

Proactive Management and Performance of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) In South-East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of proactive management on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in South-East Nigeria. The study specifically examined: the effect of strategic foresight on the innovation capacity of SMEs; the extent to which competitive intelligence affects market expansion; the effect of risk management on operational efficiency among SMEs in the region. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted, employing a quantitative approach with structured questionnaires to collect data from SME owners and managers across five South-East states, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The study population consisted of 2,159 staff drawn from 25 registered SMEs, and a sample size of 326 was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula. Stratified sampling with Bowley's proportional allocation was used to ensure fair representation. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ordinal logistic regression analysis at a 5% level of significance, with reliability confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.86 and validity ensured through expert review and principal component analysis. The findings revealed that strategic foresight significantly enhances the innovation capacity of SMEs ($\beta = 3.755$; $p = 0.00 < 0.05$); Competitive intelligence had a strong and significant effect on market expansion ($\beta = 47.218$; $p = 0.035$); Risk management was found to have a significant positive effect on operational efficiency ($\beta = 3.12$; $p = 0.024$). The study recommended that SMEs should adopt strategic foresight, competitive intelligence practices, and risk management, which result in innovation capacity, market expansion, and operational efficiency. The study concluded that implementing proactive management measures, such as strategic foresight, competitive intelligence, and risk management, improves SMEs' performance through innovation capacity, market expansion, and operational efficiency.

Keywords: Strategic foresight, competitive intelligence, risk management, innovation capacity, market expansion, operational efficiency, proactive management

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Proactive management has become an essential strategic orientation that emphasizes anticipating future opportunities and challenges rather than reacting to events after they occur. The concept gained prominence through Bateman & Crant (1993), who introduced the idea of the "proactive personality" to describe individuals who initiate change and shape their environments. Over time, this concept evolved into an organizational management philosophy in which leaders employ strategic foresight, innovation, and long-term planning to enhance organizational performance and competitiveness. Unlike reactive management, proactive management encourages organizations to forecast market changes, identify emerging opportunities, and minimize potential risks before they become critical.

In the context of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), proactive management is widely recognized as a vital driver of growth and sustainability. SMEs often operate in highly competitive and uncertain business environments that require managers to anticipate environmental changes and implement strategic initiatives

ahead of competitors. Ugwoke & Modebe (2020) state that proactive management enables business owners to plan strategically and take initiative instead of responding only after challenges arise. Likewise, Chukwuma & Abiola (2020) argue that proactive entrepreneurs establish clear business goals, monitor industry developments, build strategic networks, and encourage innovation, thereby improving decision-making, reducing uncertainty, and strengthening organizational adaptability.

The development of proactive management is closely associated with the contributions of Peter Drucker, who emphasized strategic planning, innovation, and managerial foresight as foundations for organizational success. As globalization and technological advancement intensified, proactive management became increasingly important for SMEs seeking long-term competitiveness. Nwachukwu & Chladkova (2019) maintain that proactive management enables SMEs to identify emerging opportunities while minimizing operational risks, thereby improving resilience and competitive advantage. Across Africa, economic reforms and globalization accelerated the adoption of proactive management among SMEs. Okafor & Eze (2022), Adeyemi (2021), Uche and Okonkwo (2023), and Nwachukwu & Ibe (2024) conclude that African SMEs adopting proactive strategies characterized by innovation, opportunity recognition, and risk mitigation achieve greater resilience, survival, and sustainable business growth.

Statement of the Problem

In an ideal business ecosystem, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operate within enabling environments that encourage innovation, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability through the adoption of strategic management practices. Proactive management, which entails anticipating environmental shifts, preempting risks, and capitalizing on emerging opportunities, is widely acknowledged in global literature as a key driver of enterprise growth and resilience. Across advanced economies, the integration of proactive strategies has enabled SMEs to maintain a competitive advantage, foster innovation, and adapt to rapidly changing market conditions. When properly institutionalized, proactive management facilitates effective decision-making, promotes organizational agility, and enhances firms' capacity to navigate complex operational systems.

However, the reality within the Nigerian context, particularly in the South East region, diverges significantly from this ideal. Despite the growing awareness of the strategic value of proactive management, many SMEs continue to rely on reactive, short-term approaches to business operations. The prevailing business environment is characterized by infrastructural deficits, macroeconomic volatility, insecurity, and policy inconsistency, all of which constrain strategic planning and weaken the institutionalization of proactive frameworks. In addition, structural limitations such as poor access to finance, low digital integration, and limited managerial competencies further inhibit the transition from informal, intuitive management styles to more anticipatory, evidence-based practices. These challenges are compounded by socio-cultural norms and traditional, kinship-based governance models that often resist formalization and innovation.

As a consequence of this disconnect between theory and practice, many SMEs in Southeast Nigeria remain ill-equipped to respond to external disruptions or harness opportunities in the global marketplace. The absence of proactive management practices has contributed to operational inefficiencies, reduced competitiveness, and high failure rates among SMEs. While studies have explored the general performance of Nigerian SMEs, there remains a critical gap in the literature regarding how proactive management, as a strategic orientation, specifically influences performance outcomes such as sustainability, innovation capacity, and market expansion within this regional context. This study, therefore, seeks to address this empirical and contextual gap by examining the effect of proactive management on the performance of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the impact of proactive management on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the South East, Nigeria. Specifically, the study will seek to:

- i. Determine the effect of strategic foresight on the innovation capacity of small and medium enterprises

- ii. Ascertain the extent to which competitive intelligence affects the market expansion of small and medium enterprises
- iii. Assess the effect of risk management on the operational efficiency of small and medium enterprises

Research Hypotheses

Based on the proposed research objectives and research questions, the following alternative hypotheses will be formulated to guide and direct this study.

- i. Strategic foresight affects the innovation capacity of small and medium enterprises
- ii. Competitive intelligence affects the market expansion of small and medium enterprises
- iii. Risk management affects the operational efficiency of small and medium enterprises

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

Proactive Management

Proactive management refers to a strategic and anticipatory approach in which organizational leaders make decisions in advance of potential challenges, rather than responding only after problems arise. It emphasizes foresight, initiative, and early action in planning and operations. Ogbonna & Harris (2020) explain that proactive managers seek to identify opportunities and threats early, thereby positioning their organizations to take advantage of emerging prospects or mitigate risks before they escalate. This approach stands in contrast to reactive management, which often leads to inefficiencies due to delayed responses. In Nigeria, the increasingly volatile business climate marked by economic fluctuations, policy inconsistencies, and infrastructural gaps makes proactive management particularly vital (Adeleye, 2019). Managers who apply proactive strategies are better equipped to stabilize operations, navigate uncertainty, and gain competitive advantage in both local and global markets.

At the heart of proactive management is strategic long-term planning supported by continuous environmental scanning. Proactive leaders are committed to monitoring both internal and external business environments in order to adapt early to changing market dynamics. Okeke & Eze (2021) posit that regular data-driven assessments, stakeholder feedback, and industry benchmarking allow proactive firms to adjust strategies effectively. This constant engagement with the external environment empowers managers to identify trends and shifting customer preferences well in advance. In Nigeria's highly competitive sectors, such as telecommunications and retail, firms that adopt proactive techniques are often more responsive, resilient, and profitable (Ibrahim & Bello, 2020). Uche & Olowu (2018) further assert that proactive organizations typically nurture cultures of accountability, creativity, and innovation traits that drive sustainable business performance in dynamic environments.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are widely recognized as critical drivers of economic development, employment generation, and innovation, particularly in emerging economies like Nigeria. SMEs are typically defined by the scale of their operations, number of employees, and capital base. Ogechukwu (2019) states that SMEs in Nigeria are classified based on the number of workers, ranging from 10 to 199 employees, and asset value not exceeding ₦500 million, excluding land and buildings. These enterprises are often privately owned and operate within local communities, offering goods and services that support both urban and rural economies. In a country marked by high unemployment and poverty rates, SMEs have become a pivotal means for self-employment and community development. Uchenna & Adedayo (2021) argue that the SME sector serves as a vital instrument for inclusive growth and income redistribution in Nigeria, especially among youth and women entrepreneurs.

In Nigeria, the definition and classification of SMEs have been standardized by regulatory institutions such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). SMEDAN (2021) defines a small enterprise as one with between 10 and 49 employees and assets ranging from ₦5 million to ₦50 million, while a medium enterprise has 50 to 199 employees and assets between ₦50 million and ₦500 million. These definitions are important for policy implementation, particularly in the administration of credit facilities, grants, and tax incentives. Olatunji & Salami (2020) argue that the formal recognition of SMEs by Nigerian institutions has helped streamline support programs, although many enterprises remain unregistered and operate outside the regulatory framework. This dual nature of formal and informal SMEs presents challenges in accurate policy targeting and data collection.

Indicators of Proactive Management in Small and Medium Enterprises

Strategic Foresight

Strategic foresight refers to the capability of anticipating future trends, challenges, and opportunities to guide present-day decisions and actions proactively. This proactive approach enables SMEs to navigate uncertainties and capitalize on emerging opportunities, thereby enhancing their resilience and long-term sustainability (Ogungbamila & Oyeibisi, 2018). In Nigerian SMEs, strategic foresight is not merely about prediction but involves a systematic process of scanning the external environment, identifying potential disruptions, and envisioning alternative futures (Olusegun & Olawale, 2019). It entails synthesizing diverse information sources, including market trends, technological advancements, and regulatory changes, to inform strategic decision-making (Ojo, 2020). By integrating foresight into their management practices, SMEs in Nigeria can better adapt to changing market conditions and preemptively respond to competitive pressures.

Strategic foresight serves as a vital indicator of proactive management in Nigerian SMEs, facilitating anticipatory decision-making, fostering innovation, and enhancing organizational resilience. By systematically scanning the external environment, synthesizing information, and envisioning alternative futures, SMEs can proactively navigate uncertainties and capitalize on emerging opportunities. This proactive approach not only strengthens their adaptive capacity but also fosters long-term sustainability and competitive advantage in Nigeria's dynamic business ecosystem.

Competitive Intelligence

Competitive intelligence is an essential tool for proactive management, particularly within the context of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). It refers to the process of gathering, analyzing, and applying information about competitors, market trends, and the external business environment to inform strategic decisions. Adebayo & Arogundade (2020) assert that competitive intelligence enables SMEs to anticipate market changes and competitor actions, thereby positioning themselves more effectively in a dynamic business ecosystem. Through this forward-looking practice, SMEs gain insights into potential opportunities and threats, which helps them remain competitive and responsive. In proactive management, the emphasis on staying ahead of challenges rather than merely reacting to them makes competitive intelligence a strategic necessity for SMEs.

In the Nigerian context, where SMEs often face intense competition, erratic policies, and infrastructural constraints, competitive intelligence provides a critical advantage. As noted by Ezeani & Uche (2021), many Nigerian SMEs operate in highly volatile environments, and only those that actively monitor their competitive landscape can effectively anticipate shifts in customer preferences and market dynamics. This awareness enables proactive formulation of marketing, pricing, and innovation strategies, which are vital for sustainable growth. Ezeani and Uche (2021) further emphasize that competitive intelligence is not merely about knowing what rivals are doing, but about turning that knowledge into actionable strategic insights that give SMEs a performance edge.

Risk Management

Risk management, as an indicator of proactive management, refers to the structured and systematic identification, assessment, and mitigation of potential threats that could impact the achievement of organizational

goals. In the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), risk management enables business owners to anticipate possible disruptions and prepare adequate strategies to address them. Eze & Okoye (2020) state that proactive risk management in SMEs involves taking pre-emptive steps to minimize the adverse effects of both internal and external uncertainties. This ensures the enterprise is better positioned to maintain stability, reduce losses, and seize emerging opportunities. Nigerian SMEs operate in volatile environments influenced by economic fluctuations, security challenges, and infrastructural deficiencies; therefore, risk management becomes a critical tool in their sustainability strategy (Eze & Okoye, 2020).

Effective risk management supports SMEs in embedding a culture of foresight and preparedness, which is a fundamental aspect of proactive management. Chukwuma & Egbunike (2021) assert that proactive SMEs develop risk-conscious organizational cultures that empower managers and employees to think ahead and develop response plans for potential business threats. This approach stands in contrast to reactive management, where firms respond only after damage has occurred. Through proper risk assessment, SMEs can set risk tolerance levels, prioritize risks based on impact and likelihood, and implement control measures that align with their strategic objectives.

Strategic Alliance

Strategic alliance refers to a formal agreement between two or more organizations to pursue a set of agreed-upon objectives while remaining independent organizations. It is a proactive management strategy that allows small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to leverage external resources, competencies, and markets without sacrificing autonomy. Okafor & Ogbonna (2020) assert that strategic alliances empower SMEs to pool resources, share risks, and enhance competitiveness in a highly dynamic and uncertain business environment. As SMEs in Nigeria often face limited access to finance, technology, and skilled manpower, forming alliances with other firms can provide the synergy necessary for growth and survival. The proactive nature of strategic alliances lies in their anticipatory function helping SMEs to prepare for market challenges before they arise (Okafor & Ogbonna, 2020).

In the Nigerian context, strategic alliances have become essential tools for SMEs seeking to enhance innovation, market penetration, and operational efficiency. Ojo & Adebayo (2021) point out that strategic alliances in sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and ICT have led to increased access to modern technologies and enhanced market reach for participating SMEs. These alliances often take the form of joint ventures, supply chain partnerships, franchising agreements, and cooperative networks. Proactive SMEs use such alliances not merely as survival strategies but as forward-looking mechanisms for capacity building and strategic positioning in the marketplace (Ojo & Adebayo, 2021). This deliberate alignment with external partners reflects a shift from isolated growth efforts to collaborative development paths.

Performance in Small and Medium (SMEs) and Proactive Management

Performance in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is a multidimensional construct that encompasses various aspects such as profitability, growth, market share, customer satisfaction, and employee engagement. It refers to the degree to which an enterprise achieves its set goals and objectives within a defined period. In the Nigerian context, SME performance is a critical measure of national economic development given their contribution to employment creation and poverty reduction. Eniola & Ektebang (2014) argue that SME performance in Nigeria is often assessed based on financial indicators, operational efficiency, and market competitiveness. However, non-financial measures such as customer loyalty, innovation capacity, sustainability and social responsibility are increasingly being acknowledged as important performance indicators.

The relationship between performance and proactive management lies in the strategic actions taken by SMEs to anticipate and prepare for future challenges and opportunities. Proactive management, characterized by foresight, planning, and early intervention, directly influences the ability of SMEs to adapt to environmental changes and remain competitive. Ogechukwu, Ndubisi, & Chinedu (2019) assert that proactive management enables SMEs to allocate resources efficiently, identify emerging trends, and make timely decisions, all of which enhance performance outcomes. In contrast to reactive strategies, proactive management fosters innovation and agility, which are essential for sustaining high performance in dynamic markets.

Performance in SMEs is also linked to how well the enterprise aligns its internal capabilities with external opportunities through proactive strategies. This includes setting realistic performance targets, benchmarking against competitors, and engaging in continuous improvement. In their study, Okpara & Kabongo (2017) found that Nigerian SMEs that practice proactive management by consistently reviewing market demands, updating technologies, and investing in employee development demonstrate significantly higher performance levels than their counterparts. This suggests that performance is not merely an outcome of operational efficiency, but a reflection of strategic foresight and adaptability.

Performance indicators in SMEs in Relation to Proactive Management

Innovation Capacity

Innovation capacity refers to the ability of an enterprise to consistently generate, adopt, and implement new ideas, products, services, or processes that enhance its performance and competitiveness. In the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), it serves as a critical indicator of performance by enabling businesses to respond to changing market demands, technology trends, and customer preferences. Adebayo & Oloruntoba (2021) state that innovation capacity in SMEs involves both technological innovation such as adopting new machinery or digital tools and non-technological innovation, including new business models, marketing strategies, and organizational changes. The capacity to innovate allows SMEs to differentiate themselves in saturated markets, thereby improving customer loyalty and profitability (Adebayo & Oloruntoba, 2021).

In Nigeria, the innovation capacity of SMEs has gained increasing attention due to the evolving economic ecosystem and the push for diversification beyond oil. Chinedu & Oduguwa (2020) note that Nigerian SMEs that invest in innovative practices are more likely to experience increased market share, enhanced product quality, and overall growth. These innovations are often driven by necessity and are shaped by the peculiar challenges of the Nigerian environment, such as irregular power supply, inadequate funding, and infrastructural deficits. Nevertheless, such challenges have not deterred Nigerian SMEs from being creative in delivering solutions tailored to local needs. Innovation capacity, therefore, becomes both a survival strategy and a performance-enhancing tool in turbulent environments (Chinedu & Oduguwa, 2020).

Market Expansion

Market expansion refers to the strategic process by which small and medium enterprises (SMEs) enter new geographical areas, target additional customer segments, or diversify their product offerings to increase revenue and market share (Adeoye & Elegunde, 2020). In Nigeria, SMEs play a crucial role in economic development, and their performance is often measured by their ability to expand into new markets (Ogunmokun & Ibru, 2019). Market expansion serves as a key performance indicator because it reflects an enterprise's growth potential, competitive advantage, and sustainability (Okoro & Agwu, 2021). Nigerian scholars argue that SMEs that successfully expand demonstrate strong managerial capabilities, financial stability, and adaptability to changing market conditions (Eze, Olatunji, & Ayo, 2020). This expansion can take various forms, including local, regional, or international market penetration, each requiring distinct strategic approaches (Adeleke, Ogundipe, & Ojo, 2021).

One of the primary drivers of market expansion among Nigerian SMEs is the need to mitigate risks associated with operating in a single market (Iyiola & Adeoye, 2018). By diversifying their market presence, SMEs can reduce dependence on a limited customer base and cushion the impact of economic downturns (Akinbola, Ogunnaike, & Ojo, 2019). Research by Okafor and Eze (2020) indicates that SMEs engaging in market expansion report higher profitability and resilience compared to those confined to a single location. Additionally, market expansion allows SMEs to leverage economies of scale, optimize production costs, and enhance brand recognition (Oladimeji & Udegbe, 2021). Nigerian entrepreneurs who embrace expansion strategies often benefit from increased bargaining power with suppliers and access to new funding opportunities (Balogun & Adeoye, 2020). However, the process requires careful planning, market research, and financial readiness to avoid overextension (Adeyemi & Oluwatobi, 2022).

Operational Efficiency

Operational efficiency is a critical determinant of the overall performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), especially in competitive and resource-constrained environments like Nigeria. It refers to the ability of an enterprise to deliver quality products and services using minimal input resources while maximizing output value. This concept is significant for SMEs as it directly affects their cost structure, customer satisfaction, and market competitiveness. According to Oladele & Ogunyemi (2021), operational efficiency is about optimizing internal processes and workflows to reduce waste, improve speed, and enhance service delivery, which in turn impacts firm profitability and sustainability. SMEs that invest in enhancing their operational procedures are better positioned to adapt to market changes and meet customer expectations effectively. Thus, improving operational efficiency helps SMEs maintain a lean structure and improve responsiveness to external and internal business pressures.

In the Nigerian context, operational efficiency is often influenced by several factors such as technological adoption, workforce competence, infrastructure availability, and regulatory environment. Adebayo & Akinola (2022) emphasized that SMEs in Nigeria that embrace digital tools and streamline their production and service processes significantly outperform their counterparts in terms of cost reduction and customer retention. They noted that operational efficiency is not just a matter of process optimization, but also of strategic decision-making, particularly in resource allocation and inventory management. Efficient operations enable SMEs to reduce downtime, manage risks better, and avoid redundancies that can lead to financial losses. Consequently, operational efficiency becomes a strong indicator of enterprise success in terms of output quality, service reliability, and revenue growth.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in this study is the researcher's postulation of the interactions among the study's variables. It diagrammatically shows the general constructs of the variables intends to be studied and the relationships among them.

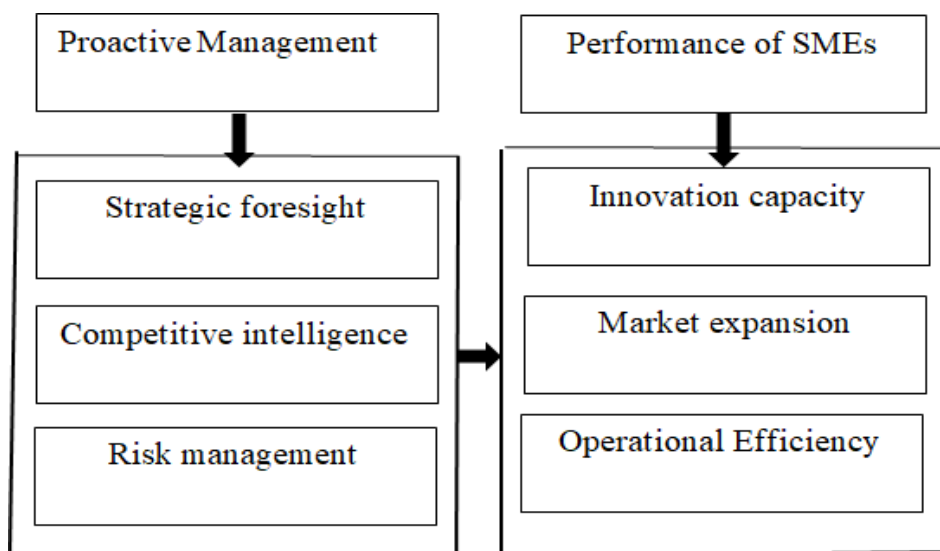


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Proactive Management and Performance of SMEs

Source: Researchers, 2025

The conceptual framework highlights the relationships between various indicators of proactive management strategic foresight, competitive intelligence, risk management, market orientation and strategic alliance. Performance is measured through key metrics, including innovation capacity, market expansion, operational efficiency, customer acquisition and retention and market positioning. The framework posits the following relationships: strategic foresight is hypothesized to enhance innovation capacity (H_1). competitive intelligence is linked to improved market expansion (H_2), risk management is expected to drive operational efficiency, (H_3)

market orientation is hypothesized boost customer acquisition and retention(H₄) and strategic alliance is theorized market positioning (H₅).

Theoretical Review

The importance of theory in every research cannot be overlooked. However, the theoretical foundation of this study is anchored on the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory (Barney, 1991). This theory explains how the proactive development, integration, and deployment of internal resources and capabilities enhance the performance and sustainability of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in dynamic and competitive environments.

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV), initially proposed by Wernerfelt (1984) and further developed by Barney (1991), is a strategic management theory that posits that an organization's internal resources are the key determinants of its sustained competitive advantage and overall performance. According to Wernerfelt (1984), firms should be viewed as bundles of resources, and gaining a competitive edge depends on the strategic acquisition and deployment of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources. Barney (1991) expanded on this by arguing that firms that possess and strategically manage these VRIN resources are more likely to achieve superior performance. Within the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the RBV is particularly relevant because SMEs typically operate with limited resources, making strategic resource management vital. Anchoring the study on proactive management within the RBV framework is critical, as proactive management itself can be conceptualized as a valuable internal capability a dynamic resource that enables SMEs to anticipate changes, mitigate risks, and exploit emerging opportunities. This proactive behavior supports long-term performance by fostering innovation, resilience, and strategic agility. Therefore, RBV offers a solid theoretical lens for analyzing how proactive management, as an internal intangible asset, contributes to the sustainable performance of SMEs in a competitive and uncertain business environment.

Gaps in Research

Despite growing interest in proactive management, existing studies on its effect on the performance of SMEs in Southeast Nigeria remain limited in scope, often neglecting a comprehensive multi-state analysis and an integrated theoretical framework; however, these gaps have now been identified.

Geographical Coverage

The present study covers the entire Southeast Nigeria, unlike previous studies that focused on two or a single state within the region.

Examples of such studies include:

- i. Nwankwo, Okeke, & Eze (2020) studied proactive management and performance of SMEs in Anambra State only.
- ii. Okafor & Eze (2019) examined proactive management and SMEs performance in Enugu State without covering other Southeast states.
- iii. Uche & Okonkwo (2021) focused on Abia State SMEs, excluding Anambra, Imo, Ebonyi, and Enugu

By incorporating all five Southeast states, this study offers a more comprehensive and representative assessment of the effect of proactive management on SME performance, thereby addressing the regional limitations evident in previous single-state studies.

Variables Indicators

Previous studies in Nigeria, including those conducted in the Southeast, have varied in their adoption of indicators for proactive management and SME performance. The present study's inclusion of strategic foresight, competitive intelligence, and strategic alliance as indicators of proactive management, alongside innovation

capacity and sustainability as indicators of performance, provides a more holistic assessment of SME success beyond financial metrics alone.

Examples of such studies include:

- i. Eze & Okoye (2020) assessed SME performance using only financial metrics (profitability, ROI), ignoring innovation capacity and sustainability
- ii. Okafor (2020) measured proactive management using Customer feedback responsiveness, operational flexibility, and Performance using employee productivity, cost reduction

Sample Size

Previous studies in the Southeast Nigeria region have often used smaller sample sizes compared to the present study's robust sample of 326 SMEs. With this larger sample, the study aims to enhance statistical reliability, minimize sampling errors, and allow for broader generalization of findings compared to those of smaller-scale studies.

Examples of such studies include:

- i. Igwe *et al.* (2017) used a sample of 120 SMEs in Southeast Nigeria.
- ii. Okoro and Madu (2019) sampled 150 SMEs in their study on proactive strategies

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design, which primarily adopts a quantitative approach using structured questionnaires. This design is particularly suitable for capturing data at a single point in time, thereby allowing for the assessment of relationships among variables without the need for longitudinal follow-up. By using structured questionnaires, the study ensures standardization in data collection, which enhances reliability, comparability, and objectivity of responses. Primary and secondary data were used. The geographical coverage of this study encompasses the Southeastern states of Nigeria, comprising Abia State, Enugu State, Imo State, Ebonyi State, and Anambra State. The study was conducted across 25 selected small and medium enterprises in the zone. The target population of the study comprised two thousand, one hundred and fifty-nine (2,159) management/senior, and junior staff drawn from twenty-five (25) conveniently selected small and medium enterprises (SMEs) out of the 217 registered SMEs across the five states of Southeast Nigeria: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. Five (5) SMEs were selected from each state. The names, addresses, and core business activities of the firms were obtained from the register of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Collaborative Survey (2023). It was always difficult and expensive to study the whole population. Consequently, a portion of the large group was statistically selected in such a way that it was accepted as representative of the entire population. The formula adopted in determining the sample size for the study was that propounded by Cochran (1977) for a finite population.

Data for this study were generated through the use of a structured questionnaire, which was made up of two sections. To ensure the validity of the research instrument for the study, it was subjected to both content and face validation by five (5) experts three senior lecturers from the Faculty of Management Sciences, ESUT, and two professionals from the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Collaborative Survey. Based on their expert input, the structure and language of the instrument were revised accordingly. Additionally, the questionnaire was properly structured, and a pre-test of each item was conducted to confirm its validity. Finally, the question items were validated using the principal component analysis on SPSS (v. 24).

To ascertain the reliability of the research instrument, the test-retest method was adopted. A pilot study was conducted in which 45 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the same group of respondents at two

different times. The instrument was re-administered to the same subjects after an interval of 14 days. The responses were subjected to a consistency test using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The reliability result yielded a coefficient of 0.86, indicating a high degree of internal consistency. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and simple percentages were used to analyze the bio-data of respondents via SPSS v.23. At the inferential level of analysis, simple regression analysis was used to test the formulated hypotheses.

Data Presentation, Analyses, And Interpretation

Data Presentation

This chapter presents the demographic and research data obtained from the respondents, explains how the data were systematically organized, and provides a detailed analysis and discussion of results.

Control Variables

Table 1: Control Variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	Below 20 years	15	4.7	4.7	4.7
	20–29 years	206	64.4	64.4	69.1
	30–39 years	47	14.7	14.7	83.8
	40–49 years	32	10.0	10.0	93.8
	50–59 years	12	3.8	3.8	97.5
	60 years and above	8	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	320	100.0	100.0	
Gender	Male	211	65.9	65.9	65.9
	Female	109	34.1	34.1	100.0
	Total	320	100.0	100.0	
Educational Qualification	WASSCE/GCE	127	39.7	39.7	39.7
	NCE/OND	146	45.6	45.6	85.3
	HND/B.Sc.	44	13.8	13.8	99.1
	M.Sc.	3	0.9	0.9	100.0
	Total	320	100.0	100.0	
Marital Status	Single	81	25.3	25.3	25.3
	Married	239	74.7	74.7	100.0
	Total	320	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The demographic profile indicates that most respondents are young, with 206 (64.4%) aged 20–29 years, followed by 47 (14.7%) aged 30–39 years, 32 (10.0%) aged 40–49 years, 12 (3.8%) aged 50–59 years, 8 (2.5%) aged 60 years and above, and 15 (4.7%) below 20 years. This suggests that SMEs in South East Nigeria are predominantly driven by a youthful workforce capable of supporting innovation, adaptability, and proactive management, while the smaller proportion of older employees contributes valuable experience and knowledge transfer. Gender distribution shows that 211 (65.9%) are male and 109 (34.1%) are female, indicating male dominance within the SME sector. This highlights the need for proactive management practices that promote gender inclusiveness to strengthen creativity, innovation, and organizational performance. Educationally, 45.6% possess NCE/OND qualifications, 39.7% hold WASSCE/GCE certificates, 13.8% have HND/B.Sc. degrees, and only 0.9% possess M.Sc. qualifications, suggesting a workforce with moderate educational attainment that requires continuous training and capacity development. Regarding marital status, 239 (74.7%) respondents are married while 81 (25.3%) are single, implying that supportive management practices, flexible work arrangements, and employee welfare initiatives are essential for improving motivation, commitment, productivity, and the sustainable performance of SMEs in South East Nigeria.

Test of Hypotheses

The hypotheses stated in Chapter One are tested in this section using Ordinal Logistic Regression (OLR) at a 0.05 significance level, which is appropriate for analyzing the ordinal (Likert-scale) data used in this study

Hypothesis One:

Null Hypothesis (H_0): Strategic foresight does not have a significant effect on the innovative capacity of organizations.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): Strategic foresight has a significant positive effect on the innovative capacity of organizations.

Table 2: Case Processing Summary

		N	Marginal Percentage
Innovatie_Capacity	3.75	1	0.3%
	4.00	1	0.3%
	4.25	6	1.9%
	4.50	34	10.6%
	4.75	100	31.3%
	5.00	178	55.6%
Strategic foresight enables us to offer better value to our customers than our competitors.	Undecided	4	1.3%
	Agree	6	1.9%
	Strongly agree	310	96.9%
Valid		320	100.0%
Missing		0	
Total		320	

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

Table 3: Model Fitting Information

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	33.580			
Final	25.931	7.649	2	.022

Link function: Logit.

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

Significance at 0.022, hence the null hypothesis that the model without predictors is rejected. This shows that the model improves the ability to predict the outcome

Table 4: Goodness-of-Fit

	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	2.687	8	.952
Deviance	3.202	8	.921

Link function: Logit.

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

The goodness-of-fit test shows that the model fits the data well, as both the Pearson ($p = 0.952$) and Deviance ($p = 0.921$) values are greater than 0.05, indicating no significant difference between observed and predicted values.

Table 5: Pseudo R-Square

Cox and Snell	.024
Nagelkerke	.027
McFadden	.012

Link function: Logit.

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

The pseudo- R^2 statistics indicate that the model explains only a modest proportion of the variation in innovation capacity (Cox and Snell = .024; Nagelkerke = .027; McFadden = .012). Although the explanatory power is relatively weak, the model remains statistically significant, suggesting that strategic foresight contributes significantly to innovation capacity while other factors not included in the model also influence the outcome.

Table 6: Parameter Estimates

	Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound

Threshold	[Innovative Capacity]	16.191	1.012	37.462	1	.000	4.209	8.174
Location	[Strategic Foresight]	3.755	.684	42.220	1	.000	1.585	2.096
Link function: Logit.								
a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.								

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

The ordinal logistic regression results indicate that strategic foresight has a statistically significant positive effect on the innovative capacity of SMEs ($\beta = 3.755$, Wald $\chi^2 = 42.220$, $p < .001$). This finding implies that higher levels of strategic foresight are associated with increased odds of achieving higher levels of innovation capacity. Since the coefficient reported by SPSS is a log-odds coefficient rather than an odds ratio, it should not be interpreted directly as an odds ratio. The corresponding odds ratio is $\text{Exp}(3.755) = 42.73$, indicating that a one-unit increase in strategic foresight substantially increases the odds of reporting a higher level of innovation capacity. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis Two:

Null Hypothesis (H_{02}): Competitive intelligence has no significant effect on the market expansion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Alternative Hypothesis (H_{12}): Competitive intelligence has a significant effect on the market expansion of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Table 7: Case Processing Summary

		N	Marginal Percentage
Market_Expansion	4.25	8	2.5%
	4.50	31	9.7%
	4.75	122	38.1%
	5.00	159	49.7%
Competitive_Intelligence	4.25	8	2.5%
	4.50	31	9.7%
	4.75	122	38.1%
	5.00	159	49.7%
Valid		320	100.0%
Missing		0	
Total		320	

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

Table 8: Model Fitting Information

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	661.454			
Final	.000	661.454	3	.000

Link function: Logit.

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

This result indicates that the inclusion of the predictor variables significantly improved the model's ability to predict the dependent variable compared to the intercept-only model. Therefore, the model provides a good fit to the data and is statistically significant in explaining variations in the outcome variable.

Table 9: Goodness-of-Fit

	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	.149	6	1.000
Deviance	.298	6	1.000

Link function: Logit.

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

Since the p-values ($p = 1.000$) are greater than 0.05, the model does not differ significantly from the observed data. This indicates that the model fits the data very well, meaning the predicted values closely match the actual values.

Table 10: Pseudo R-Square

Cox and Snell	.873
Nagelkerke	1.000
McFadden	1.000

Link function: Logit.

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

Table 11: Parameter Estimates

							95% confidence interval	
		Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[Market Expansion]	39.371	13.506	8.498	1	.004	32.900	65.843
Location	[Competitive Intelligence]	47.218	22.413	4.438	1	.035	28.733	55.878

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

The ordinal logistic regression results indicate a statistically significant positive relationship between competitive intelligence and market expansion ($\beta = 47.218$, Wald $\chi^2 = 4.438$, $p = .035$). However, the extremely large coefficient estimates and pseudo- R^2 values (Nagelkerke = 1.000; McFadden = 1.000) suggest complete or quasi-complete separation of the data. This occurs when the predictor almost perfectly predicts the outcome, resulting in unstable maximum-likelihood estimates. Therefore, while the statistical significance indicates a positive association, the magnitude of the coefficient should be interpreted with caution. These unusually high values may also indicate that the predictor and outcome variables are highly overlapping or that the same composite score was inadvertently used during analysis.

Hypothesis Three

Null Hypothesis (H_{03}): Risk management has no significant effect on the operational efficiency of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Alternative Hypothesis (H_{13}): Risk management has a significant effect on the operational efficiency of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Table 12: Case Processing Summary

		N	Marginal Percentage
Operational Efficiency	4.25	7	2.2%
	4.50	54	16.9%
	4.75	33	10.3%
	5.00	226	70.6%
Risk Management	4.25	14	4.4%
	4.50	24	7.5%
	4.75	97	30.3%
	5.00	185	57.8%
Valid		320	100.0%
Missing		0	
Total		320	

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

Table 13: Model Fitting Information

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	81.960			
Final	59.660	22.300	3	.000

Link function: Logit.

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

Significance at $p < .001$, hence the null hypothesis that the model without predictors is rejected. This shows that the model improves the ability to predict the outcome

Table 14: Goodness-of-Fit

	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	25.848	6	.200
Deviance	26.918	6	.060

Link function: Logit.

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

The goodness-of-fit test shows that the model fits the data well, as both the Pearson ($p = 0.20$) and Deviance ($p = 0.06$) values are greater than 0.05, indicating no significant difference between observed and predicted values.

Table 15: Pseudo R-Square

Cox and Snell	.067
Nagelkerke	.082
McFadden	.040

Link function: Logit.

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

Table 4.21 shows that the model explains a modest portion of the variation in the dependent variable (Cox and Snell $R^2 = 0.067$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.082$, and McFadden $R^2 = 0.040$). This indicates that the predictors account for about 6.7% to 8.2% of the variation, suggesting a moderate explanatory power of the model.

Table 16: Parameter Estimates

							95% confidence interval	
		Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[Operational Efficiency]	5.847	3.402	91.411	1	.000	3.058	4.635
Location	[Risk Management]	3.127	4.571	32.050	1	.024	3.112	4.246

Link function: Logit.

a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

Source: IBM SPSS Version 29

The ordinal logistic regression analysis revealed that risk management significantly influences operational efficiency ($\beta = 3.127$, Wald $\chi^2 = 32.050$, $p = .024$). The positive regression coefficient indicates that higher levels of risk management are associated with greater odds of achieving higher operational efficiency. The corresponding odds ratio is $\text{Exp}(3.127) = 22.81$, suggesting a substantial increase in the likelihood of higher

operational efficiency for each one-unit increase in risk management. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Hypothesis one was tested with ordinal logistic regression to ascertain the effect of strategic foresight on the innovation capacity of small and medium enterprises. The result revealed that strategic foresight had a positive effect on the firms' innovation capacity ($\beta=3.755$, $p < .001$). Therefore, the alternate hypothesis, which states that Strategic foresight has positive effects on the innovation capacity of small and medium enterprises, is hereby accepted and the null hypothesis rejected. Rohrbeck and Kum (2018) found that firms with well-developed strategic foresight mechanisms are more likely to anticipate market shifts and develop innovative products ahead of competitors. In the Nigerian context, Nwokah and Ahiauzu (2019) found that strategic foresight among SMEs significantly improves innovation outcomes by enhancing access to technology, finance, and specialized expertise.

Hypothesis two was tested with ordinal logistic regression to ascertain the effect of competitive intelligence on the market expansion of small and medium enterprises. The result revealed that strategic foresight had a positive effect on the firms' innovation capacity ($\beta=47.218$, $P=0.035 < 0.05$). Therefore, the alternate hypothesis, which states that competitive intelligence has positive effects on the market expansion of small and medium enterprises, is hereby accepted, and the null hypothesis is rejected. Calof and Wright (2018) found that competitive intelligence enhances organizational decision-making by providing actionable insights into market trends, competitor behavior, and emerging opportunities. Saayman, Pienaar, de Pelsmacker, and Viviers (2008) found that organizations utilizing structured CI processes demonstrated higher market adaptability and were better equipped to recognize market shifts early, allowing them to secure greater market shares.

Hypothesis three was tested with ordinal logistic regression to ascertain the effect of risk management on the operational efficiency of small and medium enterprises. The result revealed that risk management had a positive effect on the firms' operational efficiency ($\beta = 3.127$, $P=0.024 < 0.05$). Therefore, the alternative hypothesis, which states that Strategic foresight has positive effects on the innovation capacity of small and medium enterprises, is hereby accepted, and the null hypothesis is rejected. Similarly, Hillson and Murray-Webster (2017) found that proactive risk identification and response mechanisms help organizations allocate resources more effectively, avoid costly disruptions, and maintain continuous operations even under volatile market conditions.

Summary of Findings

This section provides a concise summary of the key empirical findings derived from the analyses conducted in the study.

- i. The strategic foresight had a significant effect on the innovative capacity of organizations ($\beta = 3.755$; $p = 0.00 < 0.05$). This implied that organizations engaging in strategic foresight are more likely to enhance their innovative capacity through shared resources, knowledge exchange, and market collaboration, enabling them to develop superior products, adopt advanced technologies, and maintain a competitive advantage in the market.
- ii. The competitive intelligence had a strong and significant effect on market expansion among organizations ($\beta = 47.218$; $p = 0.035$). This implied that firms with robust competitive intelligence systems are more capable of expanding their markets through systematic market scanning, competitor tracking, and customer trend analysis.
- iii. The risk management had a significant positive effect on operational efficiency among organizations ($\beta = 3.12$; $p = 0.024$). This implied that firms with effective risk management practices are more likely to attain higher operational efficiency through proactive identification, assessment, and mitigation of potential risks.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that proactive management functions, including strategic foresight, competitive intelligence, risk management, market orientation, and strategic alliance, contribute significantly to the performance of small and medium enterprises. These functions enhance key aspects of firm outcomes such as

innovation capacity, market expansion, operational efficiency, customer acquisition and retention, and market positioning. The findings revealed that each dimension of proactive management exerts a measurable and positive influence on a specific area of performance. Specifically, strategic foresight promotes innovative capacity by encouraging forward-thinking decisions that stimulate creativity and continuous improvement. Competitive intelligence facilitates market expansion by enabling firms to systematically gather and analyze information on competitors, customers, and industry trends, thereby supporting informed strategic decisions and access to new market opportunities. Likewise, risk management strengthens operational efficiency by helping firms identify potential disruptions early and introduce preventive and control measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby proposed.

- i. SMEs should adopt strategic foresight as a deliberate management approach to enhance their innovation capacity.
- ii. SMEs should engage in competitive intelligence practices to achieve broader market expansion.
- iii. SMEs should implement effective risk management strategies to improve operational efficiency.

Suggestions for Further Studies

- i. Strategic Foresight and the Innovation Capacity of Small and Medium Enterprises in Nigeria
- ii. Competitive Intelligence and the Market Expansion of Small and Medium Enterprises in North Central Nigeria
- iii. Risk Management and the Operational Efficiency of Small and Medium Enterprises in South West Nigeria

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