INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN SOCIAL SCIENCE (IJRISS)
ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue VIII August 2026

Knowledge Management and Business Continuity among Educational SMEs in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800319

Received: 19 August 2026; Accepted: 24 August 2026; Published: 03 September 2026

ABSTRACT

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operate in environments characterized by economic uncertainty, technological change, regulatory pressures, and operational disruptions. Educational SMEs are particularly dependent on organizational knowledge for maintaining teaching, administrative, and support activities during periods of disruption. This study examined the relationships among Knowledge Management (KM), Founder Dependence (FD), and Business Continuity (BC) among selected educational SMEs in Ekiti State, Nigeria, with particular attention to the mediating role of Founder Dependence. The study was anchored on the Knowledge-Based View and supported by the Resource-Based View and Contingency Theory. A quantitative survey design was adopted, and data were collected using a structured questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale. Of the 500 questionnaires administered, 461 valid responses were obtained, representing a 92.2% response rate. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS and bootstrapping based on 5,000 resamples.

The results showed that Knowledge Management had a positive and statistically significant effect on Business Continuity. Knowledge Management also had a positive and statistically significant effect on Founder Dependence, while Founder Dependence had a positive and statistically significant effect on Business Continuity. The indirect effect of Knowledge Management on Business Continuity through Founder Dependence was positive and statistically significant, indicating partial mediation. The model explained 71.5% of the variance in Business Continuity and 39.3% of the variance in Founder Dependence. The findings suggest that Knowledge Management is an important organizational capability for maintaining business continuity, while Founder Dependence provides an additional pathway through which knowledge-related practices are associated with continuity outcomes.

Keywords: Knowledge Management, Business Continuity, Founder Dependence, Educational SMEs, PLS-SEM

INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are important contributors to economic activity, employment, innovation, and human capital development. Their importance is particularly evident in developing economies where smaller firms provide employment and essential services to local communities. At the same time, SMEs are often vulnerable to external shocks because of resource constraints, limited managerial capacity, dependence on key personnel, and restricted access to technology and specialized expertise.

The educational sector provides an important context for examining knowledge management and business continuity. Private educational institutions depend on accumulated organizational knowledge relating to teaching practices, student administration, regulatory compliance, financial management, staff coordination, parent relationships, and institutional procedures. Disruptions affecting these activities can interfere with service delivery and threaten institutional sustainability. Maintaining continuity therefore requires organizations to preserve critical knowledge, distribute responsibilities, and ensure that essential activities can continue when key personnel are unavailable.

Knowledge Management (KM) refers to the processes through which organizations create, acquire, share, preserve, and apply knowledge. Organizational knowledge becomes valuable when it supports decision-making, problem-solving, innovation, adaptation, and the continued performance of essential activities. In SMEs, this is particularly important because knowledge may be concentrated in a small number of individuals, making the organization vulnerable when those individuals are unavailable.

One related issue is Founder Dependence. In founder-led SMEs, important decisions, operational responsibilities, organizational relationships, and critical knowledge may remain concentrated in the founder or owner-manager. Founder Dependence can therefore influence how an organization responds to disruptions and maintains essential activities. The concentration of knowledge and authority in a founder may provide experience and leadership during periods of uncertainty, while also creating potential dependence on an individual for decision-making and operational coordination.

The relationship between Knowledge Management, Founder Dependence, and Business Continuity is therefore important. Knowledge management may influence the extent to which organizational knowledge and responsibilities are distributed within an educational SME. At the same time, founder dependence may be associated with continuity outcomes because founders can provide organizational knowledge, experience, leadership, and decision-making during disruptions. Examining Founder Dependence as a mediating variable provides a more complete explanation of how knowledge management relates to business continuity.

Business continuity refers to an organization's capacity to maintain essential functions during and after disruptive events. In educational SMEs, continuity includes maintaining teaching and administrative activities, preserving critical records, communicating with stakeholders, reallocating responsibilities, and recovering operations after disruption.

Despite growing interest in Knowledge Management within SMEs, much of the empirical literature has focused on organizational performance, innovation, competitiveness, and growth rather than business continuity specifically. Evidence examining the relationship between Knowledge Management and Business Continuity among Nigerian educational SMEs remains limited. There is also limited empirical evidence on whether founder dependence helps explain this relationship.

This study therefore examines the relationship between Knowledge Management and Business Continuity among selected educational SMEs in Ekiti State, Nigeria, while investigating the mediating role of Founder Dependence. By incorporating the three constructs into a single empirical model, the study seeks to provide a more complete understanding of the organizational factors associated with continuity in educational SMEs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge Management

Knowledge Management (KM) refers to the systematic processes through which organizations create, acquire, share, preserve, and apply knowledge to support organizational objectives. Alavi and Leidner (2001) conceptualized KM through processes involving the creation, storage, transfer, and application of knowledge, while Gold et al. (2001) positioned KM as an organizational capability involving knowledge infrastructure and knowledge processes.

In this study, KM is operationalized through four dimensions: knowledge creation, knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, and knowledge application. Knowledge creation concerns the development of new ideas and solutions. Knowledge acquisition involves obtaining relevant knowledge from employees, professional development activities, external sources, stakeholders, and other organizations. Knowledge sharing concerns the exchange of knowledge among organizational members, while knowledge application involves using accumulated knowledge in decision-making, problem-solving, service improvement, and innovation.

These processes are particularly important in SMEs because smaller organizations often operate with limited financial and human resources. Knowledge and expertise may also be concentrated in a small number of individuals, increasing the consequences of knowledge loss when key employees or managers leave. Effective

KM can strengthen organizational learning, adaptability, and resilience by making knowledge more accessible and usable across the organization (Durst et al., 2023; Usai et al., 2021). Knowledge management practices have also been associated with operational outcomes among Nigerian SMEs (Odesola et al., 2026).

The importance of these processes is particularly strong in SMEs. Smaller organizations may not possess the financial resources of larger firms, making organizational learning and knowledge utilization important sources of capability (Darroch, 2005; Durst et al., 2023).

Business Continuity

Business continuity refers to an organization's ability to maintain essential operations when disruptive events occur. It encompasses preparedness, continuity planning, alternative operating arrangements, crisis response, recovery, and restoration (Elliott et al., 2010).

The study operationalizes BC through business continuity planning, continuity strategies, and recovery capability. These dimensions capture an organization's preparedness for disruption, its ability to establish alternative arrangements for maintaining critical functions, and its capacity to restore operations following an interruption.

For educational SMEs, business continuity is particularly important because disruption to teaching, administration, student records, communication, and other essential services can affect both organizational performance and stakeholder confidence. The ability to maintain these activities therefore depends partly on the availability of organizational knowledge, competent personnel, and systems that support continued operations.

Founder Dependence

Founder Dependence refers to the extent to which critical organizational knowledge, decision-making, and operational responsibilities remain concentrated in the founder or owner-manager. Founder involvement can provide valuable experience and leadership, particularly in smaller organizations, but excessive concentration of authority and knowledge may create challenges for organizational continuity and succession (Miller et al., 2008; Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2014).

From a knowledge management perspective, documentation, knowledge sharing, and employee development can help distribute organizational knowledge beyond individual knowledge holders. However, the presence of KM practices does not necessarily eliminate founder involvement because founders may continue to play important roles in strategic and operational decisions (Durst et al., 2023).

In this study, Founder Dependence is treated as a mediating construct linking Knowledge Management and Business Continuity. It captures the extent to which the organization relies on the founder for critical knowledge, decision-making, and operational activities.

Theoretical Foundation

The study is primarily anchored on the Knowledge-Based View (KBV), which treats organizational knowledge as a strategic resource and emphasizes the importance of creating, integrating, transferring, and applying knowledge within organizations (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Gold et al., 2001).

The Resource-Based View complements the KBV by emphasizing organizational resources and capabilities as sources of sustained advantage. Contingency Theory provides an additional perspective by suggesting that organizational effectiveness depends on the fit between management practices and environmental conditions.

Knowledge Management and Founder Dependence

Knowledge Management and Founder Dependence are related through the distribution and institutionalization of organizational knowledge. Documentation, knowledge sharing, and employee development can make critical knowledge more accessible beyond the founder and other key individuals (Durst et al., 2023).

However, KM practices may coexist with strong founder involvement. Founders may continue to provide important knowledge, make key decisions, and coordinate organizational activities even when knowledge-sharing and documentation practices are present. This suggests that the relationship between KM and Founder Dependence should be examined empirically rather than assumed to be negative.

The present study therefore examines the relationship between Knowledge Management and Founder Dependence among educational SMEs in Ekiti State.

Knowledge Management and Business Continuity

The relationship between KM and Business Continuity can be explained through several mechanisms. Knowledge documentation can preserve critical organizational knowledge when particular employees are unavailable. Knowledge sharing distributes expertise and responsibilities, while training strengthens employee capability and creates greater redundancy in critical functions. Knowledge application enables organizations to convert accumulated experience into practical responses during disruptions (Durst et al., 2023; Usai et al., 2021).

The literature therefore provides a theoretical basis for expecting KM to be associated with stronger Business Continuity. However, empirical evidence specific to Nigerian educational SMEs remains limited.

Founder Dependence and Business Continuity

Founder Dependence may influence Business Continuity because the concentration of critical knowledge, decision-making, and operational responsibilities in one individual can affect an organization's ability to maintain operations when that individual is unavailable. Research on small businesses emphasizes the importance of leadership arrangements, employee involvement, and succession considerations for organizational sustainability (Miller et al., 2008; Le Breton-Miller & Miller, 2014).

At the same time, founder involvement may provide valuable experience, leadership, and rapid decision-making during periods of uncertainty. The relationship between Founder Dependence and Business Continuity should therefore be examined empirically rather than assumed to be uniformly negative.

Knowledge Management, Founder Dependence and Business Continuity

The integration of Knowledge Management, Founder Dependence, and Business Continuity provides a broader explanation of continuity within educational SMEs. KM concerns how organizational knowledge is created, acquired, shared, and applied, while Founder Dependence reflects the extent to which critical knowledge and responsibilities remain concentrated in the founder. Business Continuity reflects the organization's ability to maintain and recover essential activities during disruption.

Existing literature has largely examined Knowledge Management in relation to organizational performance, learning, innovation, and resilience, while founder-related research has focused more broadly on leadership, succession, and organizational dependence. The relationship among these three constructs therefore remains insufficiently examined, particularly within Nigerian educational SMEs.

This study addresses this gap by examining the direct relationships among Knowledge Management, Founder Dependence, and Business Continuity and by testing whether Founder Dependence mediates the relationship between Knowledge Management and Business Continuity.

RESEARCH GAP AND HYPOTHESIS

The literature identifies three important gaps. First, much of the existing research on Knowledge Management has examined organizational performance, innovation, learning, and resilience rather than Business Continuity specifically. Second, limited empirical evidence exists on Founder Dependence within educational SMEs, particularly in Nigeria. Third, relatively little attention has been given to the mechanism through which Knowledge Management may influence Business Continuity through Founder Dependence.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining the direct relationships between Knowledge Management and Business Continuity, Knowledge Management and Founder Dependence, and Founder Dependence and Business Continuity, as well as the mediating role of Founder Dependence.

The following hypotheses are therefore proposed:

H1: Knowledge Management has a significant positive effect on Business Continuity among selected educational SMEs in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

H2: Knowledge Management has a significant effect on Founder Dependence among selected educational SMEs in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

H3: Founder Dependence has a significant effect on Business Continuity among selected educational SMEs in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

H4: Founder Dependence significantly mediates the relationship between Knowledge Management and Business Continuity among selected educational SMEs in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative survey design to examine the relationships among Knowledge Management, Founder Dependence, and Business Continuity among selected educational SMEs in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The design was appropriate because the study sought to assess existing organizational practices and examine the relationships among the study constructs without manipulating the study environment.

Population and Sampling

The population comprised management personnel of registered private educational SMEs operating in Ekiti State, including nursery and primary schools, secondary schools, and vocational training institutions. The sampling frame comprised 731 nursery and primary schools, 480 secondary schools, and 42 vocational training institutions, giving a target population of 1,253 management personnel.

A multistage sampling technique was adopted. Educational institutions were first stratified according to institutional category, after which simple random sampling was used within the identified strata. A total of 500 questionnaires were administered, of which 461 valid responses were returned and used for analysis, representing a 92.2% response rate.

Instrument and Measurement

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The measurement items were adapted from established studies and modified to reflect the context of educational SMEs in Ekiti State.

Knowledge Management was measured through four dimensions: knowledge creation, knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, and knowledge application. These dimensions captured the extent to which educational SMEs generate new knowledge, obtain relevant knowledge from internal and external sources, exchange knowledge among organizational members, and apply available knowledge to organizational activities.

Founder Dependence was measured as a mediating construct through three dimensions: dependence on founder knowledge, centralized decision-making, and dependence on founder relationships. These dimensions captured the extent to which critical organizational knowledge, important decisions, and key organizational relationships remained concentrated in the founder.

Business Continuity was measured through three dimensions: business continuity planning, continuity strategies, and recovery capability. These dimensions captured the organization's preparedness for disruption, its ability to maintain essential activities through alternative arrangements, and its capacity to restore operations following an interruption.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The measurement model was assessed using indicator outer loadings, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, while convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT).

The structural model was assessed using path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), and bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. The analysis examined the direct relationships among Knowledge Management, Founder Dependence, and Business Continuity, as well as the indirect relationship through Founder Dependence. Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% level. The measurement model was assessed using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, AVE, the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and HTMT, while structural relationships were assessed using bootstrapping with 5,000 samples (Hair et al., 2022).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Postgraduate School and Department of Business Administration, Thomas Adewumi University, Oko-Irese, Kwara State. Permission was obtained from relevant proprietors, principals, and managers before questionnaire administration. Participation was voluntary, and the information collected was treated confidentially. The article already reports the ethical approval and permission process.

RESULTS

Descriptive Results

Knowledge Management recorded a grand mean of 3.96, indicating a high level of KM practices among the sampled educational SMEs. Knowledge creation recorded particularly high scores, including 4.06 for developing new ideas and 4.05 for encouraging innovative ideas.

Founder Dependence recorded a grand mean of 3.75, indicating a considerable level of founder dependence. The highest score was for major decisions requiring founder approval ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.63$).

Business Continuity recorded a grand mean of 3.84, with secure preservation and accessibility of important records having the highest mean ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.62$).

Measurement Model

The measurement model was assessed using indicator outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity. During the assessment, indicators with particularly weak outer loadings were removed to improve the measurement properties of the constructs while retaining indicators necessary for adequate construct representation. Specifically, FD5, FD2, and KM2 were removed from the model.

Following the removal of these indicators, the constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency reliability. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.831 to 0.886, while composite reliability (rho_c) values ranged from 0.870 to 0.909. These values indicate adequate internal consistency across the three constructs.

Business Continuity achieved an AVE of 0.531, while Founder Dependence recorded an AVE of 0.493 and Knowledge Management recorded an AVE of 0.444. Thus, Business Continuity exceeded the conventional

0.50 threshold, while Founder Dependence and Knowledge Management remained slightly below the preferred threshold. However, both constructs retained strong composite reliability, and the indicator-removal process was limited to items with the weakest loadings to avoid excessive reduction of construct content.

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	rho_A	Composite Reliability (rho_C)	AVE
Business Continuity	0.886	0.898	0.909	0.531
Founder Dependence	0.831	0.842	0.870	0.493
Knowledge Management	0.872	0.890	0.896	0.444

Source: Author's computation, 2026.

Indicator Assessment

The final outer loadings showed that the retained indicators provided varying levels of contribution to their respective constructs. For Business Continuity, loadings ranged from 0.509 to 0.849. Founder Dependence had loadings ranging from 0.582 to 0.784, while the retained Knowledge Management indicators ranged from 0.544 to 0.824.

The lowest loading for Business Continuity was BC5 (0.509), while FD9 recorded the lowest loading among the retained Founder Dependence indicators (0.582). KM5 recorded the lowest loading among the retained Knowledge Management indicators (0.544). These indicators were retained because their removal would require further reduction of construct content without sufficient justification from the measurement results.

The three removed indicators were:

Indicator	Original loading	Decision
FD5	0.367	Removed
FD2	0.565	Removed
KM2	0.444	Removed

Source: Author's computation, 2026.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT criterion. The revised results showed HTMT values of 0.699 for Founder Dependence and Business Continuity, 0.662 for Knowledge Management and Founder Dependence, and 0.922 for Knowledge Management and Business Continuity.

Table 2. HTMT Results

Construct Pair	HTMT
Founder Dependence ↔ Business Continuity	0.699
Knowledge Management ↔ Founder Dependence	0.662
Knowledge Management ↔ Business Continuity	0.922

Source: Author's computation, 2026.

The HTMT values for Founder Dependence–Business Continuity and Knowledge Management–Founder Dependence were below 0.90. However, the HTMT value of 0.922 between Knowledge Management and Business Continuity exceeded the commonly used 0.90 threshold, indicating substantial empirical overlap between the two constructs. This result warrants caution in interpreting Knowledge Management and Business

ISSN No. 2454-6186 | DOI: 10.47772/IJRISS | Volume X Issue VIII August 2026

Continuity as completely distinct constructs.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesized relationships were assessed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with bootstrapping based on 5,000 resamples. The results showed that Knowledge Management had a positive and statistically significant effect on Business Continuity, supporting H1. Knowledge Management also had a positive and statistically significant effect on Founder Dependence, supporting H2. Founder Dependence had a positive and statistically significant effect on Business Continuity, supporting H3.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Knowledge Management - Business Continuity	0.714	22.119	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Knowledge Management - Founder Dependence	0.627	17.276	< 0.001	Supported
H3	Founder Dependence - Business Continuity	0.19	3.779	< 0.001	Supported

Source: Author's computation, 2026.

Mediation Analysis

The mediating role of Founder Dependence was assessed using the specific indirect effect. The results showed that Knowledge Management had a positive and statistically significant indirect effect on Business Continuity through Founder Dependence. Thus, H4 was supported. Since the direct effect of Knowledge Management on Business Continuity remained statistically significant, Founder Dependence partially mediates the relationship between Knowledge Management and Business Continuity.

Table 4. Specific Indirect Effect

Hypothesis	Indirect Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Decision
H4	Knowledge Management -Founder Dependence -Business Continuity	0.119	3.548	< 0.001	Supported

Source: Author's computation, 2026.

Explanatory Power of the Model

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the explanatory power of the model. Knowledge Management explained 39.3% of the variance in Founder Dependence ($R^2 = 0.393$), while Knowledge Management and Founder Dependence jointly explained 71.5% of the variance in Business Continuity ($R^2 = 0.715$).

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Founder Dependence	0.393	0.392
Business Continuity	0.715	0.714

Source: Author's computation, 2026.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that Knowledge Management has a positive and statistically significant effect on Business Continuity among selected educational SMEs in Ekiti State, Nigeria. This indicates that organizations that create, acquire, share, and apply knowledge are more likely to maintain essential activities during periods of disruption. The finding supports the Knowledge-Based View, which positions organizational knowledge as an important organizational resource and capability. It is also consistent with previous evidence linking knowledge management with organizational learning, adaptability, and resilience in SMEs.

Knowledge Management also had a positive and statistically significant effect on Founder Dependence. This finding indicates that stronger knowledge management practices were associated with greater founder dependence in the sampled educational SMEs. Although knowledge management can facilitate the distribution and retention of organizational knowledge, the positive relationship suggests that founders may remain important sources of organizational knowledge, decision-making, and coordination even where knowledge management practices are present. This finding highlights the continued centrality of founders within educational SMEs and suggests that the existence of knowledge management practices does not necessarily eliminate reliance on founder expertise and involvement.

Founder Dependence also had a positive and statistically significant effect on Business Continuity. This suggests that founder involvement may provide valuable knowledge, leadership, and decision-making support that helps educational SMEs maintain operations during disruptions. The finding provides a more nuanced view of founder dependence. While excessive concentration of knowledge and authority can create continuity risks, founder experience and leadership may also provide an important source of stability in smaller organizations.

The mediation analysis further showed that Founder Dependence significantly mediates the relationship between Knowledge Management and Business Continuity. Since the direct effect of Knowledge Management on Business Continuity remained significant, the result indicates partial mediation. This suggests that Knowledge Management contributes to Business Continuity both directly and indirectly through its relationship with Founder Dependence.

The measurement results require some caution when interpreting the strength and distinctiveness of the constructs. The HTMT value between Knowledge Management and Business Continuity was 0.922, indicating substantial empirical overlap between the two constructs. Knowledge Management and Founder Dependence, as well as Founder Dependence and Business Continuity, recorded HTMT values of 0.662 and 0.699 respectively. The AVE values for Knowledge Management (0.444) and Founder Dependence (0.493) were also slightly below the conventional 0.50 threshold, although both constructs demonstrated strong composite reliability. These results suggest that the findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution, particularly regarding the distinction between Knowledge Management and Business Continuity.

Overall, the findings extend the existing literature by showing that Knowledge Management is strongly associated with Business Continuity among educational SMEs, while Founder Dependence provides an additional pathway through which this relationship operates. The findings also indicate that founder involvement remains relevant to continuity even in organizations that engage in knowledge management practices.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships among Knowledge Management, Founder Dependence, and Business Continuity among selected educational SMEs in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The findings established a positive and statistically significant relationship between Knowledge Management and Business Continuity. Knowledge Management also had a positive and statistically significant relationship with Founder Dependence, while Founder Dependence had a positive and statistically significant relationship with Business Continuity.

The mediation analysis further established that Founder Dependence significantly mediated the relationship between Knowledge Management and Business Continuity, indicating partial mediation. The model explained 71.5% of the variance in Business Continuity and 39.3% of the variance in Founder Dependence.

The findings indicate that knowledge creation, acquisition, sharing, and application are important organizational capabilities for maintaining continuity among educational SMEs. They also show that founder involvement remains relevant to organizational continuity, suggesting that knowledge management practices and founder roles should be considered together when developing continuity strategies.

Educational SMEs should therefore strengthen knowledge documentation, knowledge-sharing routines, staff development, cross-training, and the accessibility of critical organizational knowledge. At the same time, managers should clarify decision-making responsibilities and ensure that essential operational knowledge is not concentrated exclusively in the founder. These measures can help organizations maintain continuity while reducing vulnerability associated with the concentration of critical responsibilities and knowledge.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical approval was obtained from the Postgraduate School and Department of Business Administration, Thomas Adewumi University, Oko-Irese, Kwara State, Nigeria. Permission was obtained from relevant proprietors, principals, and managers before questionnaire administration.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest associated with this study.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data supporting the findings are not publicly available because they contain information collected from participating educational institutions and respondents. Data may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to applicable ethical and confidentiality requirements.

FUNDING

The authors received no specific external funding for this research.

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