

**PERCEIVED CONSTRAINTS AND BUSINESS GROWTH OF SMALL
SCALE BUSINESSES IN PORT HARCOURT METROPOLIS**

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ABSTRACT

Small businesses whether in developing or developed country is important to the nation's economic growth and help the country to advance. However, small businesses in the oil rich city of Port Harcourt; South – South of Nigeria, find it difficult to survive and grow to maturity because of the constraints hindering their progress. The study investigated the effect of perceived constraints on business growth of small enterprises in the city of Port Harcourt using a study sample of 200 small firms; and it was found that poor electricity, high office/shop rent, multiple taxes/levies, and lack of innovation have a significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt metropolis. It is therefore, recommended that government should endeavor to provide adequate electricity so as to enable small businesses in Port Harcourt operate and grow to maturity. Also, government should lessen the taxes and levies impose on small scale business in the city

Keywords: Constraints, Business growth, Small scale businesses, Poor electricity, Lack of innovation, High office/shop rent, Multiple taxes/levies.

INTRODUCTION

Over time, small businesses have proven its relevance in Nigeria economy by creating more jobs for the unemployed people which invariably reduces poverty in the country. Nigeria economy would have collapsed without small businesses activities. In Nigeria, about 27 percent of the country's business activities come from small businesses sector. Conversely, small businesses in Nigeria employ about 60 million Nigerians and contribute 48% of the GDP (Tony, 2018). Small businesses are essential in Nigeria because without them the unemployment rate would increase from 14% to as much as 50%, causing a lot of problems in the country (Tony, 2018). Business growth of small businesses in Nigeria is vital to the country's economy.

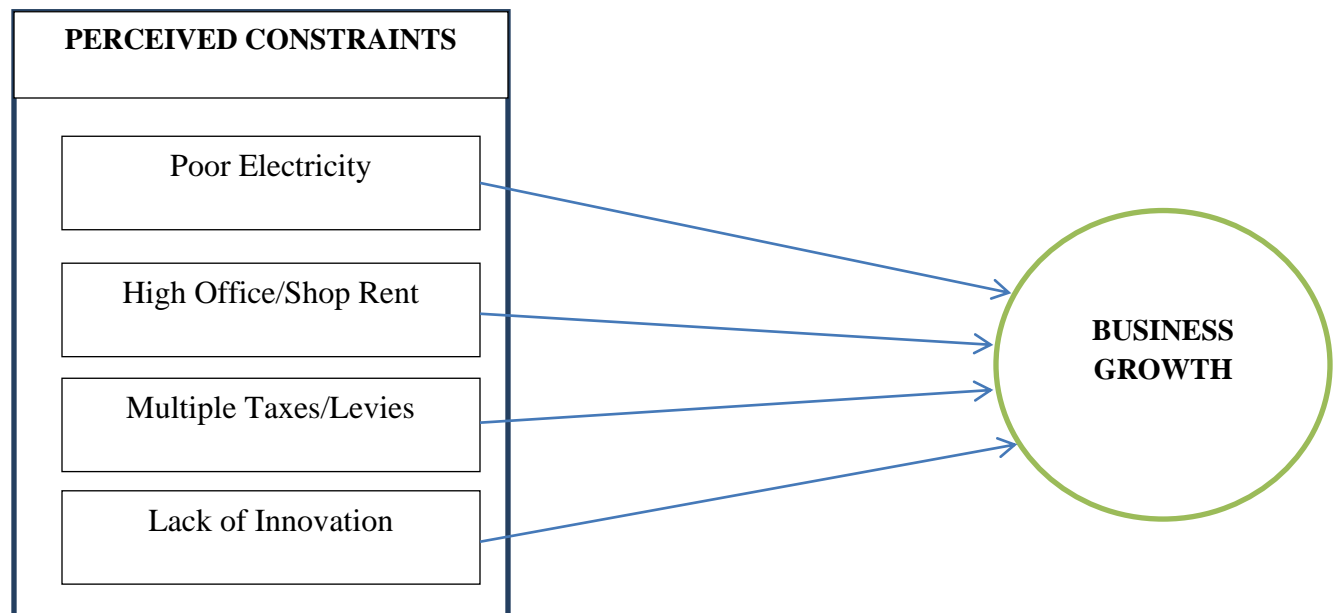
Business growth is the process of improving some measure of an enterprise's success. Business growth can be achieved either by boosting the top line or revenue of the business with greater product sales or service income, or by increasing the bottom line or profitability of the operation by minimizing costs. Small business owners generally love the word "growth" since when used in relation to a business, it usually means success. A growing business is a thriving business, or so most people believe. Unfortunately, many small business owners discover the hard way that business growth may result in problems if your business isn't equipped to handle that growth - and can even kill your business all-together (Dragon, 2011). In Nigeria, small businesses' growth opportunity is being limited by a lot of constraints.

A lot of surveys assembled from small businesses in Nigeria, listed the primary constraint to business growth as follows: lack of infrastructure, lack of capital, corruption, and poor book keeping (Essays, 2018). The extremely high cost of operating and maintaining a business accounts for about 80% of the collapse of businesses in Nigeria. Everything ranging from the incredibly high cost of transportation to the security systems. The highest cost however is incurred by the unavailability of constant power, for this reason every successful enterprise has to run most of the time on power supplied from generators. The cost of buying a generator, its maintenance and the ever increasing cost of fuel makes it very difficult for an entrepreneur to stay in business because the operating cost constantly overrides the revenue (Essays, 2018).

Statement of Problem

Small businesses whether in developing or developed country is important to the nation's economic growth and help the country to advance. However, small businesses in Port Harcourt find it difficult to survive and grow to maturity because of the constraints hindering their progress. Small businesses in Port Harcourt face challenges of poor electricity, high cost of shop/office rent, multiply license/revenue fee from State and Local Government, inability to access loan etc. which hinders their business growth. Ayodele (2000) noted that electricity supply in Nigeria reflects a situation of supply crisis in which industrial growth and socio-economic development paces are kept below the potential of the economy. Akinlo (2009) found a positive co-integrated and significant impact of electricity consumption on the level of economic growth.

Conceptual Framework



Research objectives

The following are the research objectives for the study:

1. To determine the effect of poor electricity on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
2. To determine the effect of high office/shop rent on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
3. To determine the effect of multiple taxes/levies fee on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
4. To determine the effect of lack of innovation on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Research questions

The following are the research questions for the study:

1. What is the effect of poor electricity on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis?
2. What is the effect of high office/shop rent on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis?
3. What is the effect of multiple taxes/levies on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis?
4. What is the effect of lack of innovation on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Research hypotheses

The following are the research hypotheses for the study:

- Ho₁ Poor electricity does not have significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

- Ho₂ High office/shop rent does not have significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
- Ho₃ Multiple taxes/levies fees do not have significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
- Ho₄ Lack of innovation does not have significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Small Business

A small business is any company that employs fewer than 500 employees or falls beneath an industry-specific annual receipts cap. While this makes for quite a broad pool of organizations, most small businesses are significantly smaller than this, employing no more than a few dozen employees at most. In fact, firms with under 100 employees make up the majority of small businesses (Walters, 2018). The Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Nigeria defines small-scale business as a business with capital investment that is not over seven hundred and fifty thousand naira (N750,000), while the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) (2010) defines small and medium enterprise (SMEs) as business with asset base of between five and five-hundred million naira, and staff strength of between 11-300 people. Alaye-Ogan, (2012) defines a small business as companies with capital base between twenty thousand naira and thirty million naira (equivalent of \$125 to \$193,500). A small scale enterprise is one that is independently owned and operated, and in which the owner is the sole decision maker and the overall boss (Onuoha, 1994).

Importance of Small Business

According to Ojo (2009), small-scale industry has a better prospect for developing domestic economy through the generation of goods and services that propels the economy of Nigeria. SMEs are important role players in contributing to the transition of agriculture led economies to industrial ones, SMEs help in the absorption of productive resources at all levels of the economy and contribute to the building of flexible economic system in which small and large firms are interlinked (Fida, 2008). The need to focus on small scale industry became important in Nigeria because it was a means of ensuring self-independence, job creation, and import substitution, effective and efficient utilization of local raw materials (Ojo, 2009). According to Central bank of Nigeria report (2003), SMEs are very important economic catalyst in developing and industrialized countries, in developed countries 98% or more than belong to the Small and Medium scale sector. Social income distribution, employment and tax revenue, adequate

utilization of resources and stable family income are some of the significant effects SMEs have (Fida, 2008).

Business Growth

Business Growth is a stage where the business reaches the point for expansion and seeks additional options to generate more profit. Business growth is a function of the business lifecycle, industry growth trends, and the owners desire for equity value creation (Attract Capital, 2019). The main outputs of the business are the products and or sales. Production level can be a reasonable indicator of the business size because it's likely to reflect both the capacity of the business and its potentiality for profit. The value of goods produced is not readily available to the outsiders, so sales value is most widely used growth indicator. When amount of products produced by the business increases it implies that the business is growing (Olomi, 2004). Growth is an important phenomenon in small enterprises. In fact, their survival essentially depends on their power to participate in the market with other big companies. Growth decreases the possibility of closing small businesses (Rauch & Rijskik, 2013).

Perceived Constraints

Small businesses in Port Harcourt – Nigeria, find it difficult to survive and grow to maturity because of the constraints hindering their progress. Small businesses in Port Harcourt face challenges of poor electricity, high cost of shop/office rent, multiple license/revenue fees from State and Local Government, inability to access loan etc. which hinders their business growth.

Poor Electricity

Electricity has risen to be the dominance source of industrial power, based on the fact that Electricity could be packaged in almost any size. Electricity has become indispensable to socio-economic and industrial development of any nation (Odili & Mokuwunye, 2003).

One major constraint affecting the Nigerian business is the lack of electricity. Facts have emerged as to how the poor electricity supply has contributed to and is a major factor to the closure and declining manufacturing sector, leading to a high rate of unemployment (Essays, 2018). The absence of reliable electricity supply to most SMEs in low income countries and its high tariffs to SMEs was becoming the number one challenge to SMEs in most developing

countries (Scott, Darko, Lemma, & Juan-Pablo, 2014) . In an attempt to mitigate the hash effect of the poor power supply on their businesses, some SMEs use alternative power generators, reduce hours of work, and vary the working hours (ISSER, 2015); ironically, these measures increase the operational cost of the business as is reported that on average, 86% of SMEs in Nigeria use generator compared with 21% in Nepal where electricity supply is a bit stable (Scott, Darko, Lemma, & Juan-Pablo, 2014). A positive correlation has been established by Adenikinju (2005) between electricity infrastructure usage by firms and higher growth in firm's productivity and the economy. Hence poor and interrupted electricity supply and its accompanied high tariff leads to lower performance and productivity (Chissokho, & Seck, 2013). Isaksson, (2009) found that, the existence of reliable electricity infrastructure plays a significant role in firms growth and development disparities.

The very unstable electricity situation of Nigeria, has led even its citizens to mock the National Electricity Power Authority, which is the body responsible for the provision and regulation of electricity in the country (NEPA), by giving it another name (NEVER EXPECT POWER ALWAYS), and even when the parastatal's name was changed to Power Holding Company of Nigeria, the slang was also changed to (please hold your candles now), emphasizing, how extremely unreliable the electricity situation of Nigeria is (Essays, 2018). Because it is clear that lack of electricity can stifle industrial development, many industries have to settle for alternatives which are not environmental friendly. Companies or small scale business have to include the cost of purchasing a generator, as well as the cost of fuelling and servicing it, to ensure that it does not fail. This unnecessary additional cost is what scares off foreign investors, because half of a company's profit will be directed towards the generation of electricity (Essays, 2018).

High Office/Shop Rent

High cost of office or shop rent contributes to business failure in Nigeria especially in Port Harcourt. Rent is the economic return to land resources. It is also the value of land on annual basis (Ifediora, 2005). As argued by Boon and Higgins (2007), rental value is a key parameter for measuring real property market performance. It is also a major cost for tenants and an important source of income for the landlord. Key property market participants such as investors and developers often use rental value as an indicator to appraise the viability of their real estate development and investment. The intensity of use, rent-paying capacity and land values, the

areas occupied by central business districts in urban areas represent some of the most valuable lands (Harvey & Jowsey, 2003).

In urban areas where the central business district has retained its attractiveness, economic strength and viability, the central business district is almost always found near the hub of the city's traffic and transportation system and at sites both accessible and convenient to large numbers of people. This creates a potential for high volumes of retail and other commercial activities, which in turn justifies intensive land use practices, high rents and high land values (Ighalo, 2002).

Multiple Taxes and Levies

Small businesses pay multiple taxes and levies in the course of doing business. They pay taxes and levies such as fees for permits for signboards, bill boards and advertisements; fees for public convenience, sewage and refuse disposal, fees for fire service; fees for development etc. Although fiscal measures are aimed at promoting rapid economic growth, they also generate some unintended effects, making taxation a double-edged sword. Apart from encouraging (or discouraging) activities that are socially or environmentally friendly (unfriendly), fiscal policy is also used as a tool to provide direct assistance to society or individuals. As an economic development tool, taxation provides the financial base for providing and maintaining, among others, infrastructure such as roads, electricity, telecommunications, and water that have direct impact on living conditions (Odusola, 2006). The need to bring social succour to the people recognizes the potential offered by personal taxation for improving exemption benefits such as individual allowance, tuition for children, insurance premiums and allowance for dependent family members, all of which are factors that affect the social structure of the whole country (Ola 2001). Part of the adverse impact of taxation is the possible migration of people and businesses. Taxation can become a 'push' or 'pull' factor for migration because businesses relocate to areas with smaller taxes. In fact, taxation in recent times is one of the instruments for promoting foreign investments in developing countries. The foregoing has a significant practical impact for Nigeria. For instance, an increase in import duties in the country would cause an intensification of smuggling and under utilization of some productive capacities (Odusola, 2006).

Lack of Innovation

Many small business owners lack innovation in their various businesses. The lack of individual innovation or creativity is more than just a personal challenge – it's a corporate problem. Profits depend on knowledge workers' ability to generate new solutions, think on their feet and make complex decisions. When that doesn't happen, it's up to leadership to understand the dynamics and take actions to correct and control them (Maura, 2017). In the case of Nokia and Kodak, the lack of innovation has and will make companies obsolete. If there is one thing to be remembered from their mistakes is it that innovation needs to be a core component of your organization's culture (Ideanote, 2019). Kodak was still unwilling to adapt to the rise of digital technologies. They had already lost the chance to secure a leading position on the new market. The company clinged to traditional photography – and that's how it proved to be too protective of its brand and profit source (Ideanote, 2019). Damanpour (1996) defined innovation as a means of changing an organization, either as a response to changes in the external environment or as a pre-emptive action to influence the environment. Hence, innovation is here broadly defined to encompass a range of types, including new product or service, new process technology, new organization structure or administrative systems, or new plans or program pertaining to organization members. According to Baregheh et al (2009), firms operate in a competitive environment that is constantly changing. Thus, any activities embarked upon to keep firms competitive in the marketplace are considered to be an innovation. In a similar vein, McAdam et al (2004) defined innovation as harnessing resources available to firms to cope with constant changes in the business environment. This idea is further supported by Smith (2008) who simply see innovation as idea generation, development and successful implementation.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted descriptive research design. The instrument used for the study was a structured questionnaire which was validated by three experts in the field of study. The instrument was titled: Perceived Constraints and Business Growth (PCBG). In the study, Cronbach Alpha reliability test was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument and 0.79 was derived as the reliability coefficient. The sample of the study was 200 small scale business owners who were randomly selected in Port Harcourt metropolis for the study. The study employed Chi-Square method of data analysis to ascertain the effect of perceived constraints on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. SPSS version 20 was used for the statistical analysis.

Hypotheses testing

Hypothesis 1

Poor electricity does not have significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Table 1: Chi-Square Test on poor electricity and business growth

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	50.321(a)	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	54.586	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.649	1	.017
N of Valid Cases	800		

From Table 1 above, Chi-Square Test was used to test effect of poor electricity on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The test statistic is statistically significant: $\chi^2_{(12)} = 50.321$, $p < 0.05$. Hence, the null hypothesis one was rejected. Thus, poor electricity has significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Hypothesis 2

High office/shop rent does not have significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test on high office/shop rent and business growth

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	29.702(a)	12	.003
Likelihood Ratio	29.172	12	.004
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.790	1	.181
N of Valid Cases	800		

As shown in Table 2 above, Chi-Square Test was used to test effect of high office/shop rent on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The test statistic is statistically significant: $\chi^2_{(12)} = 29.702$, $p < 0.05$. Hence, the null hypothesis two was rejected. Thus, high office/shop rent has significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Hypothesis 3

Multiple taxes/levies do not have significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Table 3: Chi-Square Test on multiple taxes/levies and business growth

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	32.810(a)	12	.001
Likelihood Ratio	34.950	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.499	1	.221
N of Valid Cases	800		

As shown in Table 3 above, Chi-Square Test was used to test effect of multiple taxes/levies on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The test statistic is statistically significant: $\chi^2_{(12)} = 32.810$, $p < 0.05$. Hence, the null hypothesis three was rejected. Thus,

multiple taxes/levies have significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Hypothesis 4

Lack of innovation does not have significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Table 4: Chi-Square Test on lack of innovation and business growth

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	60.064(a)	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	59.070	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.071	1	.789
N of Valid Cases	759		

From Table 4 above, Chi-Square Test was used to test effect of lack of innovation on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The test statistic is statistically significant: $\chi^2_{(12)} = 60.064$, $p < 0.05$. Hence, the null hypothesis four was rejected. Thus, lack of innovation has significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Discussion

In the study, it was found that poor electricity, high office/shop rent, multiple taxes/levies, and lack of innovation have a significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis. It is hard for small businesses in Port Harcourt to survive especially when they have insufficient startup capital. In agreement with the findings of this study, Chissokho and Seck (2013) found that poor and interrupted electricity supply and its accompanied high tariff leads to lower performance and productivity of businesses. Small scale businesses have to include the cost of purchasing a generator, as well as the cost of fuelling and servicing it, to ensure that it does not fail. This unnecessary additional cost is what scares off foreign investors, because half of a company's profit will be directed towards the generation of electricity (Essays, 2018). High office/shop rent has a positive significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis. In support of this finding, Ighalo (2002) emphasized that

heavy commercial activities in the cities led to high rents and high land values which invariably affect small scale business activities since they have little or no capital. Multiple taxes and levies have significant practical impact for Nigeria because an increase in import duties in the country would cause intensification of smuggling and underutilization of some productive capacities (Oduola, 2006). Conversely, lack of innovation is one of the problem facing business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study investigated the effect of perceived constraints on business growth of small enterprises in Port Harcourt Metropolis; and it was found that poor electricity, high office/shop rent, multiple taxes/levies, and lack of innovation have a significant effect on business growth of small businesses in Port Harcourt Metropolis. However, if these constraints are not tackled, failure will be synonymous to small business ventures in Port Harcourt Metropolis. It is therefore, recommended that government should endeavor to provide adequate electricity so as to enable small businesses in Port Harcourt operate and grow to maturity. Also, government should lessen the taxes and levies impose on small scale business. In addition, small business owners should try to be innovative in their products and services since innovation helps business to survive and grow to maturity.

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Perceived Constraints and Business Growth Questionnaire

Rate your level of agreement to the following statements:		Level of Agreement				
Part 1	Poor Electricity	SA	A	N	D	SD
1.	I find it difficult to grow my business because of poor electricity in my area					
2.	Poor electricity contributed to my inability to thrive in my business					
3.	It is difficult to make a profit after spending so much on fuel to generate electricity for my business					
4.	I run out of cash sometimes after repairing generator set that generates electricity for my business					
5.	I use generator for more than 90 percent of my business activities					
Part 2	High Office/Shop Rent					
6.	Cost of office/shop rent in Port Harcourt is high for business owners					
7.	I struggle yearly to pay my office/shop rent					
8.	I doubt if I will be able to renew my office/shop rent this year					
9.	If I find alternative way of doing business than paying office/shop rent, I will go for it					
10.	My first business failed as a result of high office/shop rent					
Part 3	Multiple Taxes/Levies					
11.	State government's multiple taxation on small businesses in Port Harcourt is not encouraging					
12.	Local government high levies on small businesses hinder business growth					
13.	I could not erect sign post for my business because I cannot afford sign post levy					
14.	Due to multiple levies on small businesses, some illegal groups use the opportunity to collect their own illegal levy and sometimes cause mayhem at business locations					
15.	Small businesses pay for fire service levy even though the ministry will not respond during the time of fire outbreak					
Part 4	Lack of Innovation					
	I would rather stick to normal way of doing business than embrace new strategies					
	I often generate new ideas on how to run my business					
	In the past few years, I have made a lot of change in my products/services					
	I cannot employ someone who is more innovative than me					
	I am always happy to embrace new business idea					