, open-minded, and passionate about finding better ways to do things. They encourage their teams to challenge assumptions, explore alternatives, and take thoughtful risks. The emphasis is on developing a working environment where experimentation is welcomed and learning from mistakes is considered a valuable part of progress. Innovation becomes part of the everyday approach to work, rather than a one-time effort.

Unlike conventional leadership, which may favor stability and adherence to proven methods, innovative entrepreneurial leadership embraces change (Li et al., 2020). It seeks to disrupt the norm in a constructive way. This type of leadership motivates employees to think beyond the obvious and look for unconventional solutions that could lead to competitive advantage or increased efficiency (Ariyani & Zuhaery, 2021). In fast-paced industries and emerging markets, innovative entrepreneurial leadership can be a key driver of success. It ensures that organizations stay relevant and agile, even in times of uncertainty. Leaders who focus on innovation create space for growth and discovery, encouraging others to explore bold ideas. This leadership style transforms challenges into opportunities by applying creativity to real-world problems and guiding teams toward inventive solutions.

### **2.1.4 Firm Performance**

Firm performance refers to how well a business achieves its objectives, manages its resources, and satisfies the expectations of its stakeholders (Taouab& Issor, 2019). It reflects the overall success of an organization in both financial and non-financial terms. While often associated with profit and revenue growth, firm performance also includes efficiency, employee satisfaction, customer loyalty, market share, and adaptability (Selvam et al., 2016). This measure of success is usually evaluated using various indicators. Financial metrics like return on investment, operating income, and profitability provide a snapshot of the firm's economic health (Nworie et al., 2023). However, firm performance also includes aspects such as product quality, customer service, innovation capability, and employee productivity. Together, these elements give a fuller picture of how well the business is functioning.

Firm performance is important because it determines the sustainability and competitiveness of an organization (Aggreh et al., 2023). Businesses that perform well are more likely to survive, grow, and expand into new markets. Their ability to manage resources efficiently, meet

customer needs, and respond to change determines their strength in both short-term operations and long-term planning (Taouab& Issor, 2019). In academic and professional studies, firm performance is often used to compare different organizations or evaluate the effects of certain practices, such as leadership style, technology adoption, or business strategy (Okafor et al., 2024). It serves as a practical way to understand how decisions and structures influence real outcomes. In simple terms, it shows whether a firm is doing well, improving, or falling behind in a given business environment.

### **2.1.5 Operating Efficiency**

Operating efficiency refers to how effectively a business uses its resources to produce goods or deliver services (Lotto, 2019; Shehu et al., 2025). It measures the relationship between inputs (such as labor, materials, and time) and outputs (products or services delivered). A business is considered efficient when it achieves its goals while minimizing waste, reducing costs, and maximizing productivity (Uddin,2022). Operating efficiency plays a key role in determining a company's ability to compete and remain profitable. Efficient operations ensure that tasks are completed in the shortest possible time without compromising quality. It also means using fewer resources to achieve the same or better results, which can lead to cost savings and better customer service (Okafor & Chia, 2024).

Unlike broader measures of performance, operating efficiency focuses specifically on the day-to-day workings of a firm. It includes how quickly products are made, how smoothly services are delivered, and how well internal processes are managed (Opoku et al., 2024). It reflects the discipline, structure, and workflow that support overall business goals. Firms with high operating efficiency are better positioned to respond to changes in market demand, control operational costs, and maintain consistent output (Shehu et al., 2025). It is often the difference between success and failure in competitive markets, especially for small businesses with limited resources. Improving efficiency can help companies grow sustainably by ensuring that they are making the most of what they have.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework and Development of Research Hypothesis**

This study is hinged on the postulates of the Path-Goal Theory. Path-Goal Theory was developed by Robert House in 1971 (Sudyantara et al., 2025). It is built on the earlier work of the expectancy theory of motivation, which suggests that individuals are motivated to act in ways they believe will lead to desired rewards. House's theory extended this idea by focusing on how leaders can influence the paths their subordinates take to reach goals and how they can remove obstacles that might hinder progress (House, 1971). Over time, the theory was refined and expanded to reflect a broader understanding of leadership behaviors and follower characteristics.

The Path-Goal Theory proposes that the leader's main job is to make the path to achieving goals as clear and smooth as possible (Bans-Akutey, 2021; House, 1971). This means leaders must define goals, clarify the path to those goals, remove any obstacles, and provide the necessary support along the way. The theory outlines four leadership styles (directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented) and suggests that the effectiveness of each depends on the situation, particularly the characteristics of the followers and the work environment (Hirt, 2016). The leader's ability to adjust their style to suit the needs of their team is what makes this theory dynamic and practical (Bans-Akutey, 2021).

This theory is relevant to the present study because it provides a strong foundation for understanding how entrepreneurial leaders can improve operational efficiency in small-scale enterprises. By applying leadership styles that match the conditions of their businesses and the needs of their employees, entrepreneurs can enhance productivity and performance. The theory also explains why some leadership styles, such as situational and innovative approaches, may



be more effective in navigating the challenges faced by small-scale enterprises in Nigeria. It supports the idea that leadership behavior should be flexible and goal-oriented to achieve efficiency in operations. The premises above informed the following alternate hypotheses that guided the study:

Ha1. Situational entrepreneurial leadership positively affects operating efficiency of small scale enterprises in Nigeria.

Ha2. Innovative entrepreneurial leadership positively affects operating efficiency of small scale enterprises in Nigeria.

### **2.3 Empirical Review**

Nawaz et al. (2025) studied how entrepreneurial leadership influences organizational outcomes by encouraging employee creativity and positive workplace behavior. Their research focused on addressing specific gaps in how leadership practices translate to overall performance improvements. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 414 employees across various industries in Punjab, Pakistan, and the data were analyzed using Smart PLS 4 and SPSS. The results showed that entrepreneurial leadership significantly boosts organizational performance, with creativity and employee behavior acting as key links in the process. Organizations with leaders who adopt entrepreneurial approaches tend to see better results, largely because such environments promote innovative thinking and positive employee attitudes.

Putri et al. (2025) explored how entrepreneurial leadership affects innovation success in small and medium enterprises by looking closely at how it influences innovation processes and products. The study gathered data from 105 employees using purposive sampling, analyzing it with the Structural Equation Model and Partial Least Squares. The analysis showed that entrepreneurial leadership has a strong effect on innovation outcomes, especially when businesses also strengthen their processes and product development. Leaders who support both process improvement and product innovation tend to see better innovation performance, suggesting that these elements are essential for long-term business success.

Rehman et al. (2025) investigated how entrepreneurial leadership works together with team diversity to support success in small and medium enterprises in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Using a cross-sectional survey method, they collected data from 350 participants including owners, managers, and employees. The analysis, done with SPSS and Smart PLS, showed that entrepreneurial leadership alone contributes significantly to business success, but this effect becomes even stronger when teams are diverse. Their findings suggest that team variety plays a big role in enhancing how leadership affects performance, supporting the view that both leadership and team structure should be considered together.

Putta (2025) carried out research on how situational entrepreneurial leadership affects innovation in medium-sized manufacturing businesses producing auto parts. The study also examined whether organizational innovativeness plays a linking role between leadership and innovation. Using a structured questionnaire and a sample of 124 respondents selected through cluster sampling, the study applied several statistical techniques including regression analysis and model testing. The results showed that situational leadership styles have a positive influence on innovation when organizational innovativeness is present. The analysis supported the existence of partial mediation, meaning leadership improves innovation partly through enhancing the organization's capacity to innovate.

Awashreh and Hamid (2025) examined how entrepreneurial leadership helps foster employee innovation by promoting knowledge sharing, and whether this effect differs across industries. Surveys were used to gather responses from 189 professionals working in different sectors in Oman, and the analysis was done using PLS-SEM. The findings showed that entrepreneurial leadership encourages innovation in employees and that sharing knowledge is a key part of this process. Additionally, the industry type influenced how knowledge sharing affected

innovation, suggesting that sector-specific factors may shape how leadership translates into innovative outcomes in organizations.

Mohamed et al. (2025) focused on how entrepreneurial leadership affects team climate and innovative behavior among nurses at a university hospital. A descriptive correlational approach was used, and data were collected from 150 nurses using three different tools: a leadership questionnaire, a team climate measure, and an innovation behavior scale. Most nurses believed their leaders showed strong entrepreneurial leadership. A large portion also reported that their team environment and personal innovation efforts were high. These findings suggest that leadership style influences how supportive teams are and how likely individuals are to innovate.

Razzaque et al. (2024) analyzed how entrepreneurial leadership traits contribute to corporate sustainability and firm performance, using responses from 321 companies in Bahrain. The study focused on five key leadership traits and used confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling to test their effects. The results showed that traits like creativity, passion, and motivation positively influence both sustainability and performance, while surprisingly, innovativeness showed a negative effect. The study provides useful hint into how different leadership skills affect organizational outcomes during uncertain times, like those caused by the pandemic.

Alshawabkeh et al. (2024) explored how innovation management influences the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and organizational performance. The researchers conducted a survey involving 551 participants, and data analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and path analysis through AMOS software. Their findings indicated that innovativeness and risk-taking significantly affect operational performance. Moreover, risk-taking and creativity, key components of entrepreneurial leadership, were found to have a substantial impact on the financial performance of manufacturing firms in Jordan. The study further revealed that technical performance plays a moderating role between entrepreneurial leadership and operational performance, while commercial and social performance significantly moderate the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and financial performance.

Jundulloh et al. (2024) examined how entrepreneurial leadership and entrepreneurial competence affect sustainable performance among Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia, with innovation capability serving as a mediating variable. Recognizing the economic importance of MSMEs in Indonesia and the sustainability challenges many of them face, particularly the green-oriented ones, the study aimed to identify factors that contribute to long-term sustainability. The research adopted a quantitative method, using data from 119 managers of green MSMEs. The results, analyzed through SEM, showed that both entrepreneurial leadership and competence positively influence innovation capability, which in turn enhances sustainable organizational performance. The study concluded that innovation capability serves as a crucial mediating factor in this relationship.

Getaneh et al. (2024) assessed the mediating role of service innovation in the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and quality performance among micro and small enterprises in the service sector in Ethiopia's North Shoa Zone. Using stratified random sampling, 369 questionnaires were distributed, with 348 being valid responses. Structural Equation Modeling was employed for data analysis. Findings revealed that both entrepreneurial leadership and service innovation have significant positive effects on quality performance. Additionally, entrepreneurial leadership was found to positively influence service innovation. The study concluded that service innovation partially mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership and enterprise quality performance, underlining the importance of leadership in fostering innovation to improve service quality.

Sultan et al. (2024) studied the effects of entrepreneurial leadership on firm-level new product development performance and employee creativity across organizational levels. The study also evaluated whether intrinsic motivation and creative self-efficacy, in combination with employee creativity, serve as serial mediators in this relationship. Data were gathered using a systematic random sampling method from leaders and employees of IT-based small and medium-sized enterprises in Pakistan. A total of 114 leaders and 476 employees participated. The findings demonstrated that entrepreneurial leadership positively correlates with new product development at the firm level and with employee creativity across levels. Moreover, the study identified significant serial mediation effects through both intrinsic motivation and creative self-efficacy pathways.

Tariq et al. (2024) investigated how entrepreneurial leadership contributes to project success by considering the mediating role of knowledge-based dynamic capabilities. Framed within the Resource-Based View (RBV), Knowledge-Based View (KBV), and Dynamic Capabilities View (DCV), the research examined how capabilities like knowledge infrastructure, dynamic knowledge management, and big data analytics influence project outcomes. Data from 467 software project employees were analyzed using the SMART-PLS SEM technique. Results showed that entrepreneurial leadership significantly influences project success and that this effect is mediated by knowledge-oriented capabilities, indicating that leveraging such internal resources is crucial for successful project execution.

Mutshidza et al. (2024) explored the relationship between various leadership styles and business success to develop practical recommendations for policymakers and entrepreneurs. The research employed a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with 16 small and medium enterprise leaders from different sectors in the Vhembe district. The study found that entrepreneurial leadership positively influences both financial and non-financial outcomes, including innovation and customer satisfaction. In particular, transformational and collaborative leadership styles were noted to have the most profound effect. The research highlighted the importance of adopting leadership strategies that are responsive to local business environments and market conditions.

Omeihe and Omeihe (2023) analyzed the role of entrepreneurial leadership within small businesses, particularly in challenging contexts. Based on a qualitative study involving Nigerian small business operators, the research identified critical leadership traits, such as communication skills, adaptability, and relational behavior, as central to effective entrepreneurial leadership. The findings showed that leaders influence their teams by guiding them toward entrepreneurial goals, and this leadership approach supports small business growth. The study offers a context-specific interpretation of entrepreneurial leadership, contributing to an area of research that has often been overlooked in developing economies.

## 2.4 Gap in Literature

There is an enormous body of literature exploring the influence of entrepreneurial leadership on various performance outcomes. However, significant gaps still remain in understanding how specific types of entrepreneurial leadership, such as situational and innovative styles, affect operating efficiency, particularly in the context of small-scale enterprises in Nigeria. While studies by Nawaz et al. (2025), Putri et al. (2025), Rehman et al. (2025), and Sultan et al. (2024) affirm the positive impact of entrepreneurial leadership on innovation, employee creativity, and overall firm performance, they largely focus on broader or generalized leadership frameworks without isolating the effects of specific styles like situational or innovative leadership. Additionally, works by Putta (2025), Awashreh and Hamid (2025), and Alshawabkeh et al. (2024) highlight the role of leadership in promoting innovation and operational outcomes but are often limited to manufacturing or service sectors in non-Nigerian contexts. Moreover, studies by Mohamed et al. (2025), Getaneh et al. (2024), and Jundulloh et



al. (2024) provide evidence from hospital, Ethiopian, and Indonesian settings, respectively, leaving a contextual gap in Nigerian small-scale enterprises. Even though Omeihe and Omeihe (2023) investigated entrepreneurial leadership in Nigeria, their qualitative approach did not specifically examine the differential effects of situational and innovative leadership styles on operating efficiency. This highlights the need for a focused, context-specific inquiry into how distinct entrepreneurial leadership styles influence the operational efficiency of small-scale enterprises in Nigeria, thereby filling a critical empirical and contextual gap in the literature.

### 3.0 Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate the effect of entrepreneurial leadership on the performance of small-scale enterprises in Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to collect opinions and responses from a broad section of small business operators across the country. Through this method, data was obtained directly from those involved in the daily running of small-scale enterprises, making it possible to assess how their leadership practices, particularly in relation to situational and innovative styles, influence operational efficiency.

The population of the study consisted of 71,288 small-scale enterprise operators in Nigeria, based on statistics provided by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN, 2017). This population reflects active entrepreneurs engaged in different sectors of the economy. These business owners are directly responsible for leadership decisions that influence business performance. Because it was not practical to study the entire population, a sample was selected using the Taro Yamane formula at a 5% margin of error, which is given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population (71,288)

e = precision level (0.05)

$$n = \frac{71,288}{1 + 71,288 (0.05)^2}$$

**n** ≈ 399

Therefore, the sample size used for the study was 399 small-scale enterprise operators. A purposive sampling technique was applied in selecting the respondents. The criteria for selection were that participants must be owners or managers of small-scale enterprises currently in operation. This ensured that the responses were based on real-life leadership experience and practical knowledge of business operations.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire specifically developed to measure variables related to entrepreneurial leadership and performance. The questionnaire focused on two key leadership styles (situational and innovative) and their effects on the efficiency of business operations. Responses were captured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “Very Low Extent” to “Very High Extent,” to allow participants indicate the degree to which each leadership style influenced performance outcomes in their businesses.

To ensure the questionnaire accurately measured what it was meant to assess, it was subjected to a content validation process. Academic experts in entrepreneurship, as well as experienced professionals who work closely with small businesses, reviewed the items. Their input was used to refine the structure and wording for clarity and alignment with the study objectives. A pre-test was conducted using 20 micro business operators who were not part of the main sample. Their feedback led to further adjustments for ease of understanding.

In addition, a pilot study involving 30 micro business owners was conducted to test the reliability of the instrument. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, and all constructs yielded values above 0.70, indicating that the instrument was reliable for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, and percentage were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents and the distribution of responses. To examine the effect of the independent variables (situational entrepreneurial leadership and innovative entrepreneurial leadership) on the dependent variable (operating efficiency), multiple regression analysis was employed.

The model for the regression analysis is as follows:

$$OE = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SEL + \beta_2 IEL + \varepsilon \quad \text{eqi}$$

Where:

OE = Operating Efficiency

SEL = Situational Entrepreneurial Leadership

IEL = Innovative Entrepreneurial Leadership

$\beta_0$  = Constant

$\beta_1, \beta_2$  = Regression coefficients

$\varepsilon$  = Error term

All statistical tests were conducted at a 5% level of significance, and conclusions were drawn based on the p-values derived from the regression output. This analytical approach helped determine the strength and direction of the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership styles and business performance among small-scale enterprises in Nigeria.

## 4.0 Data Analysis

### 4.1 Descriptive Analysis

The interpretation of the frequency table titled **Table 4.1: Descriptive Analysis** reveals how respondents evaluated various statements across three major variables (Situational Entrepreneurial Leadership, Innovative Entrepreneurial Leadership, and Operating Efficiency) using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Very Low Extent (VLE) to Very High Extent (VHE). Each item's frequency distribution and mean score helps explain how strongly participants agree with the statements. All items were marked as "Accept," indicating general agreement by the respondents.

**Table 4.1 Descriptive Analysis**

S/N	Situational Entrepreneurial Leadership	VLE	LE	N	HE	VHE	Mean	Remark
1	I adjust my leadership style based on the urgency or complexity of specific business situations.	28	16	59	180	116	3.85	Accept
2	I change the way I make decisions depending on the performance of my team or employees.	66	3	67	107	156	3.71	Accept
3	I vary my leadership approach depending on the skills and experience of individual employees.	61	51	4	217	66	3.44	Accept

4	I consider the business environment before deciding how to manage my staff.	2	22	70	179	126	4.02	Accept
	<b>Innovative Entrepreneurial Leadership</b>	<b>VLE</b>	<b>LE</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>HE</b>	<b>VHE</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Remark</b>
5	I encourage my employees to try out new ideas, even if they may not always succeed.	54	74	7	215	49	3.33	Accept
6	I often seek out new methods or tools to improve how the business operates.	39	6	25	78	251	4.24	Accept
7	I invest in learning about trends and technologies relevant to my business.	22	8	8	240	121	4.08	Accept
8	I support creative thinking when solving business problems.	57	28	17	201	96	3.63	Accept
	<b>Operating Efficiency</b>	<b>VLE</b>	<b>LE</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>HE</b>	<b>VHE</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Remark</b>
9	My enterprise minimizes waste and reduces costs without compromising quality.	32	15	14	228	110	3.92	Accept
10	Tasks and responsibilities in my business are completed within set timeframes.	70	47	4	188	90	3.45	Accept
11	My firm make good use of available resources to achieve business objectives.	5	59	54	178	103	3.79	Accept
12	My employees clearly understand their duties and perform them with minimal supervision.	48	21	59	163	108	3.66	Accept

Source: Field Survey (2025)

For Situational Entrepreneurial Leadership, the first item asks whether respondents adjust their leadership style based on urgency or complexity. A substantial number of respondents selected “High Extent” (180) and “Very High Extent” (116), suggesting strong agreement, while very few opted for “Very Low Extent” (28) or “Low Extent” (16). With a mean of 3.85, this result shows that most respondents believe in adapting leadership styles to situational demands. In the second item, which addresses changes in decision-making based on team performance, the distribution shows that 107 and 156 respondents selected “High Extent” and “Very High Extent” respectively. Although 66 chose “Very Low Extent,” the mean score of 3.71 still falls within the acceptance range, indicating overall agreement. The third item, concerning adjustments based on employee skills and experience, had a lower mean of 3.44. While 217 respondents selected “High Extent,” a notable number (61 and 51) selected the lower ends, which suggests more mixed opinions. The fourth item, which examines environmental consideration in leadership decisions, had strong positive responses (179 for “High Extent” and 126 for “Very High Extent”) leading to a mean of 4.02, the highest among the four items under this category. This shows a strong tendency among respondents to factor in external conditions when managing their staff.

In terms of Innovative Entrepreneurial Leadership, item five evaluates encouragement of new ideas among employees. Though 215 respondents selected “High Extent,” a relatively high number (54 and 74) chose “Very Low” and “Low” Extent, respectively. This mixture led to a mean of 3.33, the lowest among the innovation-related items, though still marked as acceptable. Item six explores the adoption of new tools and methods. Here, an overwhelming 251 respondents selected “Very High Extent,” and 78 selected “High Extent,” giving it the highest mean in the entire table at 4.24. This indicates a strong commitment to operational innovation. The seventh item about investment in learning new trends and technologies also showed strong agreement, with 240 and 121 respondents marking “High” and “Very High” Extent, respectively, resulting in a mean of 4.08. This implies respondents actively seek growth and relevance through knowledge acquisition. For item eight, which assesses support for creative thinking in problem-solving, 201 selected “High Extent” and 96 selected “Very High Extent,” with a mean of 3.63. This indicates moderate but clear support for innovation-driven leadership when faced with challenges.

Regarding Operating Efficiency, the ninth item discusses minimizing waste and reducing costs without quality loss. The responses were highly favorable, with 228 selecting “High Extent” and 110 selecting “Very High Extent.” This gave a mean of 3.92, indicating that respondents believe their operations are managed efficiently in terms of resource usage. In the tenth item, which focuses on timely completion of tasks, 188 selected “High Extent” and 90 chose “Very High Extent.” However, a notable 70 and 47 respondents marked “Very Low” and “Low” Extent, resulting in a lower mean of 3.45. This shows some inconsistency in time management performance. The eleventh item looks at the use of available resources to meet objectives. Here, 178 and 103 respondents selected “High” and “Very High” Extent respectively, with a few scattered responses in the lower ranges, resulting in a mean of 3.79. This shows a generally efficient use of resources. Lastly, the twelfth item on employee role clarity and independence had 163 and 108 selecting “High” and “Very High” Extent, respectively. With a mean of 3.66, it reflects a positive trend in operational independence and employee understanding of their responsibilities.

## 4.2 Test of Hypotheses

The regression output in table 4.2 below was used in testing the hypotheses of the study.

**Table 4.2 Regression Analysis**  
**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.405 <sup>a</sup>	.164	.160	2.780

a. Predictors: (Constant), Innovative Entrepreneurial Leadership, Situational Entrepreneurial Leadership

### ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	600.666	2	300.333	38.853	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	3061.053	396	7.730		
	Total	3661.719	398			

a. Dependent Variable: Operating Efficiency

b. Predictors: (Constant), Innovative Entrepreneurial Leadership, Situational Entrepreneurial Leadership



### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.869	1.251		3.092	.002
	Situational Entrepreneurial Leadership	.304	.052	.272	5.892	.000
	Innovative Entrepreneurial Leadership	.418	.059	.328	7.102	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Operating Efficiency

Source: SPSS V. 26 (2025)

The results presented in Table 4.2 begin with model validity indicators. The Adjusted R-Square value is 0.160, which implies that situational and innovative entrepreneurial leadership jointly explain 16% of the variation in operating efficiency among small-scale enterprises in Nigeria. This means that while other factors might contribute to operating efficiency, 16% of the changes observed in it can be accounted for by changes in the two forms of entrepreneurial leadership examined in this study. Although this percentage is moderate, it still highlights the relevance of leadership behavior in shaping efficiency levels within these enterprises.

Furthermore, the ANOVA section of the regression output reveals a probability (p-value) of 0.000 for the overall F-statistic. This indicates that the regression model is statistically significant at the 5% level, suggesting that situational and innovative entrepreneurial leadership jointly have a statistically meaningful effect on operating efficiency. In other words, the combination of these leadership styles contributes significantly to explaining how efficiently small businesses are managed and operated.

The constant coefficient has a value of 3.869 with a p-value of 0.002, which is less than the 5% significance level. This suggests that when both forms of entrepreneurial leadership (situational and innovative) are held constant, the operating efficiency score of the enterprises is 3.869 units.

#### 4.2.1 Test of Hypothesis I

H01. Situational entrepreneurial leadership does not significantly affect operating efficiency of small scale enterprises in Nigeria.

As shown in Table 4.2, the coefficient for situational entrepreneurial leadership is 0.304, and the p-value is 0.000, which is clearly less than the 5% significance level. This indicates a statistically significant effect of situational entrepreneurial leadership on operating efficiency. In practical terms, this means that for every 1-unit increase in the degree of situational entrepreneurial leadership, the operating efficiency of small-scale enterprises increases by 0.304 units, assuming all other variables remain constant. This marginal increase, though not extremely large, is meaningful and shows that adapting leadership style to fit specific situations such as urgency, complexity, or employee capability can improve how efficiently operations are carried out in small enterprises. This result leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis, affirming that situational entrepreneurial leadership does have a significant and positive effect on operating efficiency among small-scale enterprises in Nigeria.

#### 4.2.2 Test of Hypothesis II

H02. Innovative entrepreneurial leadership does not significantly affect operating efficiency of small scale enterprises in Nigeria.

The coefficient for innovative entrepreneurial leadership is 0.418, with a p-value of 0.000, as reported in Table 4.2. This means that the effect is statistically significant at the 5% level. More so, the coefficient indicates that a unit increase in innovative entrepreneurial leadership results in a 0.418-unit increase in operating efficiency, all else being equal. This marginal effect is even stronger than that of situational entrepreneurial leadership, highlighting the vital role of innovation-focused leadership practices such as encouraging new ideas, investing in new tools, and supporting creative problem-solving in improving operational efficiency. Given this statistically significant result, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it is concluded that innovative entrepreneurial leadership significantly and positively affects operating efficiency in small-scale enterprises in Nigeria.

#### 4.3 Discussion of Findings

The findings from the regression analysis indicate that situational entrepreneurial leadership exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on the operating efficiency of small-scale enterprises in Nigeria ( $\beta = 0.304$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This suggests that when enterprise leaders modify their leadership style according to circumstances, it enables the organization to function more smoothly, allocate resources wisely, and respond effectively to challenges. A likely explanation for this result is that adaptive leadership creates room for flexibility, responsiveness, and better alignment with team dynamics and business contexts. This view is reinforced by Putta (2025), who found that situational entrepreneurial leadership contributed to innovation performance when businesses encouraged organizational innovativeness. Similarly, the study by Omeihe and Omeihe (2023) involving Nigerian SMEs showed that leaders who practiced adaptability and context-aware leadership approaches influenced the operational success of their businesses. These findings align with the results of Rehman et al. (2025), who found that entrepreneurial leadership significantly improves firm performance and that this effect strengthens when leadership is matched with diverse teams. The findings of Sultan et al. (2024) also support this outcome; they demonstrated that entrepreneurial leadership shapes performance through its influence on creativity and employee behavior, particularly in environments where leadership adjusts based on team dynamics and business needs. Taken together, these findings validate the argument that a leader's capacity to shift leadership methods based on operational demands enhances efficiency.

The analysis also revealed that innovative entrepreneurial leadership has a positive and statistically significant effect on the operating efficiency of small-scale enterprises in Nigeria ( $\beta = 0.418$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This means that leaders who embrace innovation, encourage creativity, and adopt new methods are more likely to improve their businesses' operational outcomes. The higher beta value suggests that innovative leadership has a stronger effect on efficiency than situational leadership in this context. This result can be attributed to the fact that innovation stimulates process improvement, product development, and employee motivation, all of which contribute to smoother and more effective operations. Putri et al. (2025) provided empirical support for this finding by showing that entrepreneurial leadership significantly affects innovation performance, particularly when organizations emphasize both process and product innovation. Nawaz et al. (2025) also found that leaders who promote employee creativity and support innovative behaviors positively influence organizational outcomes. This is further affirmed by the study of Jundulloh et al. (2024), which found that entrepreneurial leadership enhances innovation capability and, in turn, improves sustainable business performance. Similarly, Getaneh et al. (2024) reported that entrepreneurial leadership boosts service innovation, which subsequently strengthens quality performance. In contrast, Razzaque et al.

(2024) found that while several entrepreneurial traits improve performance, innovativeness alone produced a negative effect in their context, suggesting that innovation must be strategically aligned with other business factors to yield positive outcomes. However, the weight of evidence supports the conclusion that innovative leadership, when effectively practiced, drives improvements in operational efficiency within small-scale enterprises.

## **5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

Small-scale enterprises are widely recognized as important drivers of economic growth, job creation, and innovation in many countries, including Nigeria. When properly managed, these businesses contribute significantly to national development by improving income levels, promoting self-reliance, and supporting community development. In such environments, effective leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing operational efficiency, guiding strategic direction, and ensuring business sustainability. Entrepreneurial leadership, especially when it is situational and innovative, enables business owners to respond quickly to market trends, customer needs, and economic shifts. Through this type of leadership, small businesses are able to develop strong internal structures, motivate staff, streamline operations, and improve overall performance.

The findings of this study carry notable implications for the operations of small-scale enterprises in Nigeria, particularly regarding the role of entrepreneurial leadership in driving business efficiency. The positive and statistically significant effects of both situational and innovative entrepreneurial leadership styles on operating efficiency suggest that how leaders behave and adapt to dynamic business contexts, as well as their openness to innovation, are essential to streamlining internal processes and improving overall performance. These outcomes imply that entrepreneurial leadership is not just a managerial attribute but a critical factor in optimizing operations within small enterprises, which often struggle with limited resources and volatile environments. The results further highlight the importance of leadership flexibility and creativity in promoting timely task execution, resource utilization, and cost-effectiveness without sacrificing quality. When leaders respond to employee capabilities, environmental demands, and changing technologies with adaptability and innovation, the entire organization benefits from more efficient workflows and better productivity. These findings also indicate that operating efficiency in small-scale enterprises may depend less on traditional administrative control and more on leadership that encourages experimentation, supports novel solutions, and adjusts methods based on situational demands. In essence, the study highlights the functional importance of entrepreneurial leadership approaches that are responsive and forward-thinking, which may help small businesses overcome the operational inefficiencies that frequently hinder their growth and sustainability. By validating these leadership styles as statistically significant contributors to efficiency, the findings emphasize their relevance in the everyday functioning of small-scale businesses within the Nigerian context.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

1. Owners and managers of small-scale enterprises in Nigeria are encouraged to actively adopt situational entrepreneurial leadership by tailoring their leadership approaches to suit specific business conditions, employee capabilities, and emerging challenges. This involves assessing each situation independently and responding with the most appropriate leadership behavior, whether directive, supportive, or delegative. Doing so will enable them to enhance employee responsiveness, reduce delays in decision-making, and increase the overall operating efficiency of their enterprises.
2. Policy makers and entrepreneurship development training institutions, such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), should incorporate

modules on innovative entrepreneurial leadership into their training programs. These modules should emphasize practical ways to drive innovation, such as fostering a culture of experimentation, encouraging idea generation among employees, and leveraging new technologies. Equipping small business leaders with innovation-oriented leadership skills will further improve their ability to enhance operational efficiency and remain competitive.

### **5.3 Contribution to Knowledge**

This study contributes to the existing body of literature by addressing a major gap concerning how specific entrepreneurial leadership styles, particularly situational and innovative leadership, affect the operating efficiency of small-scale enterprises in Nigeria. While previous studies have confirmed the general impact of entrepreneurial leadership on innovation, employee creativity, and firm performance, they have mostly adopted broad perspectives or focused on non-Nigerian contexts. This research offers a more targeted investigation by examining the distinct effects of situational and innovative leadership styles on operational outcomes within Nigerian small-scale enterprises. By doing so, it extends current knowledge beyond generalized frameworks and settings, providing fresh empirical evidence that is both context-specific and practically relevant to small business leadership and performance in Nigeria.

### **5.4 Limitations of the Study and Suggestion for Further Studies**

One limitation of this study is that it only relied on responses from 399 small-scale business owners, which may not fully represent the views and experiences of all small business operators in Nigeria. Also, the use of a questionnaire as the only method of data collection may have limited the depth of the responses, as participants might not have fully explained the reasons behind their answers. In addition, the study focused only on two styles of leadership (situational and innovative) while ignoring other possible leadership styles that may also influence business efficiency.

Future studies should consider using interviews or focus group discussions in addition to questionnaires, so that researchers can better understand how leadership styles are applied in real-life situations. Also, other types of leadership styles such as transformational or transactional leadership can be included in future research. Researchers can also compare findings across different regions or industries in Nigeria to get a broader view.



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