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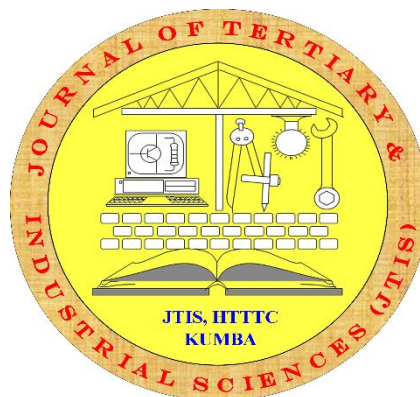
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P.O Box: 249 Buea Road, Kumba

Tel: (+237) 33354691 - Fax: (+237) 33354692

Email: [editor@jtis-htttcubuea.com](mailto:editor@jtis-htttcubuea.com)

Website: <https://www.jtis-htttcubuea.com>

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**Enterprise Education: A Strategy for the Survival of Startup SMES in the Southwest Restive Region of Cameroon**

**Mbonteh Jacob Nzang (PhD)**

EHIMBS University Institute of Kumba, Cameroon  
Tel: +237677785141, Email: ihsaniub@yahoo.com

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**Abstract:**

*Most SMEs in Cameroon do not survive after the incubation phase. According to Business and Financial experts, this happens due to the absence of market research and the inability of these enterprises to create specialize market for themselves and their products. The objective of this paper is to understand how entrepreneurship education can be a mitigating factor to the survival of small and medium size enterprises within the region. The study differs from previous studies because it emphasizes on educating the entrepreneur, to build capacity to confront the challenges facing SMEs rather than simply identify them. To achieve the objective of the study, a quantitative research approach is used. This approach is characterized by semi-structured interviews and questionnaire, with registered SMEs, selected randomly within the region. The sample frame consists of 30 SMEs that have existed for 1 to 3 years but closed down temporary or permanently. The respondents were asked questions about the premature closure. The questionnaires were analyzed using content analysis. The result of the study revealed that lack of entrepreneurship education on the part of owners of start-up SMEs contributed to poor performance of managerial functions. This deficiency contributed to putting them out of business. To survive in business therefore SME operators should at least receive basic entrepreneurial skills to enable them carryout their managerial functions more appropriately and consistently too.*

**Keywords:** Enterprise, Survival, SMEs, Entrepreneur, Education

**1. Introduction**

Muhammad Muhammed et al. (2020) have opined that orthodox economics have largely ignored the critical role that enterprise education plays in the development and growth of new markets. This view is corroborated by Dana, L.P et al. (2021), who posit that Technology-based enterprises play a paramount role in booming a country economically. Most SMEs in Cameroon do not survive after the incubation phase. According to Business and Financial experts, this happens due to the absence of market research and the inability of these enterprises to create specialize markets for themselves and their products. The notion of small and medium enterprises (SME) was introduced into the development landscape as early as the late 1940s, and the primary aim was to improve trade and industrialization in the present developed nations (OECD, 2004). The definitions of SME are usually derived in each country, based on the role of SME in the economy, policies and programs designed by particular agencies or institutions empowered to develop SMEs. For

instance, a small business in the developed economies of countries like Japan, Germany and United States of America (USA), may be a medium or large-scaled business in a developing economy like Cameroon.

Quantitative definitions mainly express the size of enterprises, mainly in monetary terms such as turnover, asset value, profit, as well as quantitative index like number of employees. As examples, the 1975 companies Act in the United Kingdom stated that an enterprise with a turnover of less than £ 1.4 million was small, those with turnover between £1.4 and £5.7million were medium, while those enterprises having turnover above £5.7 million were large. It also went further to classify the enterprises based on number of employees – those with fewer than 50 workers being small, between 50 and 250 workers being medium and those employing above 250 workers were described as being large. Similarly, the European Union (EU) in 1995, defined SME as any enterprise employing less than 250 employees, and went further to break down the SME into micro (less than 10 employees, small (from 10 to 49 employees) and medium (between 50 to 249 employees (Munro, 2013).

In Cameroon, the definition of SME employed is that of Law No. 2015/010 of 16 July 2015, amending and supplementing certain provisions of Law No. 2010/001 of 13 April 2010 promoting Small and Medium Enterprises in Cameroon. This law provides in its Articles 3 (new) to 6 that "the SME is considered as an enterprise, whatever its sector of activity, which employs not more than one hundred (100) people and whose annual turnover excluding taxes does not exceed three (03) billion CFA francs" (Kedeet al., 2024).

Small and medium-sized enterprises play a significant role in the global economic landscape. These organizations serve as pivotal contributors that create jobs, foster innovation and drive economic growth (Harrington, 2023). The Cameroon government has been cultivating small-business growth in recent years through initiatives such as one-stop business registration centres. The one in the Southwest region is located in Limbe.

The government has further created what is known as Banque des PME, (SME Bank), a bank to lend to small-business owners. Other platforms like FINASDDEE have also been put in place, all focusing on tailored credit, start-up support, and women-led businesses. A two-year tax exemption for new business owners also allows entrepreneurs to invest in their ideas. Small businesses already contribute significantly to Cameroon's economy. At least 90 percent of enterprises in Cameroon are small businesses (Ngole, 2018).

SMEs represent about 90 per cent of Africa's business, and provide about 60 per cent of jobs on the continent (World Bank, 2020). Significant scholarly works have recognized the vital role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in creating employment opportunities, innovation and alleviating poverty, especially in developing countries (Djeudja and Kongnyuy, 2018; Sebikari, 2019; Faal, 2020). Recent economic volatility and uncertainty has impacted heavily on SMEs, making it more difficult than usual to anticipate changes in consumer demand and supply chain disruptions. This highlights the need for SME owners to prepare for economic uncertainty. A key constraint cited in numerous studies for this poor performance is limited access to appropriate forms of finance at various stages of a business's lifecycle (Beck and Demircuc-Kunt, 2006; Wu *et al.*, 2016; Quartey *et al.*, 2017).

However, the core problem might be linked to lack of potential enterprise education to carryout proper managerial functions to improve outcomes.

Despite Cameroon government's attempt to make it easier for entrepreneurs to start small businesses in pursuit of its goal to become an emerging economy by 2035, we still find many SMEs wallowing in distress and eventual closure. Few studies in Cameroon have examined how enterprise education influences SME survival in conflict- affected regions, particularly the Southwest region. This study therefore differs from previous studies, because it emphasizes on educating the entrepreneur, to build capacity, including developing a positive mental attitude, knowledge and skills to confront the challenges facing SMEs rather than simply identifying such challenges as revealed by the works of most scholars. By having an awareness of the key issues they face, and mitigating risks through business and contingency planning, they can strengthen the business; enhance resilience and positioning it for eventual survival.

## **2. Conceptual Illumination**

### **The Concept of Enterprise**

Entrepreneurship has become a household word extremely used at various levels of the economy to mean at some point different phenomena. The imagination of everyone is excited when it comes to discussions on entrepreneurship. It is therefore important to deepen our search in order to understand entrepreneurship as a phenomenon. According to Rosa (1992) as cited by Dangana and Ogedegbe (2018), the term enterprise can be viewed from three different perspectives; a business organization of some type, a series of personal skill and qualities vital to economic development, and as a series of personal skills and qualities vital to good citizenship and the realizations of the individual's full potential.

Mbonteh (2025) on his part has defined enterprise as any identified idea that is translated into a planned and satisfactorily implemented activity. Judging from this definition, an enterprise means a business, a project or an undertaking that involves these different tasks; that include but perhaps not limited to idea identification, planning, implementation, successful completion of an activity and acceptance of risk and reward. Nelson and Thiongo (2005) on their part, have defined enterprise as any identified idea that is translated into a planned and satisfactorily implemented activity. Multitude of definitions of enterprise have evolved over the years but what seems common with all of them is what Dangana and Ogedegbe (2018) have highlighted as a properly planned and organized project, undertaking, or a business unit that is associated with risk and reward, and the personal attributes required to start and operate such an entity successfully.

The person who possesses the personal skills and abilities required to plan and organize the enterprise is referred to as an entrepreneur, while the process involved in starting the enterprise is also known as entrepreneurship. Logically therefore, the personal skills and abilities required to start is usually qualified as entrepreneurial traits/ qualities or what many authors refer to as an entrepreneurial mindset. Different countries have classified an enterprise using different criteria however, the general classification common to them include; the following factors.

1. The nature of objectives being pursued: Whether profit oriented business or not – for – profit
2. The size of the enterprise: Micro, small, medium or large organizations.

3. Ownership structure: Whether private (community) ownership large number of people.
4. Ownership base: Whether local or foreign
5. The products of the enterprise: Whether economic or social/public
6. The native of activities involved: Whether manufacturing or service
7. Target customers: Whether consumer or industrial
8. The degree of formality: Whether formal or informal enterprisers.

Enterprises can therefore be classified on the base of objectives, profit oriented and non-profit oriented

**Table 1: Definition of SMEs in Cameroon**

Large enterprises	100 or more employees
Medium sized enterprises	51-100 employees
Small enterprises	6-50 employees
Micro enterprises	1-5 employees

Source: (Nkafu Policy Institute, 2019).

**Table 2: International SME Definition**

S/N	Agency	Size	Definition	Measurement
1	European Union	Micro  Small  Medium	Not exceeding 10 employees; turnover not more than or equal €2million or balance sheet less than or equal €2million less than 50 employees; turnover equals and not more than €10million or balance sheet total equals or less than €10 million less than 250 employees; €50million or less balance sheet total €50million or less	Balance sheet Employment Turnover.
2	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	SME	200 staff or less	Employment
3	United State of America	Micro Small Medium	Less than 20 staff Between 20 and 49 employees Between 100 and 499 employees	Employment

4	World Bank	SME	Not exceeding 300 staff; Turnover US \$15million or less Assets US \$15million	Asset Employment Turnover
5	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	Micro Small Medium	Between 1 and 4 staff (small micro. enterprises) Between 5 and 19 staff (micro enterprises) Between 20 and 99 staff Between 100 and 500 staff	Employment

*Source: European Union (2003); Gibson and Van der (2008)*

**Table 3: Characteristics of SMEs**

S/N	Aspect (evidence)	Small Business
1	Risk of failure (Honjo, 2000; Hart and Oulton 1996)	Small businesses are probable to close down operating when compared to large businesses. The possibility of letdown basically makes a distinction between small business and large business
2	Internal Organization (Curran and Blackburn 2001)	Small businesses are informal for the reason that their businesses are undersized; the owners are able to make decisions and make certain their implementations.
3	Sources of finance (Ang 1991)	Small business owners/managers have a pecking order that favours internal source to external sources of finance. The external contributors of finance have a defective information on small business
4	Strategy (Man, Lau, and Chan, 2002)	Small businesses strategy is flexible, in view of the fact that there is no chance to obtain scale economies. They are to be expected to shift to inventive product/ service as well as new customers.
5	Investment policies (Cosh and Hughes, 1994)	Small businesses expend with a reduction in fixed apparatus, in particular the ones that cannot be effortlessly changed to substitute uses in the occurrence of alterations in demand
6	Motivation of owner (Gray 2002; Hart and Oulton, 1996)	One of the motivations for the owners of small businesses is 'lifestyle' whose aim is primarily to achieve a comfortable living or leave behind their business to their relatives. While others may desire to rapidly grow their businesses.

7	Management (Cosh, Guest, and Hughes, 2005)	The small businesses are in most cases owned and managed by the same individual(s).
8	Competitive advantage (Jennings and Beaver, 1997)	Small businesses are flexible, quick to respond to the customers, and ground-breaking.

*Source: Storey and Grene (2010)*

### **SME Survival**

According to the Statistical Yearbook, Cameroon's economic fabric comprises **393,166 SMEs**, including the 19,651 SMEs created in 2023, with 3,865 Social Economy Organisations, SEOs, and 3557 Handicraft Production Units, HPUs

Cameroon's small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are vital contributors to economic growth and employment opportunities, making its sustained success imperative. However, SMEs grapple with a myriad of issues that impede their development trajectory (Wansi and Burrell, 2023). The term "small and medium size enterprises" describe of business organizations that are especially heterogeneous as they embrace a broad variety of forms ranging from hotels, manufacturing industries, agriculture, restaurants, computer software firms and small machine shops among many others (Daniel et al., 2022).

According to OCED (2004), the sole aim of the introduction of the concept "small and medium enterprises into development scenery was to perk up trade and industrialization in the today's developed nations. The survival of SMEs has been long recognized crucial to the growth of any economy in the World (Oba and Onucha, 2013; Ndzana et al., 2021).

While the World Bank (2020) puts forth the percentage of SMEs in the global economy at 90%, existing reports show that SMEs occupy 80% of the global economy (Kuckertz et al., 2020). This percentage difference may not significantly change the pride of place occupied by SMEs in the overall economy. The categorization of business enterprises into large, medium or small scale has tagged along diverse decisive factors such as the total employment, revenue, assets, or investment.

In the Cameroon context however, an overview of SMEs in Cameroon by the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicraft, was highlighted based on the study on formulation of a Master Plan for Small and Medium Size Enterprises Development in the Republic of Cameroon (2009). Enterprises in Cameroon may be categorized into the following:

1. Large-size enterprises of state established enterprises, enterprises which were formerly state established but have been privatized and foreign capital enterprises which are targeting their businesses mostly on export markets, etc.
2. Medium Sized Enterprises
3. Small sized enterprises and finally
4. Micro enterprises and individual proprietorships, some with a few family workers.

The medium sized enterprises are those of:

1. Foreign affiliated or local capital manufacturers targeting domestic markets in Cameroon and regional markets in the neighboring countries of Cameroon

2. Distributors, whether financed by foreign or local capital, in the modern distribution sector. The manufacturing enterprises of (1) above are those which are established for import substitution and seen in such manufacturing industries namely food, textiles, paper produce, and chemical products including paints, soaps, and detergents, pharmaceutical and cosmetics, etc.

The distributors in the category (2) above include two major types of distributors. One is the distributors established by foreign investors having their head offices abroad, and operates the business in Cameroon under the supervision of the head office. Another is the distributors established and grown with the aid of capital from Cameroon or neighbouring countries. Both distribute such goods as foods, home appliances, and building materials or operate supermarkets. Some of them have moved to manufacturing of products which they have imported and distributed before, by an enterprise in their corporate group.

### **Enterprise Education and Entrepreneurial Orientation**

Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) is a strategic mindset and organizational attribute that drives companies to actively pursue new value creation. It allows firms – and individuals – to maintain a competitive advantage by operating with an entrepreneurial posture through five core dimensions: innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness, autonomy, and competitive aggressiveness (Covin and Lumpkin, 2011; Wales et al., 2020).

Entrepreneurial orientation is a key concept when executives are crafting strategies in the hope of doing something new and then exploiting opportunities that other organizations cannot exploit. EO simply refers to the processes, practices and decision making styles of organization that act entrepreneurially. In brief entrepreneurially - Oriented firms support and exhibit a sustained pattern of new entry over time that is generally characterized by innovation, proactiveness and risk taking (Wales, 2016).

Entrepreneurial orientation can be observed in the processes of an organization and the organizational environment. Entrepreneurial orientation is considered as key to obtaining better performance. Entrepreneurial orientation helps firms to develop better solution through differentiation for enhancing adoption to the environmental complexities, Shah and Ahmad (2019). This, as a result, weakens the ability to compete in turbulent market environments

It is argued that organizations require mechanisms to exploit the knowledge acquired through closed networks by utilizing entrepreneurial orientation for gaining high performance. Over the last two decades, the importance of dynamic capabilities has been continuously increasing (Bitencourt et al., 2020). Dynamic capabilities include the ability of the firm to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to meet the challenges associated with the dynamic environment (Wu et al., 2016).

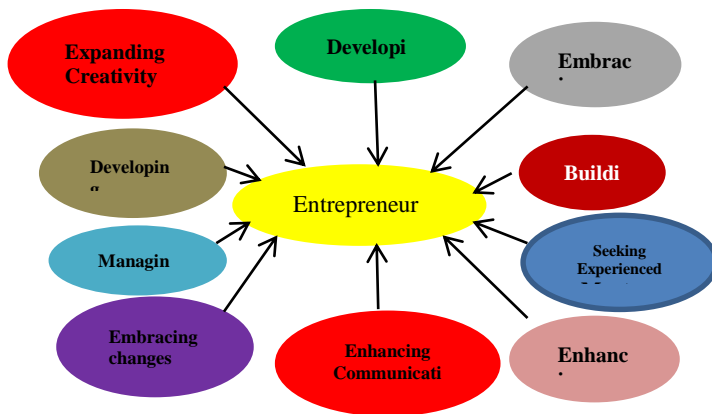


Fig 1 Entrepreneurship Skills

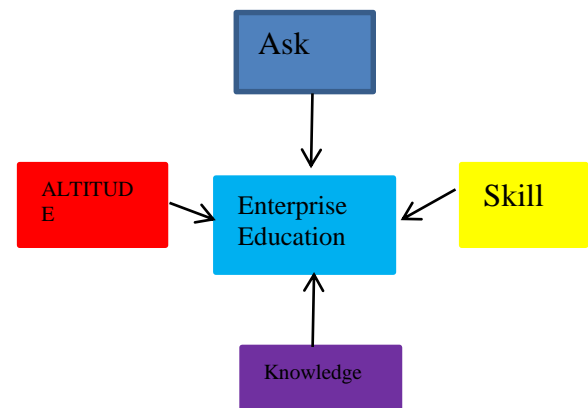


Fig 2 Developing a Positive Mental Attitude

### Challenges facing SMEs

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face numerous hurdles, the most prominent being limited access to scale-up capital, cash flow volatility, and steep competition for skilled talent. Additionally, they constantly struggle to manage digital transformation, regulatory burdens, and the capacity to invest in marketing or innovation.

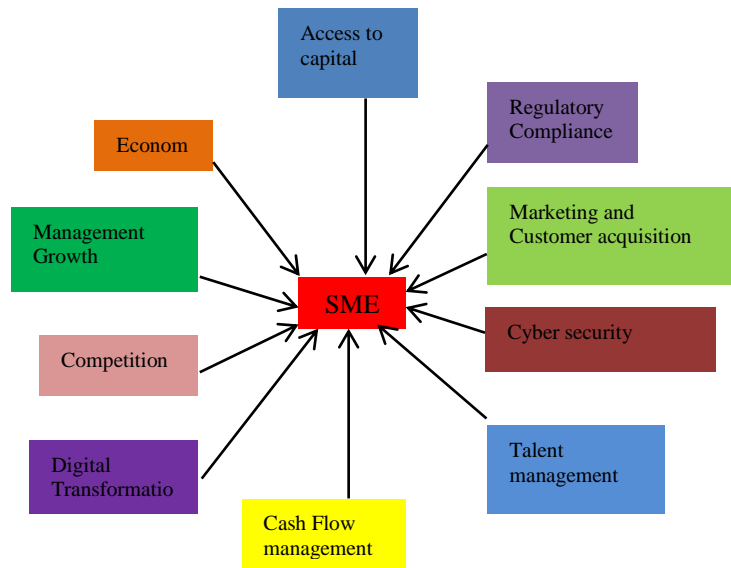
Despite SMEs' pivotal role in propelling national economic growth, their ascent is significantly thwarted by their limited access to capital, a crucial financial resource essential for sustaining and expanding their operational endeavors, as articulated by Shihadeh et al. (2019).

In the specific context of Cameroon, the thriving SME sector emerges as a source of both gainful employment and wealth accumulation, as underscored by the insights of the Nkafu Policy Institute (2019). While its citizenry derives sustenance and livelihood from these dynamic SMEs, the government accrues significant fiscal benefits through generated tax revenues. This symbiotic relationship manifests a notable positive correlation between the nation's income and the proliferation of SMEs, a salient point elucidated by Adeosun and Shittu (2021).

Social capital is emerging as a crucial resource in alleviating SMEs' financial constraints (Javakhadze *et al.*, 2016; Fogel *et al.*, 2018). One primary reason for this is that relationships are central to mitigating information lopsidedness in various financial markets Boot, (2000). Relationships with stakeholders such as employees, customers, suppliers, government and investors can result in the collection of crucial soft information, which reduces the information opacity of the SMEs, in turn leading to the amelioration of information irregularity and agency problems typical of financial markets.

SMEs currently contribute only 36% of Cameroon's GDP, though they have potential to contribute more. This contribution highlights the existence of key hindrances such as payment of taxes, difficulties to access financing administrative bottlenecks, bureaucracy, insufficient infrastructures, corruption, insufficient technical assistance, etc. (Nkafu Policy Institute, 2019). However, Cameroon is a good example for assessing the performance of

SMEs in Sub-Saharan Africa because Cameroon is the biggest economy in the CEMAC zone and its structure is similar to that of most Sub-Saharan African Countries.



**Fig 4 Current Challenges of Small and Medium Size Enterprises**

### Theoretical Framework

Although many theories exist for clarifying observable truths generated in research undertakings, the author has identified and adopted Goldratt's (1984) Theory of Constraints (TOC) for this work. The theory states that there is at least one or more limiting factors that attempts to hinder an organization from achieving its goals. There is usually at least one constraint, and TOC uses a focusing process to detect the constraint and restructure the rest of the organisation around it. SMEs are constraint by a couple of factors ranging from lack of entrepreneurial knowledge, skill acquisition to regulatory burdens, and the capacity to invest in marketing or innovation as already discussed above.

On the other hand, systems theory says that to control a system properly you need more constraints than independent variables.

This theory is applicable in the context of this study because the study assumes that SMEs in the SW Region cannot grow without facing some constraints. However, considering that the theory of constraints states that management systems are bound to face one or more constraints, this study is also conducted on that premise and hence analysing the constraints faced by SMEs in the SW Region.

In the same vein according to the theory of the firm which emanated from the work of Peter F. Drucker's in 1994, the author contended that every business functions to a 'theory' that is built upon an assumptive framework that responsibly guides and nurtures the business activities. Also it can be an influential channel for business organizations' sustainability and growth. Drucker described the Theory of the firm as the suppositions that nature could shape any business organization's activities, determines its decisions as regards what to accomplish as well as what not to accomplish and define what the business organization considers as meaningful results (Storey & Grene, 2010).

The uncertainty of the future and persistently alterations in the environment of the business make even the soundest business theories to ultimately become outdated. The theory also noted that today's management techniques which include total quality management, benchmarking, economic value analysis, reengineering, downsizing, are all mere "how to accomplish" tools while "what to accomplish" is gradually becoming the vital challenge facing management in the global environment (Drucker, 1994).

### **Developing entrepreneurial knowledge**

A positive attitude is a key component of entrepreneurial success. It can help entrepreneurs stay productive, maintain their well-being, and navigate challenges with confidence.

**Practice gratitude:** Focus on what's going well and express gratitude for your achievements.

**Practice mindfulness:** Regular self-reflection and mindfulness can help you become more aware of your thoughts and emotions.

**Surround yourself with positivity:** Connect with a supportive network of mentors, peers, and advisors.

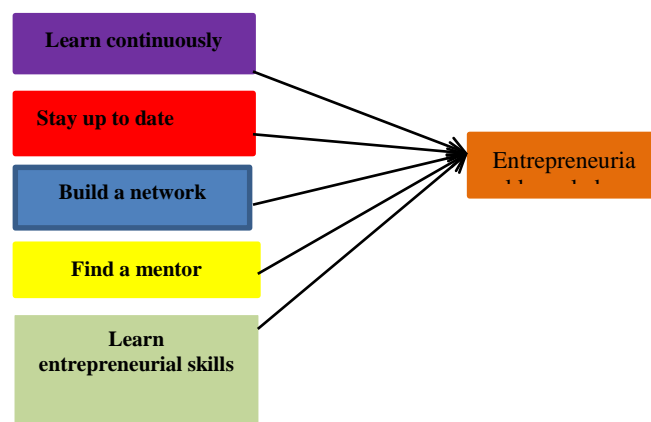
**Use positive self-talk:** Replace negative self-talk with affirmations and positive statements.

**Set realistic goals:** Set goals that are realistic and take breaks when needed.

**Celebrate successes:** Recognize your achievements and celebrate your successes.

**Embrace change:** Embrace uncertainty and change.

**Practice self-care:** Take care of yourself



**Fig 5 Developing entrepreneurial knowledge**

**Learn continuously:** Take courses, read books, attend workshops, and find mentors.

**Stay up to date:** Keep current with industry trends, market dynamics, and new technologies.

**Build a network:** Attend networking events to share ideas, get help, and make connections.

**Find a mentor:** Connect with other entrepreneurs or professionals who can offer guidance.

**Learn entrepreneurial skills:** Some entrepreneurial skills include communication, time management, networking, branding and marketing, budgeting, data analysis, user experience, and planning.

### 3. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed method survey design. This research design was permissible for employing a coherent research instrument for gathering information and generating data that were drawn in this study. The design focused on the collection, collation and analyzing data from the study population which enabled the researcher to examine the casual association connecting the identified variables. This method by extension gave the respondents the chance to express their opinions on the variables under investigation (Essien, 2014; Gado, 2015; Kanu, 2015; Omenka 2013). The target population includes owners and managers of small and medium size enterprises in the Southwest Region whose businesses are near closure or temporary closed...

The sample size for this study consisted of 30 respondents. This sample size was considered adequate to provide reliable data while remaining manageable for effective data collection and analysis. A sampling frame was established using the list published on-line by the Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Economy and Handicraft. A multistage sampling technique was employed in selecting the respondents:

Stage One: A purposive sampling technique was used to select the SMEs. Stage Two: Stratified sampling was used to categorize the SMEs and Stage Three: Simple random sampling was applied to select SMEs from each stratum to ensure equal representation and reduce sampling bias. To ensure content and face validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts and their suggestions were incorporated into the study to improve clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives.

Data were sourced from randomly selected (respondents) owners and or managers of 30 SMEs from different business industries (categories), based on their business activity carried out. Fifteen (15) business categories were established including Hospitality, Entertainment, handcraft, personal services, transportation, buyam-sellam, education, retail business, professional services, agriculture, produce buyers, food producers, construction and extraction. Structured questionnaire was used as research instrument, which enhanced the identification of statistically significant results from the data analysis procedure (Z.Kmund et al., 2010). Ethical issues were carefully considered throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 was used to analyse data.

### 4. Presentation and discussion of result

**Table 3:** Summarized result from respondents on reason why they closed down or temporary halted business

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Poor business plan	17	37
Low level of economic activity	15	50
Marketing and customer acquisition	10	33
Regulatory compilation	25	83
High taxes	16	53
Cyber insecurity	10	33
Digital transformation	11	37
High interest rates applied on loans	20	67
No knowledge of sources of finance available	23	77
Family members interruption in management	19	63
Poor management of cash flow	22	73
Too much of competition in the market	12	40

After effect of COVID-19 pandemic	18	60
Embezzlement of funds	5	17
Affected by natural or man-made disaster	3	10

**Source:** field work, 2026

From the table above, we noticed that SMEs that had a poor business plan constituted 37%, those who responded their failure was due to low level of economic activities scored 50%. Again, respondent who agreed marketing and customer acquisition scored 33%, while those who said regulatory compilation was the cause of their failure scored 83%. Respondents who blamed it on high taxes scored 53%, those who responded on cyber security scored 33% and those for digital transformation averaged 37%. Respondents who argued against high interest rates applied on loans measured 67%, and those for no knowledge of sources of finance available for assisting them scored 77%. Respondents who argued family members were interfering into the business had 63% while poor management of cash flow recorded 73%. Too much of competition in the market as part of the reason for closure was 40%. Some respondents attributed the closure of their business was due to the effects of COVID-19 pandemic, they had 60%. Respondents who argued embezzlement of funds caused a collapse of their business scored 17% and those who argued natural and or human disaster contributed to their down fall scored 10%

## 5. Conclusion

Small and medium-sized enterprises play a significant role in the global economic landscape. Small businesses already contribute significantly to Cameroon's economy. At least 90 percent of enterprises in Cameroon are small businesses. However, recent economic volatility and uncertainty has impacted heavily on SMEs, making it more difficult than usual to anticipate changes in consumer demand and supply chain disruptions. Although the Cameroon government has been cultivating small-business growth in recent years through initiatives such as one-stop business registration centers, lack of entrepreneurship education on the part of owners of start-up SMEs contributed to poor performance of managerial functions. This deficiency contributed to putting them out of business. To survive in business therefore SME operators should at least receive basic entrepreneurial skills to enable them to carry out their managerial functions more appropriately and consistently too.

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- Aamir Hassan <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8936-389X> aamirhassan50@gmail.com, Imran Anwar, [...], and Syed Abid Hussain+2View all authors and affiliations

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