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INNOVATIVE MANAGEMENT AND SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE ENTERPRISE GROWTH IN OTUKPO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, BENUE STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between innovative management and Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) growth in Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted, targeting a population of 563 registered SMEs in the LGA. Using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination table, a sample of 225 SMEs was selected through stratified and random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to SME owners, and analyzed with both descriptive and inferential statistics to assess the relationship between innovative management and SME growth. The regression analysis revealed that the model explained 61.1% of the variance in SME growth ($R^2 = 0.611$), indicating that Innovative Strategic Decision-making (ISD), Innovation Adoption Capability (IAC), and Customer-Focused Innovation (CFI) significantly contributed to growth. The model fit was statistically significant ($F(3,196) = 102.35$, $p < 0.000$). Among the predictors, IAC emerged as the strongest factor ($\beta = 0.427$, $p < 0.000$), followed by ISD ($\beta = 0.312$, $p < 0.000$) and CFI ($\beta = 0.289$, $p < 0.000$). These findings suggest that SMEs' capacity to adopt innovations, make effective strategic decisions, and align innovations with customer needs are critical drivers of competitiveness, sustainability, and long-term growth. The study concludes that innovation-oriented managerial practices are essential for SME growth. It recommends targeted training programs, improved financing mechanisms, and supportive policy frameworks to strengthen innovation-driven managerial capacity. This research contributes to the literature by offering context-specific evidence on the role of innovative management in enhancing SME growth in Nigeria.

Keywords: Innovation, Managers, Small and Medium Enterprise, Growth, Otukpo

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Introduction

Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) are globally recognised as engines of economic growth, poverty reduction, and employment generation (Ariyo, 2005; OECD, 2019). In developing countries like Nigeria, SMEs contribute significantly to gross domestic product (GDP) and serve as catalysts for industrialisation, innovation, and sustainable development (Oteh, 2010; Abor & Quartey, 2010). According to the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN, 2020), SMEs account for over 96% of businesses and 84% of employment in the country, yet their survival and growth remain severely constrained by a range of environmental and internal factors. Despite their contributions, SMEs in Nigeria often struggle with limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, weak managerial capacity, and unfavorable policy environments (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013; Olutunla & Obamuyi, 2008). In Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State, these challenges are more pronounced due to infrastructural deficits, limited market access, and leadership inefficiencies. The inability of many SMEs in Otukpo to transit from micro-enterprises into sustainable and competitive firms raises concerns about the role of managerial practices in fostering their growth.

Prior studies have examined the determinants of SME performance in Nigeria, much of the emphasis has been on finance, government policy, and infrastructural development (Obi et al., 2018; Ogujiuba, 2014). However, less attention has been paid to the role of innovative management and leadership practices in driving SME growth, particularly within the Otukpo LGA. This LGA is anecdotal evidence suggests that many SMEs remain stagnant, with owners and managers struggling to adopt innovative strategic decision-making, customer-focused innovation, and innovation adaptability to change. These managerial gaps not only limit competitiveness but also contribute to the high mortality rate of SMEs in the area. There are limited empirical evidence on the relationship between the innovative management and SME growth in Otukpo LGA, Benue State. Existing studies have predominantly focused on urban centers like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt (Olawale & Garwe, 2010; Eniola & Entebang, 2015), overlooking the peculiar challenges of SMEs in smaller localities. These gaps are essential for providing context-specific strategies that can enhance the sustainability and competitiveness of SMEs in the LGA.

In today's dynamic and competitive business environment, innovation has become a critical determinant of sustainable growth, particularly for Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs). The management style adopted by SME owners and managers plays a pivotal role in shaping how innovative, adaptable, and competitive their organisations become (Udoyiu et al., 2024). Despite their economic importance, many SMEs continue to struggle with sustainable growth due to weak managerial practices, limited innovation capabilities, and a lack of strategic direction (Ajayi & Adeyeye, 2023; Olubiyi, 2024). Innovative management characterised by creativity, adaptability, risk-taking, and innovation-driven thinking have increasingly been associated with

improved SME growth outcomes, including market expansion and customer retention (Chukwuemeka, 2021; Gonzalez-Varona et al., 2024). Managers who empower employees, experiment with new ideas, and embrace emerging technologies are often better positioned to navigate uncertainties, manage risks, and create long-term value (Joel & Oguanobi, 2023; Okafor & Oluka, 2025). Thus, managerial innovation is not merely an optional approach but a necessity for SME resilience and competitiveness.

Despite the acknowledged importance of innovation-oriented management, SMEs in Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State operate within a challenging socio-economic environment, characterised by limited access to finance, infrastructural deficits, and fluctuating demand cycles. These conditions further intensify the managerial and innovation gaps already constraining many SMEs in Nigeria. Although national-level studies indicate that creative and entrepreneurial management fosters stronger SME performance (Ajayi & Adeyeye, 2023; Joel & Oguanobi, 2023), there remains little empirical evidence on whether such innovative practices are actively adopted in semi-urban contexts such as Otukpo, and, if so, to what extent they influence growth. This creates uncertainty regarding the contextual relevance and effectiveness of innovative management strategies in less-researched environments. Therefore, this study seeks to fill these gaps by investigating the relationship between the innovative management and SME growth in Otukpo LGA, Benue State, with the aim of providing evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, SME owners, and stakeholders.

Ajayi and Adeyeye (2023) explored the role of innovation in driving SME performance. The study focused on SMEs in Ilorin, Kwara State, with a sample of 150 SME operators. Many SMEs struggle with sustaining competitiveness due to weak innovation practices. Employing multivariate regression analysis, the study examined the relationship between organisational innovation and firm performance. Findings revealed that organisational innovation, particularly when reinforced by leadership intent and embedded in firm culture, significantly enhanced customer retention, revenue growth, and product diversification. The study concluded that the active promotion and institutionalisation of innovation by SME leaders increases the likelihood of achieving sustainable business performance.

Similarly, Ojochide et al. (2023) examined "strategic leadership and innovation capability in Lagos SMEs" using a survey of 180 SME leaders. Their study was situated within Lagos, a hub of entrepreneurial activity in Nigeria. The research sought to understand how leadership style influences innovation-driven competitiveness among SMEs. Employing correlation and regression techniques, the authors tested the link between strategic leadership practices and innovation capabilities. Results suggested that leadership style plays a crucial role in strengthening SMEs' ability to innovate and remain competitive. The study reinforced the view that strategic and innovation-oriented leadership is central to sustaining SME growth in highly competitive environments.

Radzi et al. (2025) posited that Millennials possess immense potential to drive national environmental sustainability, thus, their effectiveness depends on their awareness and understanding of sustainable practices. This study investigates Millennials' awareness and comprehension of responsible environmental behaviours within Malaysian public higher education institutions, drawing on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which highlights normative, control, and behavioural beliefs as predictors of action. Using a convenience sample of 320 students from a Malaysian university on the East Coast, responses were collected through a validated and adapted survey. Data were analysed using SPSS version 20 and SmartPLS version 3.2.7, aligned with the proposed research model. Findings demonstrate a clear and positive relationship between sustainability awareness, knowledge, and actions. Specifically, greater awareness of environmental issues encourages sustainable behaviours, while deeper comprehension of sustainability concepts reinforces responsible practices. These results affirm that Millennials' engagement in sustainability initiatives is contingent upon their education and awareness. Furthermore, knowledge significantly shapes university students' sustainability efforts, highlighting the strategic role of higher education in building sustainable competencies. From a generational perspective, both Millennials and Gen Z will be crucial future leaders, equipped with relevant knowledge and capacities to advance environmental conservation initiatives. Thus, targeted interventions to strengthen their awareness and practice of sustainability are essential. This research contributes by extending the theory of planned behaviour, presenting a heuristic model that illustrates the pathways between awareness, knowledge, and sustainable action. Additionally, it emphasises the policy relevance of embedding affordable and sustainable practices within Malaysian public higher education systems, ensuring that the next generation is well-prepared to lead environmental sustainability efforts.

Perotti et al. (2025) examined the role of innovation management in facilitating CE adoption. Specifically, it examines the nexus between green innovation and CE practices in firms, while also assessing the influence of open innovation strategies. Green innovation, conceptualised as a learning process involving the adoption of novel practices, technologies, or products, has long been linked to CE implementation, though the relationship is often overlooked or assumed rather than empirically tested. In contrast, open innovation-based on leveraging external ideas, collaborations, and technological inflows, may further accelerate the transition to circularity by fostering resource access and knowledge sharing. Drawing on the resource-based view of the firm, this research employed covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) on a dataset of 318 European companies. The results revealed that both green product and process innovations enable firms to secure critical resources necessary for implementing CE practices. Moreover, these effects were found to be amplified when complemented by open innovation strategies, suggesting that a synergistic approach enhances

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circular-oriented outcomes. The findings highlight that environmental awareness and stakeholder engagement are pivotal strategic levers for acquiring the resources and knowledge required for CE implementation. Thus, the study not only advances theoretical understanding of the innovation–circularity nexus but also offers practical insights for managers, particularly regarding how to harness innovation management in the early stages of CE transition.

Hypotheses Development

The hypothesis formulated in null form were tested at 0.05 significant level

$H0_1$: There is no significant relationship between innovative strategic decision-making and SME growth in Otukpo LGA, Benue State

$H0_2$: There is a significant relationship between innovative adaptability to change and SME growth in Otukpo LGA, Benue State

$H0_3$: There is a significant relationship between customer-focused innovation and SME growth in Otukpo LGA, Benue State

Materials and Methods

Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs)

Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) Growth are widely recognised as the foundation of economic growth and innovation in developing economies such as Nigeria. They are typically measured by indicators such as workforce size, turnover, and asset base. However, in the Nigerian context, classification is guided by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), which defines SMEs as enterprises employing between 10 and 199 people and possessing assets of up to ₦500 million (Ajayi & Adeyeye, 2023). In Nigeria, SMEs simultaneously serve as hubs of innovation and as victims of structural underdevelopment. Their growth and survival depend not only on entrepreneurial drive but also on the presence of strategic and innovation-led management capable of navigating infrastructural deficiencies and market uncertainties.

As Oiku (2024) observed, the future of SMEs in Nigeria will hinge on their ability to transform innovative potential into organisational resilience, an imperative that elevates innovation in leadership to a critical focus of both policy and academic discourse. Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) growth is a multidimensional construct that extends beyond the mere physical expansion of business assets or increases in workforce size. While traditional indicators, such as growth in revenue, market share, profit margins, and staff strength, remain relevant and valid measures of performance, contemporary scholarship emphasises that SME growth should also be conceptualised in qualitative terms. These include the degree of innovation, improvements in organisational processes, and the capacity for adaptability within dynamic business environments (Okafor & Oluka, 2025; Nwuke & Adeola, 2023).

Innovative management

The concept of innovative management has gained prominence in management and entrepreneurship research, particularly in relation to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). An innovative

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management is characterised as a leader who employs creativity, adaptability, strategic foresight, and risk-taking behaviour in order to foster growth and sustain competitiveness within an organisation (Ajayi & Adeyeye, 2023). Unlike traditional managers, whose focus often centres on maintaining established routines, innovative management seek to introduce new ideas, develop flexible strategies, and integrate technological and organisational innovations to improve performance (Gonzalez-Varona et al., 2024). Innovative management also encourage a culture of experimentation, collaboration, and knowledge sharing, creating an environment where employees are empowered to contribute to problem-solving and organisational learning. According to Chukwuemeka (2021), such managers leverage emerging technologies, market intelligence, and proactive decision-making to navigate uncertainty and position their firms advantageously in volatile business environments. This approach is particularly significant for SMEs, where survival and growth depend on the ability to continuously adapt to market changes and resource constraints.

Furthermore, innovation-oriented managers are often associated with transformational and entrepreneurial leadership styles, which emphasise opportunity recognition, customer-oriented innovation, and strategic flexibility (Joel & Oguanobi, 2023). Okafor and Oluka (2025) argue that strategic innovation management, driven by proactive leaders, directly influences firm performance through improved market penetration, resilience, and long-term value creation. Thus, the concept of innovative management reflects a paradigm shift from traditional administrative leadership towards a model that prioritises innovation as the engine of organisational sustainability and competitive advantage.

Schumpeter's Theory of Innovation

The theory of innovation, developed by Joseph Schumpeter in 1934, is one of the foundational perspectives explaining how innovation stimulates economic development. Schumpeter positions entrepreneurs and managers as the central agents of creative destruction, who introduce new products, processes, and organisational methods that disrupt existing markets while creating opportunities for growth. Within the context of SMEs, innovative management embody this role by formulating novel strategies, embracing technological change, and fostering continuous improvement to sustain competitiveness (Agarwal & Selen, 2017). The theory assumes that the introduction of new products, production methods, markets, sources of supply, or organisational forms represents the fundamental driver of long-term economic growth. Economic expansion, therefore, is not viewed merely as the result of capital accumulation, but as an outcome of qualitative transformations generated through innovation (Schumpeter, 1934). Furthermore, Schumpeter distinguishes entrepreneurs (or innovative management) from ordinary businesspeople. While conventional managers focus primarily on maintaining routine operations, entrepreneurs actively disrupt equilibrium by combining resources in new ways. Hence, entrepreneurship is equated with innovation,

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and without it, economies risk stagnation (McCraw, 2007).

Methods

The study adopted a survey research design with the population of 563 registered SMEs in the LGA. The sample size for the study was 225, this sample was selected using Krejci and Morgan sample size determination table. The sampling technique used was stratified and random sampling techniques. The instrument used was a structured questionnaire, this instrument was validated and revealed a reliability coefficient of 0.721. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to establish the inference between the innovative manager variables on SME growth. The statistical too used was SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

The following econometrics model were used;

$SMEG = f(ISD + IAC + CFI) + \varepsilon_t$ ……*(eqn. 3.1)*

Where;

SMEG = Small and Medium Enterprise Growth
ISD = Innovative strategic decision-making
IAC = Innovative Adaptability to Change
CFI = customer-Focused Innovation
ε_t = Stochastic error term to represent other explanatory variables not mentioned in the study
The aprori expectation with respect to sign: *ß1>0:ß2>0:ß3>0:* denote the formulated null hypotheses.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 200)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	120	60.0
	Female	80	40.0
Age Group (years)	18–25	34	17.0
	26–35	72	36.0
	36–45	58	29.0
	46 and above	36	18.0
Education Level	Secondary	46	23.0
	Diploma/OND	52	26.0
	Bachelor's degree	78	39.0
	Postgraduate	24	12.0
Business Experience	1–5 years	68	34.0
	6–10 years	82	41.0
	Above 10 years	50	25.0
Sector	Trade/Commerce	74	37.0
	Services	62	31.0
	Manufacturing	38	19.0
	Agriculture	26	13.0

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The table shows the respondent outcome from the question administered. Out of the 200 respondents that were returned, 60% were male and 40% female, indicating a male-dominated sample. The largest age group was between 26–35 years (36%), followed by 36–45 years (29%). In terms of education, the majority (39%) held a Bachelor's degree, while 12% possessed postgraduate qualifications. Most respondents had 6–10 years of business experience (41%), suggesting a relatively established group. Sectoral distribution showed that trade/commerce (37%) and services (31%) dominated SME activity, with fewer in manufacturing and agriculture.

Hypotheses Testing
Linear Regression Results

Table 2: Dependent Variable: SME Growth (SMEG)

Predictor Variable	β (Beta Coefficient)	Std. Error	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
Constant	1.245	0.412	3.02	0.003**
Innovative Strategic Decision (ISD)	0.312	0.082	3.80	0.000***
Innovation Adoptability to Change (IAC)	0.427	0.091	4.69	0.000***
Customer-Focused Innovation (CFI)	0.289	0.077	3.75	0.000***

The regression model explains 61.1% of the variance in SME growth ($R^2 = 0.611$), suggesting that the predictors (ISD, IAC, and CFI) significantly contribute to SME growth. The general model fit was statistically significant ($F(3,196) = 102.35$, $p < 0.000$). Innovative Strategic Decision-making (ISD) had a positive and significant effect on SME growth ($\beta = 0.312$, $p < 0.000$), implying that SMEs with strong strategic decision-making frameworks tend to achieve better growth outcomes. Innovation Adoptability to Change (IAC) was the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.427$, $p < 0.000$), indicating that the ability of SMEs to adopt and implement innovations has a substantial impact on growth. Customer-Focused Innovation (CFI) also had a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.289$, $p < 0.000$), showing that tailoring innovations towards customer needs enhances competitiveness and sustainability. The findings suggest that innovation-oriented managerial practices strongly drive SME growth.

The present study converges with both Ajayi and Adeyeye (2023) and Ojochide et al. (2023) in establishing that innovation-oriented management is central to SME competitiveness and sustainability. However, this research makes an additional contribution by quantifying the relative strength of specific managerial innovation practices, highlighting IAC as the most critical determinant of SME growth in the sampled context. This adds a deeper empirical layer to existing literature by demonstrating that while leadership intent and strategic direction matter, the ability to adopt and implement innovation remains the most decisive factor in ensuring SME growth.

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Conclusion

The study concluded the regression analysis demonstrated that innovative strategic decision-making (ISD), innovation adoptability to change (IAC), and customer-focused innovation (CFI) significantly contribute to SME growth, jointly explaining 61.1% of the variance. Among these predictors, IAC emerged as the strongest determinant, underscoring the importance of SMEs' capacity to embrace and implement innovations as a driver of competitiveness, sustainability, and long-term performance. However, this study adds a unique empirical contribution by quantifying the relative strengths of these innovation practices, showing that while strategic leadership and customer-focused initiatives are important, innovation adoptability is the most decisive factor for SME growth in the Otukpo context.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. SME managers should be trained on how to effectively embrace and implement new technologies.
2. SMEs should institutionalize robust decision-making frameworks that align innovation strategies with long-term growth objectives.
3. Business owners should prioritize innovations that respond directly to customer needs and preferences to improve competitiveness, retention, and market share.

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