

Factors Limiting SME Growth: A Botswana Case Perspective

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Abstract

The study explores the factors influencing the growth potential of poultry small and medium-sized enterprises in Botswana's Serowe-Palapye region. The study applied a quantitative research approach and a descriptive research design to explore the factors influencing the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises in the selected region of Botswana. This study sampled 177 poultry farmers in the Serowe-Palapye region, who were contacted physically and telephonically to collect data. Findings indicate that marketing abilities, entrepreneurial abilities, business administration abilities, access to finance, and legal constraints negatively influence the growth of poultry farms in the Serowe-Palapye region, while human resource practices positively influence the growth of poultry small and medium-sized enterprises. Deeper knowledge of the influence of human resource practices in the small and medium-sized enterprise poultry industry of Botswana's Serowe-Palapye region can guide small and medium-sized enterprise owners/managers on how to better manage their enterprises' financial stability through human resources deployment.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Botswana's 2008/2009 growth in local poultry production was mainly due to ubiquitous backyard chicken production (Moreki, 2009). The plethora of backyard poultry firms seek to offer an alternative to beef production (Moreki, 2009). Globally, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) make meaningful economic contributions to the growing potential of gross domestic product in established and emerging markets, irrespective of production possibility. This is because small firms create jobs, which reduces citizens' dependence on governments (Barbu, Bucur, Cepoi & Străchinaru, 2019; Bouazza, Ardjouman & Abada, 2015; Denbelo, 2020). Poultry production in an emerging market, such as Botswana, increased significantly between 1980 and 2019 (Knoema, 2021; Statistics Botswana, 2016-2021). Rankhumise and Letsoalo (2019) noted that various internal and external factors affect the transformation of local poultry production into commercial enterprises. Shortcomings of Botswana's poultry industry include the presence of poultry sicknesses, poor management practices, elevated feeding costs, as well as SMEs' inability to access formal funding from commercial banks or the government (Badubi, Ravindran & Reid, 2004; Brzozowski, 2019), their inability to access profitable markets locally and internationally (Dikuelo, 2017) and limited poultry professionals operating in the country.

1.2. Problem Statement

Although numerous studies have explored different factors influencing SME performance, very few have focused on the poultry sector of an emergent market, such as Botswana (Loku & Loku, 2020; Monametsi, Mkwizu & Swai, 2018; Okurut, Olalekan & Mangadi, 2011; Vettriselvan & Balakrishnan, 2020). Furthermore, the failure rate of SMEs in Botswana was 80%, with around 70% of small and medium-sized businesses in the country exiting the market within a year and a half of starting up (Mannathoko, 2011). Considering the preceding discussion, the aim of the study was to establish the factors (internal and external) that influence the slow growth of poultry SMEs in Botswana's Serowe-Palapye region. Through this research, a deeper understanding of the ubiquitous needs of the domestic poultry market in securing greater SME success can be secured. Factors, such as marketing skills, entrepreneurial abilities, business administration skills, access to finance, legal constraints, and human resource (HR) practices, were given telescopic insight to discern a compendium of effects on poultry firms' growth.

1.3. Research Objectives

Considering the orientation to the problem discussed above, the primary objective of the study was to explore the factors influencing the growth potential of poultry SMEs in Botswana's Serowe-Palapye

region. The following secondary objectives were formulated to assist in addressing the primary research objective:

- To theoretically validate the proposed hypotheses formulated for the study;
- To test the influence of internal factors and external factors on firm growth in Botswana's Serowe-Palapye region;
- To make recommendations that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors (internal and external) that influence firm growth in the poultry sector of Botswana's Serowe-Palapye region.

The paper starts with an orientation towards the problem being explored and the objectives investigated in the study. This is followed by a theoretical overview of the constructs explored in the study, the methodology applied and a discussion of the results flowing from the study. The paper concludes with a focus on the recommendations proposed.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theories Grounding the Study

Extant literature has indicated numerous theories on factors that impact SME development and activities. Nimfa, Latiff and Wahab (2021) observed several theories, including the Penrose (1959) theory of the expansion of a firm; the Barney (1991) resource-based view (RBV) of enterprise growth; the Fauzi and Sheng (2022) institutional theory; the Rogers (1995) diffusion of innovation theory; the Freeman (1984) stakeholder theory; the Dentchev, Ranter, Jóhannsdóttir, Snihur, Rosano, Baumgartner, Nyberg, Tang, van Hoof and Jonker (2018) contingent capabilities theory; and the Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997) theory of technological change. This study centres on two theories, namely the theory of dynamic capabilities (DC) and the RBV of company expansion theory postulated by Prahalad and Hamel (1990). Teece (2018) argued that business is driven by capabilities, while change management orientation is driven by market dynamics and technological advances, setting the tone for DC.

Firm growth is postulated to be the outcome of internal and external resource capabilities. However, Penrose (1959) noted that general management's orientation in the system could mitigate growth, making it difficult for top management to achieve the experience needed for expansion plans (Nair, Trendowski & Judge, 2008). Wernerfelt (1984) developed the RBV idea and the concept of core strengths was first postulated by Prahalad and Hamel (1990), while the term "competitive edge" was crafted by Barney (1991). Over time, combination theorists developed a theory positing that a company's growth is inextricably linked to internal factors (Kellermanns, Walter, Crook, Kemmerer & Narayanan, 2016). Assets, skills, and capacities are considered in the RBV (Amadasun & Mutezo 2017). Consequently, RBV theory is a school of strategic management that establishes the importance of a company's resources, capabilities, knowledge, and skills when nurturing expansion (Hitt, Ireland

& Hoskisson, 2015). Since RBV focuses more on the factors that affect a company's growth, it was chosen as the most relevant theoretical foundation for this investigation.

2.2. Hypotheses Development through Theoretical Grounding

2.2.1. Interrelationship between Marketing Abilities to Access Lucrative Markets and Firm Growth

Marketing skills are vital to firms' growth and development (Olazo, 2023). Botswana's SMEs are challenged by a lack of access to new markets (TransUnion, 2022). Montsho and Moreki (2012) explicated the critical role of marketing skills for entrepreneurs, which are necessary for nurturing enduring marketing structure in emerging economies. Most local poultry farmers lack a competitive edge, as they face price negotiations with middlemen like Choppies, a supermarket chain in Botswana. Furthermore, Monyake and Kuruba (2021) contended that effective management of growing enterprises is not solely based on entrepreneur and financial support traits, but also various other factors, such as marketing dynamics, management strategy, business administration effectiveness, statutory provisions, and HR practices, that affect firm growth. Pansiri and Yalala (2017) posited that a myriad of antecedents exists for driving small firms' growth in Botswana. Jaiyeoba, Iwu and Marandu (2018) concluded that market orientation, innovative practices, and top management emphasis lend credence to team spirit, organisational commitment, and employee consequences among SMEs. Based on the aforementioned, small firms need skilled managers to position tactical and strategic operations of businesses for sustainable performance. Consequently, we hypothesise that:

H₁: Marketing skills are significantly and positively related to a firm's growth.

2.2.2. Interrelationship between Entrepreneurial Qualities/Attributes and Firm Growth

A plethora of research explicates numerous findings on the qualities that entrepreneurs contribute to the expansion and success of SMEs (Anwar, Clauss & Issah, 2022; Iwu & Opute, 2021; Rocha, Moraes & Fischer, 2022). Therefore, it could be noted that varying entrepreneurs' personalities react differently based on the specific issues confronting work environments and the nature of businesses they run. Contrastingly, Tian, Akhtar, Qureshi and Iqbal (2022) contended that the managerial or professional experience and level of education of an agribusiness SME owner are vital contributors to a firm's performance. Thus, Graduate Farmer (2018) differentiated a farm manager from a farmer-entrepreneur, as a farmer-entrepreneur is confident, has high energy, and is goal- and self-driven, a problem-solver, innovative, visionary, creative, and a significant risk-taker. As per Ololade and Rametse (2018), there is no statistically significant relationship between parents' or guardians' education level and their children's aspirations to start their own business. These findings indicate that entrepreneurial traits are

innate, rather than acquired attributes, and the extent to which these traits are manifested in an individual may be linked to various factors within the business environment. Hence, we hypothesise that:

H₂: Entrepreneurial abilities are significantly and positively related to a firm's growth.

2.2.3. Interrelationship between Business Administration Skills and Firm Growth

Popescu, Iancu, Avram, Avram and Popescu (2020) noted that personal/interpersonal skills significantly impact enterprise resource planning, compared to information technology skills and conceptualisation skills, countering what extant literature has espoused. Scholars, such as Braidford, Drummond and Stone (2017) and Kakouris and Liargovas (2021), concur that entrepreneurs' ability to engage with people in a positive and supportive manner, be problem-solving-focused, and manage skills in a manner that positively impacts SME growth constitute a critical role in the success of their businesses' success agenda, which makes business management skills a vital aspect of strategy for expansion. In their study on socio-economic factors on poultry firm growth in Botswana, Baliyan and Masuku (2017) argued that a plethora of business administration skills, such as market access, increased complexity of value chain cum linkages, and endemic farm management practices impact firm growth. Gaetsewe (2018) recommended that policymakers give vital attention to the inclusion of business skills in the elementary and secondary school curricula to nurture the development of future entrepreneurs from a young age. As a form of implicit knowledge transfer, we opine that this could be crucial in setting the tone for the next generation of business leaders, as our study has also uncovered this skills gap. Thus, we hypothesise that:

H₃: Business administration skills are significantly and positively related to a firm's growth.

2.2.4. Interrelationship between Access to Financial Resources and Firm Growth

Many experts contend that limited access to capital affects numerous SMEs in the first decade after their launch, with failure consequences (Loku & Loku, 2020; Zayed, Mohamed, Islam, Perevozova, Nitsenko & Morozova, 2022). Internal or owner-funded capital and external funds, such as angel or state grants or loans from banks and other financial institutions (e.g., the Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency [CEDA] in the context of Botswana), are the two crucial types of capital or finance available to SMEs. Inaccessibility to lending delays the performance and growth of SMEs because it prevents them from engaging in other business transactions or diversification, as contended in Botswana by Muranda, Mphela and Nyakudya (2011). Most lenders have reservations about disbursing loans to SMEs because of the latter's poor credit standing and lack of collateral (Mutoko & Mutoko, 2020; Rankhumise & Letsoalo, 2019). Small and medium-sized poultry farms need access to financial resources to address a plethora of operational challenges, such as the purchase of layer cages for clean egg production, freezers to preserve the quality of poultry meat products, plucking machines

for the speed and accuracy of the slaughtering process, and drinkers and feeders to prevent the spread of disease when chickens are fed from the floor, as well as the drilling of boreholes to provide water for the flock, and the expansion of existing facilities. Most SMEs in Botswana have failed because of inaccessible funding (Magodi, 2022). Consequently, we hypothesise that:

H₄: Access to finance is significantly and positively related to a firm's growth.

2.2.5. Interrelationship between Legal or Regulatory Constraints and Firm Growth

To reduce youth unemployment, Botswana's Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs implemented the Out-of-School Youth Programme, which replaced the Financial Assistance Policy programme (Diraditsile, 2022). In 2004, Kgalagadi Breweries Limited established the Kickstart Programme, giving grants of P10 000 to P200 000 to young business owners aged 18 to 35 (Diraditsile, 2022). The government saw the great potential in agribusiness, with CEDA creating the Young Farmers Fund and later repositioning the Youth Development Fund to provide financial assistance of up to P450 000 and interest-free loans of up to P450 000 to young people starting or expanding their own agribusinesses (Diraditsile, 2022). The government seeks to provide a legal and policy framework that facilitates a business environment for domestic and foreign entrepreneurs (Government of Botswana, 2022).

Many of these intervention/support programmes are affected by poor execution, insufficient CEDA staff, as well as a lack of maturity-stage supervision and research into whether the programme is effective, which contribute significantly to the failure of the project and the mismanagement of public funds, as highlighted by Diraditsile (2022). Apart from the initiatives to support SMEs, Dikuelo (2017) asserted that most poultry farmers decry the monopoly in this industry, as most of the large poultry businesses own uncontested and impermeable supply chains, ranging from the production of day-old chicks to the ownership of abattoirs and large retailers. From the perspective of legal and policy constraints, Ullah (2020) asserted that in some developing countries, lawmakers place a premium on fostering an environment favourable to business through the management of markets and financiers. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H₅: Legal constraints are significantly and positively related to a firm's growth.

2.2.6. Interrelationship between Human Resource practices and Firm Growth

According to Agarwal and Jha (2015) and Singh et al. (2020), the complexity of managing HR has made many SMEs stop the formal recruitment of employees in favour of word-of-mouth recommendations. Burhan, Hamdan, Tariq, Hameed and Naeem (2023) supported this assertion, contending that inadequate HR management by business owners has led to low performance and stagnation of agribusiness SMEs. In addition, in a study conducted in the United Kingdom, Lai, Saridakis and Johnstone (2017) established that, even in SME enterprises containing five or more employees, poor HR practices can impact employee attitude negatively, which could have an impairing

influence on future SME performance. They argued that even in an SME, an understanding of HR practices is required to establish its impact on future firm performance.

Many poultry farm owners in Botswana depend solely on recommendations from other farmers, rather than conducting formal interviews to fill vacant positions. The aforementioned practice has had a significant negative effect on farms' productivity, as it often leads to the hiring of incompetent workers. Considering the excruciating living costs facing most people in Botswana, the minimum remuneration wage of P1 100 per month for agricultural workers can be seen as low, which explains why there are so many reports of a high turnover of farm workers. Similarly, Badubi et al. (2004) confirmed that smaller broiler farms typically depend on family members as labour to generate employment, while larger farms have formal recruitment. In addition, Agarwal and Jha (2015) argued that SMEs have poor compensation structure. A lack of formal staff training, medical cover, poor work conditions, and low motivation among employees have substantial implications for the advancement of SMEs, as does the minimum wage mandated by governments that SME owners find in their favour.

Sadiq, Gunawan, Sosianika and Amalia (2022) concluded that employee induction affects client happiness and service/product quality. This implies that untrained managers are unlikely to explore or access their employees' tacit knowledge, which is vital for firm success. Instead, they depend on implicit knowledge, which may not be enough to boost corporate growth. When comparing Botswana and Tanzania, a study found that HR had a slightly more significant effect on SMEs' access to credit in Botswana than in Tanzania (Monametsi et al., 2018). Based on this assertion, we hypothesise that:

H₆: Human resource practices are significantly and positively related to a firm's growth.

3. Research Methodology

A quantitative and descriptive study was conducted. The central district region is the most prominent part of Botswana, covering an area of 146 531sqm (Central District Council Botswana, 2021) and containing seven villages, namely Tutume, Letlhakane (Boteti), Tonota, Bobonong (Bobirwa), Palapye, Serowe, and Mahalapye. Due to limited time and access to funds, the study focused on the Serowe and Palapye villages. The population encompassed 391 poultry farmers, from which a sample of 177 was included in the study (representing a response rate of 45%). A probability sampling approach was applied to the study through the application of systematic random sampling. Access to a database of poultry farmers was provided by the agricultural offices in Botswana's Serowe and Palapye regions. Through the application of telephone interviews, every second farmer on the provided list was contacted telephonically. In cases where a farmer was unavailable, a second call was made the following day to secure the interview. This process was followed until a sample of 177 respondents was reached.

A screening question was used to secure the inclusion of the correct respondents into the sample to ensure the sample included only broiler farmers who raised a minimum of 200 chickens and layer

producers of a minimum of 100 chickens. The study applied a five-point Likert scale to secure the collection of the data, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” in terms of the constructs relevant to the study (i.e., marketing abilities, entrepreneurial abilities, business administration skills, access to finance, legal constraints, HR practices, and firm growth). The items used in the research instrument were adapted from Nguyen (2021) and Singh and Soman (2019). Scholars, such as Batterton and Hale (2017) and Chimi and Russel (2009), promulgated the benefit of using Likert scales in social sciences research, arguing its value add and securing guidance of its correct use in social sciences-related studies. Furthermore, Burns, Veeck and Bush (2017) stated that a minimum sample of 30-100 sample elements is required to validate the use of a Likert scale in social sciences research.

The structured questionnaire included closed-ended questions regarding the six identified factors that influence the growth of poultry SMEs. Psychometric nomenclature was conducted for the myriad subconstructs in the study and inferential statistics were conducted to test the hypothetical proposition using SPSS version 28. The study flows from the master’s dissertation of Godfrey Magodi, titled *Factors limiting SMEs growth: Case of the Serowe-Palapye poultry industry, Central District of Botswana*, completed at Botho University in Botswana. The first author on the paper is the student from whose research the publication flows from. The second author was the supervisor on the study, while the third author contributed to the study by adapting specified sections of the paper through updated sources and strategy arguments to strengthen the innovative nature of the research study.

4. Results and Findings

4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Concerning the demographic profile of the respondents participating in the study, majority of respondents were female (74%), while 26% were male and aged 26-35 years (40%), 36-45 years (29%), 46-55 years (25%), and older than 56 years (7%). Most respondents had a primary school education (60%), a high school education (30%) or a post-matric qualification (10%). In terms of years of experience in the poultry farming industry, most respondents had five or more years of experience, farmed with 501-1 000 birds (30%), and had six or fewer workers employed by the business (96%). A total of 4% of the respondents indicated that they had 10 or more years of experience, farmed with 501-1 000 birds, and had 25 or more employees in their service. However, 56% of respondents believed that their SMEs have the potential for expansion and conduct their farming within a legally compliant dwelling structure (75%) approved for commercial farming purposes.

4.2. Reliability and Validity of Internal Factors, External Factors, and Firm Growth

As indicated in Table 1, the internal consistency dynamics for marketing abilities, entrepreneurial abilities, business administration skills, access to finance, legal constraints, HR practices, and firm growth are 0.600, 0.819, 0.769, 0.789, 0.691, 0.882, and 0.877 respectively. Malhotra (2019) stated that

the minimum cut-off value for an acceptable reliability score in social sciences is 0.7. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values indicated the robustness of the validity dynamics in the study: marketing abilities = 0.632, entrepreneurial abilities = 0.746, business administration skills = 0.762, access to finance = 0.667, legal constraints = 0.688, HR practices = 0.830, and firm growth = 0.804. The factor metrics range for marketing abilities, entrepreneurial abilities, business administration skills, access to finance, legal constraints, HR practices, and firm growth were 0.500-0.801, 0.686-0.904, 0.500-0.767, 0.500-0.833, 0.500-0.668, 0.510-0.805, and 0.697-0.916 respectively. The mean range values for marketing abilities, entrepreneurial abilities, business administration skills, access to finance, legal constraints, HR, and firm growth were 1.70-3.27, 2.38-3.62 1.86-3.65, 1.45-1.88, 2.91-3.70, 1.52-3.44, and 1.87-2.48 respectively.

Table 1: Psychometric Properties of Internal Factors, External Factors, and Firm Growth

Factors	Cronbach's	KMO test/Bartlett's	AVE	Factor	Mean	Standard
Marketing abilities (9)	0.600	0.632/149.883	60.325	0.679	2.19	0.689
				0.771	2.04	0.802
				0.640	1.70	0.603
				0.500	2.73	1.143
				0.505	2.90	0.912
				0.801	2.30	0.796
				0.568	2.60	0.862
				0.563	3.27	0.853
Entrepreneurial abilities (9)	0.819	0.746/300.777	81.285	0.506	2.29	0.825
				0.854	3.56	0.639
				0.836	3.57	0.594
				0.853	3.43	0.658
				0.771	3.18	0.839
				0.803	3.16	0.608
				0.904	3.40	0.748
				0.686	2.38	0.918
Business administration skills (8)	0.769	0.762/210.181	59.622	0.855	3.62	0.586
				0.754	3.53	0.718
				0.709	3.53	0.836
				0.500	2.49	0.788
				0.584	3.65	0.602
				0.612	1.95	0.560
				0.767	1.86	0.531
				0.586	2.27	0.758
Access to finance (11)	0.789	0.667/293.241	62.103	0.730	1.94	0.656
				0.500	2.16	0.727
				0.833	1.88	0.917
				0.500	1.77	0.705
				0.510	1.87	0.937
				0.794	1.47	0.575
				0.615	1.51	0.620
				0.524	1.71	0.985
				0.534	1.45	0.735
				0.558	1.65	0.757
Legal constraints (7)	0.691	0.688/83.276	52.128	0.710	1.83	0.909
				0.630	1.86	0.899
				0.634	2.32	1.081
				0.500	3.21	1.050
				0.618	3.58	0.595
				0.668	3.29	0.846
				0.590	3.66	0.478

Factors	Cronbach's	KMO test/Bartlett's	AVE	Factor	Mean	Standard
HR practices (9)	0.882	0.830/390.101	68.995	0.500	3.51	0.808
				0.638	2.91	1.288
				0.500	3.70	0.611
				0.755	1.71	0.610
				0.712	1.65	0.533
				0.805	2.08	1.037
				0.687	1.52	0.601
				0.711	1.71	0.693
				0.719	3.44	0.575
Firm growth (6)	0.877	0.804/270.112	78.857	0.617	1.65	0.581
				0.612	1.72	0.763
				0.510	2.01	0.830
				0.848	2.48	1.088
				0.697	1.88	0.778
				0.916	2.39	1.041
				0.744	2.27	1.034
				0.762	2.17	0.938
				0.764	1.87	0.695

Notes: AVE = average variance extracted.

4.3. Influence of Internal Factors and External Factors on Firm Growth

As per Table 2, marketing abilities ($\beta = 0.099$, $t = 0.729$), entrepreneurial abilities ($\beta = 0.071$, $t = 0.652$), business administration skills ($\beta = 0.191$, $t = 1.205$), legal constraints ($\beta = 0.144$, $t = 1.277$), and access to finance ($\beta = 0.000$, $t = 0.001$) are not significant factors to influence firm growth in the selected poultry farming regions of Botswana. As such, H₁-H₅ were rejected. However, HR practices ($\beta = 0.337$, $t = 2.475$) was deemed a significant factor that influences firm growth. Consequently, H₆ was accepted. The tolerance levels for all the constructs were less than 1 and the variance inflation factor (VIF) values were greater than 1, indicating the multicollinearity assumption was not violated in this study. Consequently, H₁-H₅ were not supported in this study, while H₆ was supported. The adjusted root mean square error of approximation was 0.372, indicating that the internal and external factors accounted for 37.2% in the growth of poultry business in the Serowe-Palapye region of Botswana. The Durbin-Watson value of 1.167 corroborated this assertion.

Table 2: Regression Coefficient of the Influence of Internal and External Factors on Firm Growth

Model	Unstandardised Coefficient		Standardised Coefficient	t-value	Significance	Collinearity Diagnostics	
	Beta	SE	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	-6.328	5.444		-1.172	0.246		
Marketing abilities	0.119	0.163	0.099	0.729	0.468	0.470	2.127
Entrepreneurial abilities	0.076	0.117	0.071	0.652	0.516	0.733	1.364
Business administration abilities	0.242	0.201	0.191	1.205	0.233	0.341	2.933
Access to finance	0.000	0.091	0.000	0.001	0.999	0.698	1.432
Legal constraints	0.181	0.142	0.144	1.277	0.206	0.673	1.486
HR practices	0.318	0.128	0.337	2.475	0.016	0.463	2.160

Table 3 orientates towards the different hypotheses developed for the study. Only one of the formulated hypotheses were accepted in the context of chicken poultry farming SMEs in Botswana.

Table 3. Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Variable	Variable	β	Sig.	Finding
H ₁	Marketing ability	Firm growth	0.099	0.468	Not supported
H ₂	Entrepreneurial ability	Firm growth	0.071	0.516	Not supported
H ₃	Business administration ability	Firm growth	0.191	0.233	Not supported
H ₄	Access to finance	Firm growth	0.000	0.999	Not supported
H ₅	Legal constraints	Firm growth	0.144	0.206	Not supported
H ₆	HR practices	Firm growth	0.337	0.016	Supported

5. Discussion

The future growth of SMEs is guided by multiple factors, affecting their ability to survive in competitive markets. This is especially important in an emerging African market like Botswana, considering the country's need to stimulate SME growth for economic development and job creation ("Demystifying roadblocks to SME growth", 2022; Molelo, 2022). Although multiple scholars have explored the factors that influence SMEs' future survival in the context of multiple industries, limited research has explored these factors in an emergent African market context, such as Botswana. Due to the impact of the

COVID-19 pandemic on the survival of SMEs in Botswana as well as the need to create jobs through SME stimulation, there is a growing school of thought that promulgates a deeper understanding of the factors that impact SME survival in an emerging market context (Das, Kundu & Bhattacharya, 2020).

Grounded in the theories of DC and RBV of company expansion, this study's primary aim was to establish the factors (internal and external) that influence the slow growth of poultry SMEs in Botswana's Serowe-Palapye region. The study established that HR practices are imperative to securing the future success of an SME in Botswana's poultry industry. Through the application of HR practices that are transparent, inclusive, and supportive of employee needs, SMEs are enabled to recruit and retain employees with the required skills, knowledge, and ability to drive their future success (Bilan, Mishchuk, Roshchuk & Joshi, 2020). The study established that HR practices are most critical in securing the future success of an SME. This study established that the recruitment of suitable employees, who receive sufficient training and development and are appropriately remunerated for their skills, can stimulate SME growth to secure future success (Heilmann, Forsten-Astikainen & Kultalathi, 2020; Zenner-Höffkes, Harris, Zirkle & Pilz, 2021). To develop an improved understanding of employees' needs and expectations, employees' commitment can be stimulated, ultimately enhancing their willingness to deliver on SME expectations (Schenkel, Farmer & Maslyn, 2019). Yet, scholars (e.g., Otoo & Mishra, 2018) argue that employee feedback is important to positively influence SME strategy development for future growth and that knowledge of employee expectations is crucial to drive employee commitment, and ultimately SME growth. Considering the discussion above, it is important to note that the SME environment in Botswana as an emerging African market is unique and the factors that influence SME development are guided by the SME sector to which the study is applied.

Intrinsic factors exist inside the firm surroundings and are under the direct authority of internal stakeholders like managers and staff (Surbhi, 2019). The future existence of SMEs in emerging markets is impacted by factors that are not necessarily similar to those in established markets, thus a deeper understanding is needed to develop an enhanced awareness of their relevance within a specific setting/context. One challenge experienced was that many farmers who were asked whether their businesses had grown over the previous three years responded negatively because the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to their failures. High inflation has recently caused a spike in fuel prices, making it impossible for the researchers to visit all farms. As a result, the researchers settled on making phone calls and, in cases where a farmer could not be reached, secured a follow-up call by phone. Data collection telephonically had its advantages and disadvantages, such as low turnover of interviewees or even frustrations from lengthy telephone calls.

6. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The study shows that an SME's HR practices guide its future survival, specifically in a small SME context, such as Botswana's poultry farming. The manner in which employees are recruited, managed,

and developed primarily impact the future survival of an SME (Singh et al., 2020; Singh, Rigsby & Ramgulam, 2017). Therefore, SME owners – such as those in Botswana’s poultry industry – require enhanced knowledge of the need to develop, implement, and manage sound HR practices that could positively influence the growth and future survival of SMEs in the poultry sector of Botswana as an emergent African market.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

6.1.1. A Deeper Understanding of the Importance of Human Resource Practices in Driving Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Strategy to Ensure Growth

The study’s results confirm the interrelationship between HR practices and the future growth of SMEs in Botswana as an emergent African market. Insight on this relationship is imperative in the management sphere, as it has implications for HR practices. SME growth is not influenced by sound employee recruitment practices alone, but also by the management and development of employees (Mamabolo, Kerrin & Kele, 2017). Employees recruited for positions in an SME need to be skilled and experienced in the specific role, but should also be multifunctional in their skills application (Naidoo, 2022). This implies that should the SME require the knowledge of the employee in a field other than what the employee is specifically recruited for, there should be an enablement of knowledge sharing, where required.

Consequently, employees’ multi-skilled nature is important to stimulate future SME growth, as SMEs cannot afford to recruit employees only for a specific task/skill level (Adisa, Abdulraheem & Mordi, 2014). Demirkan, Srinivasan and Nand (2022) and Rabie, Cant and Wiid (2016) concurred, stating that employees’ development, in terms of a specific skill set or management needs, is imperative to secure diverse skill sets that SMEs continuously require. Multiple studies have explored SMEs’ employee needs, but this research also confirms the importance of skills development and employee retention as critical HR elements that will influence the future growth and survival of SMEs in competitive business environments in emerging markets.

6.1.2. Enhanced Knowledge of the Role of Employee Practices in Fostering Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Growth

The study’s results show that SME growth is guided by employee participation and employee commitment to a business’s SME strategy. SMEs need to develop enhanced knowledge of their employees’ needs and expectations, especially in terms of working conditions and financial benefits. Scholars (e.g., Park, McQuaid, Lee, Kim & Lee, 2019) argue that although SMEs are small or medium-sized businesses, an understanding of employee work-benefit requirements and how such requirements influence employee intent to remain with the SME remains crucial.

Amah and Oyetunde (2020) agreed, asserting that should an SME not be able to financially deliver on employee expectations, a stronger focus on employee development is required to replace financial benefits with skills development. This is especially important to empower employees with the required skills that could strengthen their participation in the management of the SME or the planning process towards SME strategy development. Therefore, the fundamental prerequisites for SMEs to become more successful in securing the participation or development of employees towards the future growth of SMEs include a focus on aspects, such as performance management, the successful training and development of employees, continuous employee engagement that secures employee feedback, and an employee benefit preference analysis to better understand the remuneration expectations of SMEs that could stimulate their productivity to perform better in the long term.

6.2. Managerial Implications

From a practical perspective, small poultry farmers in the Serowe-Palapye region of Botswana should strengthen the potential for SME growth by implementing strategies that enhance HR practices to stimulate SME growth. For example, poultry farmers should develop and implement HR practices that are suitable for their immediate needs, but also adaptable to stimulate medium- to long-term growth. This implies the recruitment of people who reflect the skills and personality to contribute to the long-term growth of the SME, who illustrate potential for skills development and leadership, and who are able to contribute to the business through knowledge and skills sharing. This recommendation is aligned to the findings of a Canadian study that established financial security is not the only important factor in SME survival, but also the recruitment of suitable employees who reflect the skills and people relationships required to positively impact on future SME growth (Fadil & St-Pierre, 2021). Furthermore, SMEs like poultry farmers (hereafter referred to as SMEs) should put greater effort into researching the skills and personality type of individuals required for specific positions. This will require continuous in-house assessments of the needs of the SMEs and the use of social media or media platforms, such as newspapers, to drive the recruitment of suitable candidates.

Consequently, SMEs must be knowledgeable of the specific skills required and how these skills may contribute to their future growth. An in-depth analysis and understanding by the SMEs of the required skills needed and how these can be applied to secure future growth need to be secured prior to the development of a recruitment plan. Mashavira, Guvuriro and Chipunza (2022) concurred, asserting that skills development should be aligned with the performance management of employees, where a continuous analysis should be done of the business skills required to train and empower employees to deliver on these needs or to recruit suitable employees who deliver on these business skill needs.

Once a recruitment plan has been developed, SMEs will be in a better position to design the training needs for new employees and how such training can enhance the skill sets required to secure future SME growth. Regular research (biannual or quarterly) and consistent engagement with the SME are

required to obtain a deeper understanding of existing employees' needs concerning training and development. Current employees should be approached and asked what their training needs are and how such training and development can provide them with the required knowledge to add to the skills needs of the SME, which may stimulate growth.

Similarly, Osborne and Hammoud (2017) expressed that through successful employee engagement, a deeper understanding of employee skills, needs, and expectations can be secured. This approach ensures an improved performance management plan, which could enhance employee productivity and positively stimulate future SME growth. In conclusion, SMEs must remember that knowledge of the benefits offered to employees is also required, as these individuals will remain committed to the SMEs if there is a belief that the benefits of remaining outweigh the cost of moving. Moreover, benefits do not always have to be financial, but can encompass the development of new skills, the opportunity to be part of the management of the SME as well as an integrated benefit approach where financial remuneration (e.g., monthly salary) can be further strengthened by offering a profit-sharing option based on a well-managed performance management system, aligned to the opportunity to be part of decision-making when potential is illustrated after being employed for a specific period that could be combined with additional benefits, such as medical or insurance cover (e.g., life cover for loved ones in the case of an employee's death).

Prouska, Psychogios and Rexhepi (2016) concurred, stating that employee benefit needs can vary per employee or industry, where active participation in the business, having a voice as an employee of the business, job security (e.g., fixed-term or full-time employment) or economic benefits like financial rewards are amongst the most preferred benefits for employees working for SMEs. Through such an integrated benefit approach, SMEs improve the recruitment and retention of better-qualified and -skilled employees, which is important for the future survival of the SME sector in an emerging African market, such as Botswana.

7. Conclusion, Research Limitations, and Future Research

The study's primary aim was to establish the factors (internal and external) that influence the slow growth of poultry SMEs in Botswana's Serowe-Palapye region. The study established that the HR practices of SMEs in the selected industry and region of Botswana are critical to driving future SME growth in the country. Through a deeper understanding of these practices, the management and owners of SMEs in the region will be better enabled to manage them towards greater success, inclusive of future sustainability and growth.

A limitation of the study is that it focused on only one poultry farming region of Botswana. Consequently, the study's results cannot be generalised to all poultry farmers operating in Botswana as an emerging African market. Therefore, future studies could consider a comparative analysis of the internal and external factors that influence SME growth in the poultry farming industry of Botswana

and South Africa (as an established poultry farming country in Southern Africa) or between two different poultry farming regions in Botswana. This way, an international perspective can be secured, or similarities or differences can be established between regions within Botswana.

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