

Learning Orientation and Organizational Agility of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Rivers State, Nigeria

Leesi Gabriel Gborogbosi^{1*}, John E Chikwe²

¹Doctoral Student, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt

²Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt

***Corresponding Author:** Leesii Gabriel Gborogbosi

Doctoral Student, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt

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Abstract: This study examined how learning orientation shapes the organizational agility of small and medium-sized businesses in Rivers State, Nigeria, especially when entrepreneurial orientation is moderating. Many SMEs are encountering considerable difficulties staying flexible and competitive, especially with all the changes in the economy and regulations. To get real insights, the research used cross-sectional survey, gathering data from 167 SME owners using a well-structured questionnaire and being grounded in dynamic capabilities theory. Data analyzed by regression method. The reliability scores (Cronbach Alpha) comfortably above the 0.7 benchmark. The results showed that learning orientation matters a lot. When teams share a common vision, stay committed to growth, and remain open to new perspectives, they adapt quickly and make smart moves as the business landscape shifts. As SMEs lean into entrepreneurial behaviours like embracing innovation and not being afraid to take risks, the positive link between learning and organizational agility gets stronger. When SMEs add entrepreneurial orientation to the connection linking learning orientation and organizational agility, performance and sustainability become superior. If SMEs want to thrive, they need to build a learning culture, be willing to experiment, and let data guide their decisions.

Keywords: Learning Orientation, Entrepreneurial Orientation, Organizational Agility, SME.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Today's business scene is unpredictable. Companies must think on their feet and be ready to pivot fast if they want to stay competitive (Ghitulescu, 2013). It is not just about chasing profits anymore; organizations are also being agile in addressing stakeholders' concerns. Organizational agility is not a luxury but a necessity for survival (Motwani & Katatria, 2024). Calantone *et al.*, (2002) affirm that agility is the backbone of resilience and staying power in turbulent markets. Organizational agility comprises three essential capabilities: the abilities of sensing, decision-making, and acting. Helfat *et al.*, (2009) highlight those businesses with sharp sensing skills are better at navigating chaos.

In environments where new tax laws or local regulations disrupt plans overnight, the ability to make quick and smart decisions becomes a game-changer. Acting agility, the ability to execute promptly is especially critical in regions where infrastructure is unreliable. S. L. Brown and Eisenhardt (1998) argue that being able to move quickly in difficult terrains is a strategic edge. For SMEs in Rivers State, agility is not a buzzword, it is how they mitigate risks, stay afloat, and contribute to the local economy.

Multiple factors influence organizational agility. Structural rigidity, for example, can hinder responsiveness, while flatter, decentralized structures foster flexibility (Hamel & Välikangas, 2003). Leadership also plays a key role. Transformational leaders empower teams and promote adaptability (Eisenhardt & Sull, 2001). An organizational culture that values and actively promotes agility encourages fast learning and empowers teams to respond with confidence and

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clarity (Teece *et al.*, 1997). Technological tools, including real-time data and analytics, further strengthen agility by enabling fast market sensing and action (Cavusgil & Deligonul, 2025). Yet, many SMEs lack these enablers due to resource limitations or entrenched practices.

In Rivers State, Nigeria, SMEs operate inside a unique environment marked by volatile markets, policy shifts, and infrastructural weaknesses (Gborogbosi & Onuoha, 2024a). Even with these challenges, they remain the economic lifeblood of the region generating jobs, fostering innovation, and sustaining local communities (Romanus *et al.*, 2024). Organizational agility helps these businesses sense emerging opportunities, respond strategically, and act swiftly whether in oil, agriculture, retail, or tech. Without agility, SMEs risk falling behind or closing altogether.

Yet, agility requires more than tools or structure; it needs the right mindset and culture. Learning orientation, an organization's commitment to acquiring, sharing, and applying knowledge is critical. Senge (1990) sees it as a cornerstone of learning organizations. It fosters experimentation, critical thinking, and innovation. However, many SMEs in Rivers State operate without robust learning systems. They lack market intelligence, resist change, and struggle with top-down mindsets that hinder knowledge flow and delay decisions. This study focuses on how learning orientation fosters organizational agility in this resource-constrained environment. Moreover, it examines the function of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) as a potential moderator that catalyzes learning orientation into agile action (Rafiki *et al.*, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Despite increasing interest in organizational agility, many SMEs in Rivers State remain ill-equipped to act quickly and decisively. They struggle with outdated structures, siloed knowledge, and limited training, making it difficult to sense changes, make informed decisions, or act with urgency. Though organizational agility is acknowledged as a driver of competitive advantage, its practical implementation in small businesses, especially in turbulent environments like Rivers State, remains fragmented and under-researched.

A critical yet overlooked enabler of agility is learning orientation. While agility often focuses on structural or technological factors, learning especially in how it drives decision-making and execution is treated as secondary. Senge (1990) argued that organizations must cultivate a culture of continuous learning, yet many SMEs neglect this due to its intangible nature and delayed payoff. Research in the region shows that most SMEs are unable to sense shifts in consumer behavior, lack shared knowledge frameworks, and often delay crucial decisions due to hierarchical bottlenecks and poor internal communication.

The basis of this research is the recognition that learning orientation may significantly influence how agile a business can be, especially in turbulent, resource-constrained environments. However, learning alone is not enough. Without a mechanism to translate knowledge into timely action, learning becomes passive. This is where entrepreneurial orientation (EO) becomes critical. EO acts as a moderator that fuels the translation of learning into strategic movement that Companies with strong EO better leverage their learning for growth and agility (Irawan *et al.*, 2023). EO provides the confidence and drive to take risks, innovate, and act swiftly.

Yet, in regions like Rivers State, the EO-agility link remains largely unexplored. Existing models and research have been shaped by Western environments with stable systems, assuming access to finance, infrastructure, and institutional support. These assumptions don't hold in Port Harcourt or Bonny, where policies flip overnight and entrepreneurs face power cuts and poor roads. Therefore, a major research gap exists in understanding how learning orientation influences agility within SMEs operating under such conditions and how EO may moderate this relationship. Addressing this will not only expand academic understanding but also offer practical frameworks for SMEs trying to thrive amid constant flux.

Conceptual Framework

Source: Conceptualized and adapted learning orientation (Wang, 2008); organizational agility (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993); entrepreneurial orientation (Hughes & Morgan, 2007).

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This paper dives into how learning orientation connects with organizational agility in small and medium businesses across Rivers State, Nigeria. The objectives of this paper are to:

1. Investigate the connection between commitment to learning and organizational agility among SMEs in Rivers State.
2. Assess the connection between shared vision and organizational agility.
3. Evaluate the Interaction between open-mindedness and organizational agility.
4. Analyze the moderating effect of entrepreneurial orientation on the link between learning orientation and organizational agility.

Research Questions

To frame this study, I adopted the research questions as stated:

1. What is the connection between commitment to learning and organizational agility?
2. How does a shared vision relate to organizational agility?
3. What is the connection between open-mindedness and organizational agility?
4. How does entrepreneurial orientation moderate the connection the relationship between learning orientation and organizational agility?

Hypotheses

These null hypotheses were formulated:

Ho1: There is not a significant relationship between commitment to learning and sensing agility.

Ho2: Commitment to learning does not significantly influence decision-making agility.

Ho3: Commitment to learning does not significantly influence acting agility.

Ho4: There is not a significant relationship between Shared vision to learning and sensing agility.

Ho5: There is no significant link between shared vision and decision-making agility.

Ho6: Shared vision shows no significant impact on acting agility.

Ho7: Open-mindedness does not significantly relate to sensing agility.

Ho8: Open-mindedness does not significantly influence decision-making agility.

Ho9: Open-mindedness shows no significantly impact acting agility.

Ho10: Entrepreneurial orientation does not play the role of a moderator between learning orientation and overall organizational agility.

Significance of the Study

This study is notable because it addresses a critical need to improve the organizational agility of SMEs in Rivers State a sector that is vital to economic development, job creation, and innovation. In a context where businesses are frequently blindsided by policy shifts, market volatility, and infrastructural constraints, agility becomes the primary tool for survival and success. By examining the influence of learning orientation on agility, the research impacts to theory and practice. It presents a more nuanced understanding of how organizational culture, internal knowledge systems, and adaptive learning can lead to faster, smarter business responses. This is especially relevant in Nigeria's dynamic and often unpredictable environment.

Furthermore, the study reaffirms the moderating role of entrepreneurial orientation, a variable that could be the catalyst turning learning into strategic agility. While EO has been extensively studied in general terms, its specific role in enabling learning to enhance agility, particularly in SMEs within developing economies, remains largely unexamined. The findings of this research can guide SME managers in fostering internal cultures that promote both learning and entrepreneurial action, inform policymakers on designing support programs that blend capacity building with entrepreneurial training, and contribute to academic discourse by extending dynamic capabilities theory to contexts with limited resources and high uncertainty. Ultimately, the study offers a practical framework for SME resilience and growth in Rivers State. In doing so, it bridges existing research gaps, provides localized insights, and supports a strategic shift toward more agile, learning-oriented, and entrepreneurial organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Concept of Learning Orientation

Researchers (Gnizy *et al.*, 2014) highlight that learning orientation (LO) promotes a corporate culture and environment that prioritizes learning by highlighting the significance of organizational learning activities for managers. Consequently, LO is viewed as a complex and subjective learning process within businesses (Gnizy *et al.*, 2014; Karpacz & Wojcik-Karpacz, 2024; Wales *et al.*, 2020). When companies truly embrace learning, they open the door to both small wins and big game-changers.

We are talking steady improvements like getting a little better every day and bold, out-of-the-box innovations that can shake up an entire industry (Baker & Sinkula, 1999; Baron, 2013). Learning orientation is not just some corporate buzzword. It is about a company's mindset, how much it values learning, shares knowledge, and pushes people to keep growing (Shi *et al.*, 2024). The best organizations do not just talk about learning; they live it. They test new ideas, celebrate experiments (even the flops), and make sure insights flow freely across teams (Alkhalaf & Badewi, 2024).

Commitment to Learning

When a company is truly committed to learning, it puts in time, money, and energy into making it part of how they work (Shi *et al.*, 2024). This dimension involves dedicating resources, time, and leadership focus to promote employee development and enhance skills (Alkhalaf & Badewi, 2024). A learning organization is characterized by its proficiency in

generating, acquiring, and disseminating knowledge (Karpacz & Wojcik-Karpacz, 2024). Such commitment reflects in deliberate efforts to encourage both individual and collective development, leading to sustained performance improvements.

A robust commitment to learning builds organizational resilience. For example, Senge (1990) emphasizes that companies that give precedence to learning are well-positioned to handle complex and changing environments. Employees in such organizations are motivated to identify and close skill gaps, fostering innovation and responsiveness. Leadership occupies a central role in modeling this behavior, as leaders who exhibit a growth mindset encourage employees to take ownership of their professional development. However, commitment to learning requires balancing short-term goals with long-term benefits. Organizations may face challenges like resource constraints and resistance to change when prioritizing learning (Alkhalaf & Badewi, 2024). By embedding learning into the organizational culture, companies can overcome these barriers, creating a foundation for sustainable success.

Shared Vision

Shared vision in a learning-oriented organization unites employees around common goals and aspirations. It aligns individual motivations with objectives of the organization, cultivating a sense of purpose and fostering collaboration (Karpacz & Wojcik-Karpacz, 2024). Senge (1990) describes a shared vision as essential for building a learning organization, as it provides the direction and inspiration necessary for individuals to work collectively. Developing a shared vision involves participatory processes that ensure inclusivity.

J. S. Brown and Duguid (1991) emphasize that shared visions must resonate with employees at all levels to be effective. When employees feel ownership of the vision, they tend to contribute meaningfully to its realization, enhancing organizational cohesion and effectiveness (Alkhalaf & Badewi, 2024). However, maintaining a shared vision requires ongoing communication and reinforcement. Leaders must continuously communicate their vision to ensure its relevance and alignment with evolving organizational goals (Motwani & Katatria, 2024).

Open-Mindedness

Openness reflects an organization's ability to embrace diverse perspectives, challenge existing norms, and remain receptive to new ideas. Argyris and Schön (1997) identify this trait as a key enabler of double-loop learning, where organizations not only rectify mistakes but also scrutinize underlying premises (Alkhalaf & Badewi, 2024; Karpacz & Wojcik-Karpacz, 2024). Organizations that encourage open-mindedness foster innovation and adaptability.

A culture of openness stimulates creativity by allowing employees to explore novel solutions without fear of judgment (Tan *et al.*, 2019). This trait is particularly critical in rapidly changing environments, where flexibility and curiosity can make the difference between stagnation and growth. Nonetheless, open-mindedness can face challenges, including resistance to change and cognitive biases. Leaders should actively cultivate psychological safety, creating spaces where employees feel empowered to voice divergent views (Kyambade *et al.*, 2024). By fostering open-mindedness, organizations can tap into shared intelligence and drive transformative changes.

Concept of Organizational Agility

The agility of an organization implies its capability to reveal, interpret, and respond effectively to shifts in its environment (Alyasein *et al.*, 2025). Agile organizations excel at navigating uncertainty, adapting to new conditions, and executing strategies with speed and precision. Originating from management theory, agility emerged (Senge, 1990) in response to the imperative for organizations to succeed in dynamic and unpredictable environments (Jaafar *et al.*, 2025). The Iacocca Institute conceptualized agility as a system integrating technologies, human resources, and management practices to meet rapid market shifts.

Agility's not just a trendy word, it is how a business stays on its feet when everything is spinning. It is about being flexible, quick on the draw, and smart with how you use your people and tools to meet what customers want (Baron, 2013; Dove, 2002). Think speed. Think sharp decisions. Think knowing when to pivot and when to double down. That is what makes companies survive the chaos of today's fast-moving markets (Sambamurthy *et al.*, 2003; Sherehiy, 2008). In this study, we are diving into agility through three key lenses: sensing agility, decision-making agility, and acting agility (Jaafar *et al.*, 2025). Why those three? Because together, they paint the full picture from spotting what is coming, to figuring out the next move, to getting it done. It is like the business version of being street-smart, strategic, and action-ready all rolled into one.

Sensing Agility

Sensing agility is basically a company's radar. It is how a business keeps tabs on what's going on out there such as changes in customer needs, shifts in tech, new market trends. Baron (2013) describe it as a kind of built-in alert system, one that picks up early signs before the noise gets loud. But it's not just about watching. It is about spotting the stuff that

matters and making sense of it. Cavusgil and Deligonul (2025) say this ability is right at the heart of what keeps companies sharp when the market starts spinning. It takes tools, data, and smart minds connecting the dots.

According to Helfat *et al.*, (2009), the best companies do not just react, they notice the quiet signals early and get ahead of the game. That is the edge. Collaborative tools, cross-functional teams, and real-time data integration are crucial in enhancing this agility. However, excessive focus on sensing can lead to analysis paralysis, delaying decision-making. Mintzberg (1994) emphasizes the need for balance between analysis and action. By embedding sensing agility into their culture, organizations can ensure proactive and informed responses to environmental changes.

Decision-Making Agility

The ability of an organization to make timely and effective decisions, even in the face of uncertainty, is regarded as decision-making agility (Nafei, 2016). Eisenhardt and Sull (2001) argue that swift and informed decision-making is a hallmark of high-performing firms, enabling them to seize fleeting opportunities. Agile decision-making requires a blend of decentralized authority and structured processes. Hamel and Välikangas (2003) suggest that empowering frontline employees with decision-making authority can enhance responsiveness while maintaining alignment with strategic objectives.

Additionally, organizations must prioritize speed without compromising the quality of decisions, which often involves leveraging scenario planning and simulations (Chikwe, 2018). Despite its advantages, decision-making agility can be hindered by bureaucratic inertia and fear of failure. It is crucial to cultivate an environment that encourages experimentation and continuous learning, where errors are seen as opportunities for improvement (Alkhalaf & Badewi, 2024; Belasen & Pfeffermann, 2024). This method empowers organizations to adapt swiftly without undue hesitation.

Acting Agility

Acting agility indicates the ability to implement decisions by executing strategies swiftly and effectively (Motwani & Katatria, 2024). This dimension of agility ensures that an organization can translate plans into tangible outcomes, even under time constraints. S. L. Brown and Eisenhardt (1998) note that execution speed is a competitive differentiator in dynamic industries. Organizations with strong acting agility rely on streamlined processes and adaptive workflows. Zollo and Winter (2002) highlight that, capabilities such as process innovation and cross-functional coordination play a pivotal role in enabling rapid execution.

When teams know exactly what they are aiming for and they have got the freedom to make calls on the fly, they are way more likely to handle curveballs during execution (Motwani & Katatria, 2024). But here is the catch: being fast does not mean being reckless. Charging ahead without thinking it through is a recipe for regret. There is a real art to balancing bold moves with careful planning. As Cavusgil and Deligonul (2025) and Jaafar *et al.*, (2025) put it, you have got to juggle exploration (trying new stuff) with exploitation (making the most of what already works). It is not easy, but it is necessary. And when acting agility becomes second nature, is when a business does not just survive tough times but thrives. Even when things get messy, resilient organizations keep moving forward (Motwani & Katatria, 2024).

Commitment to Learning and Organizational Agility

When an organization's serious about learning, everything starts to shift. You see people hungry to grow, eager to try new things, and not afraid to make a few mistakes along the way (Boerma *et al.*, 2024). That kind of mindset is gold for agility. Companies that live and breathe learning do not just react to change; they spot it coming (Boerma *et al.*, 2024). They are the ones tweaking strategies before the storm hits, not scrambling after. It is like having a built-in radar for what is next (Saabye & Kristensen, 2025). Such a commitment drives innovation and enhances resilience as employees are empowered to explore new methods and embrace change proactively (Mohammad *et al.*, 2024). Learning organizations continuously transform themselves to remain relevant and competitive (Alkhalaf & Badewi, 2024). This alignment between a learning-oriented culture and agility ensures that the organization stays dynamic and forward-thinking in an ever-changing marketplace.

Shared Vision and Organizational Agility

A shared vision is foundational to organizational agility, as it unites employees under common goals and provides clarity during periods of uncertainty. When members of an organization work towards with a collective purpose, they are more likely to collaborate effectively and pivot swiftly in response to external disruptions. Senge (1990) emphasized that a shared vision fosters commitment and guides decision-making, making it a critical enabler of agility. By aligning efforts towards a shared goal, organizations reduce resistance to change and can adapt cohesively and strategically to shifting demands.

Open Mindedness and Organizational Agility

The openness to new perspectives and a readiness to challenge existing paradigms is known as open mindedness which is Key catalyst of organizational agility (Alyasein *et al.*, 2025). This mindset encourages organizations to be more receptive to adjustments in the operational landscape by fostering a culture of curiosity and critical thinking (Motwani & Katatria, 2024). Back in 2001, Weick and Sutcliffe made a big point that being mindful really matters. Not in the meditation sense (though that is great too), but in staying alert, tuned in, and ready to catch those tiny hints that something is shifting. When a companies wired for learning and open to change, it is like having headlights on full beam. They spot the early signs others miss, dodge risks before they become disasters, and often find fresh opportunities hiding in plain sight. That is not just being smart, but it is being agile.

Learning Orientation and Organizational Agility

When a company is all in on learning, it is really committed to picking up new knowledge, spreading it around, and putting it to good use, it naturally becomes more agile. It is like having a built-in reflex for change. Organizations that live and breathe learning do not get stuck when the market zigs or when tech takes a wild turn. They bend, flex, and roll with it. Calantone *et al.*, (2002) said that learning-oriented companies soak up change like a sponge. That kind of mindset does not just help you survive, it keeps you sharp, quick, and one step ahead when the road gets bumpy.

Theoretical Framework

Dynamic Capabilities Theory

Teece *et al.*, (1997) laid the groundwork with Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Gborogbosi & Onuoha, 2024a), and it is still one of the clearest ways to understand how small businesses especially SMEs in places like Rivers State, Nigeria, manage to stay agile in a world that will not sit still. Teece (2007) later expanded on organizational agility and stated that the ability to sense what is coming, decide smartly, and move fast is not some random skill. It grows from this deep, ongoing commitment to learning. When SMEs lean into that learning mindset, they start spotting market shifts earlier. They pick up on subtle signals, little whispers of change and they adjust before others even notice (Calantone *et al.*, 2002).

The whole idea is about building skills and systems that help firms not just keep up but thrive amid chaos. Learning and adaptability are key ingredients here. Dynamic capabilities theory brings learning orientation and agility under one roof. It is all about spotting chances when they show up, acting on them quickly, and then reshuffling your tools and resources to stay in the game or better yet, ahead of it (Cavusgil & Deligonul, 2025).

Dynamic capabilities theory is not just theory, but it is what smart businesses do every day to keep their edge (L. G. Gborogbosi & Onuoha, 2024). Learning orientation is the engine driving dynamic capabilities. Learning orientation gives these firms an edge, especially when it is paired with organizational agility (Cavusgil & Deligonul, 2025). Learning orientation shows up in how a company gets curious, shares insights across teams, puts new knowledge to work to improve things, become more innovative, more flexible, and more alive to change (Lyles & Salk, 2007). In unpredictable settings like the business environment in Rivers State, SMEs that learn fast and stay flexible are not just surviving but they are staying one step ahead (Gborogbosi & Onuoha, 2024a).

Empirical Review

Karpacz and Wojcik-Karpacz (2024) went down a different path, focusing on MSMEs inside tech parks in Poland. Their goal is to see how learning orientation links to firm performance, and whether market dynamism shakes things up. They gathered data from 182 MSMEs and used good old linear regression to test the waters. The takeaway is that learning orientation clearly helps businesses perform better. But here is the twist: market dynamism didn't really change that relationship. That is a surprise, right? Still, the research sheds light on how valuable learning really is for small and growing businesses, though future studies might need to check out other strategic angles for a fuller picture.

Hernández-Linares *et al.*, (2024) went big with a sample of over a thousand SMEs from Portugal and Spain. Their focus is knowledge-based dynamic capabilities and how those influence firm performance. But they threw entrepreneurial orientation into the mix too, and it played a key role. The study found that when firms have both the know-how and the drive to act on it, they are far more likely to thrive. It is not just about storing knowledge, but it is about using it to pivot, innovate, and stay sharp. Their message to SMEs is clear: lean into what you know, combine it with entrepreneurial energy, and you will be better equipped to tackle uncertainty and stay ahead of the pack.

Chelliah *et al.*, (2010) examined the problem of whether going global help Malaysian SMEs perform better. It is surprisingly that research especially on manufacturing SMEs in Malaysia has been thin on the ground. To fill that gap, they built a study around 77 manufacturing SMEs scattered across northern Peninsular Malaysia. They obtained data using using a structured questionnaire. The framework they used was grounded in earlier studies but shaped by noticeable gaps in the literature. The finding showed that a clear, statistically significant link between internationalization and performance. In other words, SMEs that ventured beyond Malaysia's borders tended to outperform those that stayed local. This indicated

that a strong message to SME owners and policymakers alike: expanding internationally is not just an option, it is a smart move for growth.

Summary and Gap in Literature

There is plenty of research showing that learning orientation (LO) boosts things like performance, agility, and how quickly firms can respond to change. But there are still some big question marks out there (Jaafar *et al.*, 2025). A lot of the heavy-hitting studies, like those by Chelliah *et al.*, (2010) or Karpacz and Wojcik-Karpacz (2024), zoom in on bigger firms or specific regions. That is helpful, but it also means smaller businesses especially those trying to bounce back post-pandemic, do not always get the spotlight they deserve.

The real game-changers include entrepreneurial orientation, innovation, or teams sharing knowledge. They are often mentioned as part of the LO-performance puzzle, but we still do not fully get how they fit in (Karpacz & Wojcik-Karpacz, 2024; Wach *et al.*, 2023). That is where this current study steps in. By focusing on SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria, where resources are tight, and the business terrain is not exactly smooth, this research digs into how LO plays out in the real world. It is not just about learning for learning's sake. It is about how these smaller firms survive, adapt, and stay ahead using the dynamic capabilities framework (Meekaewkunchorn *et al.*, 2021). In other words, this is not just theory, it is boots-on-the-ground stuff.

METHODOLOGY

This study took the cross-sectional survey route, quick snapshot style, just like Emeana and Onuoha (2023) did. The focus is 285 SMEs officially listed with the Rivers State Board of Internal Revenue (Uzoma, 2021). To streamline data collection, the study focused on small and medium-sized firms operating in and around Port Harcourt, the state capital, given the large number of SMEs in Rivers State (BoNing *et al.*, 2024). The Krejcie and Morgan approach established the size of the sample (Etikan *et al.*, 2016), resulting in a sample of 167 SME owners from Port Harcourt, Obio-Akpor, Eleme, and Igwuruta, all of whom operate legally established businesses in the state.

Data was collected via a questionnaire comprising 25 items. Each part of the instrument was carefully built to capture meaningful stuff. For learning orientation, the scale leaned on Wang (2008), breaking it down into bite-sized areas: four items that looked at how committed these businesses were to learn, another four that gauged whether everyone shared the same vision, and three that tested how open people were to new ideas (Wales *et al.*, 2020). As for organizational agility, that got its own set of questions too.

Sensing agility had three items. Decision-making agility has four items while acting agility has items. These came from Jaworski and Kohli (1993)'s early work, which Nafei (2016) later built on. Additionally, 4 items were used to assess entrepreneurial orientation, based on Hughes and Morgan (2007). All variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale: strongly agreed (5), agreed (4), neutral (3), disagreed (2), and strongly disagreed (1) (Joshi *et al.*, 2015). Following face and content validation, the instrument underwent further reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha, ensuring an index above 0.70. The reliability scores were as follows: commitment to learning (0.73), shared vision (0.914), open-mindedness (0.776), sensing agility (0.841), decision-making agility (0.946), acting agility (0.898), and entrepreneurial orientation (0.848). These results confirm that the instrument is reliable, with all scores exceeding the 0.70 threshold.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Spearman's Rank Order Correlation were employed to examine the relationships among the variables, while partial correlation analysis tested the moderating variable. As shown in Table 1, commitment to learning exhibits a strong, positive, and significant correlation with sensing agility ($r = 0.670$), decision-making agility ($r = 0.698$), and acting agility ($r = 0.612$), all significant at the $0.000 < 0.01$ level. Similarly, shared vision is strongly and significantly correlated with sensing agility ($r = 0.699$), decision-making agility ($r = 0.750$), and acting agility ($r = 0.635$), with significance at the $0.000 < 0.01$ level. In addition, open-mindedness demonstrates strong, positive, and significant relationships with sensing agility ($r = 0.754$), decision-making agility ($r = 0.757$), and acting agility ($r = 0.628$), also significant at the $0.000 < 0.01$ level.

Table 1: Correlations among Variables

Correlations		Commitment to Learning	Shared vision	Open Mindedness	Sensing Agility	Decision-making Agility	Acting Agility
Commitment to Learning	Pearson Correlation	1	.586**	.518**	.670**	.698**	.612**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	159	159	159	159	159	159
	Pearson Correlation	.586**	1	.589**	.699**	.750**	.635**

Shared vision	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	159	159	159	159	159	159
Open Mindedness	Pearson Correlation	.518**	.589**	1	.754**	.757**	.628**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	159	159	159	159	159	159
Sensing Agility	Pearson Correlation	.670**	.699**	.754**	1	.975**	.732**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	159	159	159	159	159	159
Decision-making Agility	Pearson Correlation	.698**	.750**	.757**	.975**	1	.749**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	159	159	159	159	159	159
Acting Agility	Pearson Correlation	.612**	.635**	.628**	.732**	.749**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	159	159	159	159	159	159

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

These findings imply that individuals who are committed to learning have a greater chance to exhibit agility in both decision-making and sensing, that are crucial for organizational agility in responding to rapidly shifting environments. The correlation indicates that a learning-oriented mindset can align with a collective organizational direction. In organizational contexts, fostering a learning culture can thus enhance agility across multiple dimensions, leading to better decision-making, sensing, and action.

Shared Vision correlates strongly with all agility-related variables, particularly with Decision-making Agility (0.750) and Sensing Agility (0.699). This suggests that when individuals or teams share a collective vision, they are more inclined to make agile decisions and sense emerging trends or opportunities effectively. A shared vision provides a firm sense of purpose, that can significantly enhance the ability to adapt and act quickly. In organizational settings, fostering a shared vision aligns teams, enabling faster, cohesive actions.

Open Mindedness shows strong positive correlations with sensing agility (0.754) and Decision-making Agility (0.757), indicating that open-minded individuals are particularly adept at recognizing new information, sensing changes in the environment, and making decisions in response. Basically, being open-minded really matters, especially when things get messy or unpredictable. It is not just a feel-good trait; it is a survival skill. When teams or organizations actively foster open-minded thinking, they are way better at spotting fresh opportunities and adjusting course when the game suddenly changes (Tan *et al.*, 2019).

Moderating Influence of Entrepreneurial Orientation

Table 2 dives into how entrepreneurial orientation stirs things up between learning orientation and organizational agility. It is about how that connection shifts when a bit of entrepreneurial mindset comes into play. The correlation matrix lays bare the dynamics between all three variables, zeroing in on how being more entrepreneurial can reshape the way learning orientation feeds into organizational agility. Notably, the correlation between learning orientation and organizational agility drops from 0.634 in the initial analysis to 0.460 when entrepreneurial orientation is included, suggesting that entrepreneurial orientation moderates this relationship.

Table 2: Moderating influence of Entrepreneurial Orientation

Correlations						
Control Variables			Learning Orientation	Organizational agility	Entrepreneurial Orientation	
-none ^a	Learning Orientation	Correlation	1.000	.634	.780	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	
		df	0	157	157	
	organizational agility	Correlation	.634	1.000	.492	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	
		df	157	0	157	
	Entrepreneurial Orientation	Correlation	.780	.492	1.000	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	
		df	157	157	0	
Entrepreneurial Orientation	Learning Orientation	Correlation	1.000	.460		
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.000		
		df	0	156		

	organizational agility	Correlation	.460	1.000	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.000	.	
		df	156	0	
a. Cells contain zero-order (Pearson) correlations.					

Entrepreneurial orientation acts as a catalyst, enhancing the impact of learning orientation on organizational agility. When a business dares to take risks, chases bold ideas, and stays on its toes, that is entrepreneurial orientation in action. It boosts the power of learning across the board, ensures faster decision-making, and increases speed of innovation as the whole team moves faster and sharper. The research shows clearly that different levels of entrepreneurial orientation shape the strength of the relationship between learning orientation and organizational agility. This demonstrates that entrepreneurial orientation is a key facilitator of organizational agility when fitted with a robust learning orientation.

DISCUSSION

Commitment to Learning and Sensing Agility

In the bustling SME scene of Rivers State, Nigeria businesses that truly commit to learning do not just adapt, they stay one step ahead. This mindset helps them spot shifts in the market, catch wind of new opportunities, and brace for potential threats before others even notice. By treating learning as a priority, these firms actively scan their environment and are quicker to respond to changes. It is like having radar, those who nurture a culture of learning are simply sharper at picking up on what is coming next (Gnizy *et al.*, 2014).

Commitment to Learning and Decision-Making Agility

Good decisions rely on good information. For SMEs in Rivers State, learning is not just a checkbox; it's how leaders stay sharp. When decision-makers are continuously learning, they make smarter choices faster. It is that simple. They are not stuck in outdated thinking, they evolve. Learning builds better mental models, helping leaders cut through the noise and make sense of complex situations with clarity.

Commitment to Learning and Acting Agility

Learning also fuels action. Without it, even great decisions gather dust. But when SMEs in Rivers State stay curious and informed, they act with confidence. They have got the tools, the knowledge, and the drive to make things happen quickly and effectively. According to Cavusgil & Deligonul (2025), this is how dynamic capabilities like acting agility come to life. It is not about reacting blindly; it is about having the muscle memory to adapt with precision.

Shared Vision and Sensing Agility

When everyone is pulling in the same direction, sensing change becomes second nature. A shared vision does not just inspire, it sharpens focus. In SMEs across Rivers State, this shared purpose helps teams spot market trends, customer shifts, or competitive threats as one cohesive unit. No more working in silos or missing the obvious. With shared goals, employees are more alert, more engaged, and better at connecting the dots. Senge (1990) stated that clarity of vision leads to clarity of action. When everyone understands where the company's headed, their antennas are up, and their insights are aligned.

Shared Vision and Decision-Making Agility

A clear vision clears the fog. For SMEs in Rivers State, this means faster decisions with fewer hiccups. When there's unity around where the business is going, choices feel less like guesswork and more like confident moves. It trims down debates, aligns priorities, and keeps momentum going even when things get rocky. Senge's (1990) idea of systems thinking backs this up: organizations are stronger and more agile when every part knows its role and goal. That kind of internal coherence is a game-changer when speed matters.

Shared Vision and Acting Agility

Shared vision turns purpose into motion. In SMEs, when employees believe in the "why," they're quicker to act on the "how". It is not just about reacting, but it is about taking the right steps with clarity and conviction. No more hesitations or mixed signals. With a unified purpose, teams execute with urgency and alignment. It is like jazz, each part knows its cue, and together, they create harmony. In fast-moving markets, that kind of synergy gives SMEs the edge.

Open-Mindedness and Sensing Agility

Open minds notice more. That is the bottom line. In Rivers State, SMEs that welcome different perspectives pick up on things others miss. They are not stuck in groupthink, and they are constantly challenging assumptions and widening their lens. It is not just about being "aware" but it is about being deeply mindful, as Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) put it. This kind of awareness keeps companies sharp, alert, and ready for whatever is around the corner. In uncertain markets, that is a superpower.

Open-Mindedness and Decision-Making Agility

Want better decisions? Start with open ears. SMEs that embrace open-mindedness do not just gather more ideas; they make smarter, more flexible choices. They are willing to pivot, rethink, and experiment. And when the pressure's on, that flexibility pays off. Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) highlight how openness helps leaders process complex information faster, using it to fuel creative yet grounded decisions. These are the SMEs that do not just survive, they adapt and thrive. For SMEs, cultivating open-mindedness is therefore essential for building decision-making agility that supports resilience and competitive advantage in dynamic markets.

Open-Mindedness and Acting Agility

Acting agility is strongly linked to open-mindedness, as SMEs in Rivers State with an open mindset are more inclined to experiment and take calculated risks when implementing strategies. This openness enables them to dynamically adjust their actions based on timely response received, making certain that their responses continue to be effective and aligned with shifting market demands (Motwani & Katatria, 2024). By embracing flexibility, these organizations foster an environment where quick and decisive action is encouraged, reducing delays in execution. This adaptability is especially crucial in maintaining a competitive edge, as it allows SMEs to respond promptly to opportunities and challenges. Ultimately, open-mindedness empowers SMEs to act with confidence and agility, even in uncertain or rapidly changing business environments.

Entrepreneurial Orientation as a Moderator of Open-Mindedness and Organizational Agility

Entrepreneurial orientation, defined by traits such as innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking, enhances the synergy between open-mindedness and organizational agility in SMEs in Rivers State. It provides a structured framework to channel open-minded attitudes into actionable strategies, bridging the gap between awareness and execution. By fostering a culture of innovation and forward-thinking, entrepreneurial orientation enables SMEs to effectively leverage open-mindedness in sensing opportunities, anticipating challenges, and responding dynamically (Crews Jr, 2024). As Lumpkin and Dess (1996) note, entrepreneurial orientation empowers organizations to capitalize on opportunities and adapt swiftly, ensuring that open-mindedness is not merely an attitude but a driver of strategic agility. This moderating influence is pivotal for translating open-mindedness into proactive sensing, informed decision-making, and flexible action, strengthening an SME's overall agility.

Implications

Theoretical Implications:

This research adds a new twist to existing theories like Dynamic Capabilities and Organizational Learning. It shows clearly and with real-world data that learning orientation helps firms move fast and smart. Also, it digs into how entrepreneurial orientation is the missing link that turns mindset into motion.

Academic Implications:

For researchers, this study offers a model worth testing across industries, geographies, or even different cultural settings. There is room to explore how agility looks in other sectors or how social and environmental factors shape what "learning" and "entrepreneurial" mean in different contexts.

Managerial Implications:

If you're running an SME, building a learning-driven workplace is not just "nice to have but is essential. Organizations should get everyone on the same page with a clear vision and seriously, stay open to fresh ideas. Embedding entrepreneurial thinking into daily operations through leadership training, innovation labs, or just giving teams more freedom, can speed up decision-making when it matters most.

Policy Implications:

For policymakers, to make SMEs to grow, invest in programs that build learning capacity, promote agile thinking, and spark entrepreneurship. Reward businesses that show they are serious about learning and innovation. Educational institutions should start weaving agility and entrepreneurship into business and management courses. That is how you shape leaders ready for tomorrow's unpredictable business world.

CONCLUSION

This study found that when SMEs in Rivers State truly commit to learning, build a shared sense of direction, and keep an open mind, they do not just survive; they thrive. These elements power their ability to sense shifts, make fast decisions, and spring into action with confidence. When entrepreneurial orientation is included in the association between learning orientation and organizational agility, it is like adding fuel to the fire of agility. Traits like being proactive, taking smart risks, and always pushing to innovate; those make open-minded firms even more agile and adaptable when the pressure is on.

Gnizy *et al.*, (2014) talked about how learning-focused firms are sharper at reading the market. Cavusgil and Deligonul (2025) tied learning directly to activating dynamic capabilities. Senge (1990) made it clear that a shared vision gets everyone pulling in the same direction. Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) explained how staying mindful and open to new information sharpens both thinking and reaction. Then there's Lumpkin and Dess (1996), who stated that entrepreneurial orientation turns good ideas into bold action.

Recommendations

1. SMEs in Rivers State should establish continuous learning programs and workshops to improve their ability to sense market shifts and emerging opportunities.
2. SMEs should integrate data-driven learning tools and decision-making frameworks to support faster and more informed strategic decisions.
3. Organizations should encourage the application of learned skills through simulations and practice-driven activities to translate knowledge into quick and effective actions.
4. SMEs should develop and communicate a clear organizational vision to align employees' focus on identifying and interpreting environmental signals collaboratively.
5. Managers should use the shared vision as a guiding principle to streamline decision-making processes and reduce hesitation during critical situations.
6. SMEs should foster a unified understanding of organizational goals to ensure swift and coordinated actions in response to external changes.
7. Leaders should create platforms for open dialogue and brainstorming sessions to encourage diverse perspectives that improve environmental scanning.
8. SMEs should adopt adaptive leadership practices that emphasize flexibility and openness in evaluating multiple options during decision-making.
9. Organizations should promote a culture of experimentation and learning from failures to enhance their ability to adapt quickly to changes.
10. SMEs should embrace entrepreneurial practices, such as innovation and risk-taking, to amplify the effects of open-mindedness on organizational agility.

Area for Further Research

1. Future research could explore how digital tools and technologies, such as ChatGPT and AI-powered learning management systems, boost the relationship between learning orientation and organizational agility in SMEs.
2. Examine how cultural values and external environmental factors, such as economic or political stability, moderate the relationship between learning orientation and agility.
3. Research the role of employee engagement and involvement in learning activities and its impact on agility outcomes in SMEs.

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