CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AND PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN CALABAR METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT
This study was embarked upon to empirically evaluate the impact of Coronavirus pandemic on performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Calabar Metropolis. Survey research design was used to gather information for the study. The study also used secondary sources of information. This paper is different from other scholars work by delving into COVID 19 pandemic and SMEs performance unlike others that concentrated only on COVID 19 pandemic and its effect on education. The study has also contributed to literature by exploring other countries affected by COVID 19 pandemic in education, health and agricultural activities. Ordinary least square multiple regression technique was used to analyze the data. From the study, it was revealed that there was a significant impact between lockdown and performance of SMEs in Calabar metropolis. There was significant relationship between restrictions on movement and performance of SMEs within Calabar metropolis. Furthermore, the findings revealed that there was a significant relationship between market closure and performance of SMEs. Finally, there was significant relationship between social distancing and performance of SMEs within Calabar Metropolis. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that government should revive the

economy by providing palliatives (in form of cash) and other incentives that will cushion the effect of Covid-19 on production and performance of SMEs in Calabar Metropolis.

Introduction

Covid-19 in any case called Coronavirus illness 2019 was announced by World Health Organization (WHO) as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30th January, 2020. Covids are group of infections that can cause disease like chilly, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). A new covid was distinguished as the reason for an infection episode that started from Wuhan in China in 2019. The virus infection is presently known as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV-2). The illness it causes is known as Coronavirus infection 2019 (COVID-19).

On 26 March 2020, UNESCO announced that there were 1.5 billion students from 165 nations who are out of school. This was caused by COVID-19. The pandemic has caused total closure of schools in over 192 nations all around the world with 91.4% of the absolute number of selected students in these nations briefly constrained out of school (UNESCO, 2020). It added that about 1.6 billion students across the world are at present constrained to avoid schools as social distancing is being upheld locally and territorially in order to contain the spread of Coronavirus illness.

In Nigeria, the record instance of Coronavirus began when an Italian employed in Lagos was flown into the ancient city of Lagos from Milan, Italy on 25 February, 2020 (NCDC, 2020). As at the period of composing this paper, Nigeria has announced more than one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) cases of Coronavirus. Consequent upon the spread of the virus and in line with the decisions of other nations, Nigeria ordered a total close down of all schools. The decision was a welcome development from National University Commission (NUC). The government also suspended all other forms of social and religious gatherings at all levels whether in towns or villages. The working population were all advised to work from home all in a bit to control the spread of the virus. The private and government schools were not left out, say for instance from - nursery, primary, secondary to tertiary were all affected. The consequences of Covid-19 will be felt for a long time to come in education sector. This is even happening at a time when the federal government and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria are attempting to arrive at an agreement to resolving a prolonged strike action which has paralyzed universities in Nigeria for months counting from October, 2020.

Information gathered was that lockdown was more prominent in South America, Africa and some parts of Europe (UNESCO, 2020). Albeit, Africa recorded the lowest death and Covid-19 related cases comparable to other continents. It is envisaged that the education of an African child would be the most impacted post Covid-19 era as a result of backwardness of economic and technology of most African countries (UNESCO, 2020). Besides, pharmaceutical therapy and other preventive methods, social distancing is considered to be the best measure of limiting the spread of Covid-19. The effective operation of social distancing stresses that schools be shut until government is sure that the pandemic has been contained enough for the safety of schools. This emergency quagmires exposed the many inadequacies and imbalances in our education frameworks (Schleicher, 2020).

In March, 2021, Our country, Nigeria received about four million doses of the COVID-19 vaccines called AstraZeneca/oxford vaccine produced by the Serum Institute of India (SII), transported through the COVAX Facility, a partnership between CEPI, Gavi, UNICEF and WHO. Furthermore, it was noted that the vaccines have undergone thorough regulatory processes at global and country level proven to be safe and effective. As at this period, March, 2021, more than 150,000 Nigerians diseased with the virus and over 1,800 lives lost, the way for recuperation for Nigerians has quite begun. Nonetheless, the reality remains whether not all Nigerians will actually want to take the vaccine in view of numerous conspiracy theories circulating in Nigeria.

The importance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Nation building cannot be overemphasized. It assumes a critical role in economic growth and improvement of any Nation. SMEs is a good employer of labour in Calabar and Nigeria in general. It aids the growth of local technology and built indigenous entrepreneurs. SMEs accounted for 90 per cent of all businesses in Nigeria. It also contributes more than 90 per cent of all economic activities and more than 50 per cent of all employment opportunities in other continents. SMEs contribute 40 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in developing Nations (Bularafa and Adamu, 2020).

Economist scholars are also very keen to point out that SMEs in Nigeria can do better, but are struggling due to weak economic growth and poor government policies. The Nigerian government had been coming to terms with oil price decline shock from 2014, with the GDP hovering around 2.3% in 2019 (Onyekwena and Ekeruche, 2020). They likewise noted that subsequently, highlight shows that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) modified the GDP growth for Nigeria in 2020 from 2.3% to 2% due to the low prices of crude oil and the restricted fiscal space. Also, Nigeria's debt profile has been inconvenient for stakeholders since the latest figures show the ratio of debt service-to revenue is at 60% (Babalola, 2020). The situation is probably going to deteriorate amid the decrease in income related to the declining oil price. These macroeconomic variables will exaggerate the economic effect of the Covid-19 Pandemic and make it harder for SMEs to climate the crisis. Small and medium businesses are finding it difficult to survive due to pandemic globally. The brunt of the novel diseases is being felt in the current market conditions. The restraints of movements have constrained many businesses to either cut down operations or close down. In addition, the reduction of consumer spending limit imply that Nigerians can only spend on indispensable products. Moreover, since SMEs depend partially on imported products for business, they would experience shortage of resources for processing. Many scholars that have written on Covid 19 pandemic in Africa and beyond concentrated on education leaving Covid 19 and SMEs untouched. This study is an extension of existing scholarship on Covid 19 pandemic and its effects. Finally, the resilience of SMEs is necessary to the recovery of the Nigerian economy from the pandemic as they are the country's economic mainstay.

Statement of the problem

On everyday bases (as at the time of writing this paper), the easing phase of the pandemic has perceived an upsurge in the number of cases signifying the chances that the Covid 19 cases might continue to heighten in future as it is presently even though the curve is flattening gradually. The coronavirus pandemic has presumably antagonistically impacted negatively within global economy by disrupted supply chain and flow of goods and services of SMEs in Calabar Metropolis and its environs. In regard, no company is immune to the challenges and the repercussions of the health crises situation which has continued to last for many months. It has brought unprecedented challenges to government, corporate organizations and many stakeholders in Nigeria and beyond. It has constrained many SMEs and other companies across the globe to observe restrictions on movement. In the same vein, regulatory bodies and government allow providers of essential services to go on with their normal businesses while observing social distancing rules. The pandemic has also caused private driven enterprises to lay-off their staff and also caused a cut in payoff of staff salaries while providing services as a way to contain the spread of the virus. With all business avenues in Nigeria currently observing Covid-19 protocols and some schools required to provide educational services through virtual learning, a number of consistent challenges are affecting businesses and education groups. The naira to dollar exchange rate is skyrocketing on daily basis resulting to high cost of imported materials used for production in Nigeria (Okoi, Iheanacho&Okoi, 2023). Another instance is cybercrime challenges, kidnapping, robbery and other related crimes have been on increase within this period of Covid 19 in Nigeria.

Covid -19 had brought economic shocks and food insecurity in Nigeria. A large number of individuals worldwide are currently facing food insecurity as a result of the pandemic. Families of SMEs worldwide are probably to struggle as their take home are drastically reduced due to job losses, restricted movement and mounting costs of living within Calabar and its environs. Covid-19 had caused economic and financial hardship to many small businesses. The

pandemic has affected the purchasing power or rate of consumers and productivity of supermarkets, eatries /fast-food, hotels and stores within Calabar. Some SMEs were forced to lay off some of their labourforce while others SMEs enforced salary cut among its workforce. The pandemic has caused socio-economic damages such as ban on sporting activities, limiting number of persons that congregate in churches, ban on political and cultural events.

In other to contain the spread of the pandemic, the government announced lockdown, social distancing and wearing of nose masks that results in the shutting of markets, public offices, business organizations, churches, mosque and social events. Additionally, restrictions on movements of persons, goods and services in Calabar caused incredible losses for businesses and companies. Customers of Banks found it cumbersome and impossible to access loan facilities within this period. Facilities were only given to those that have the technical know in the banks.

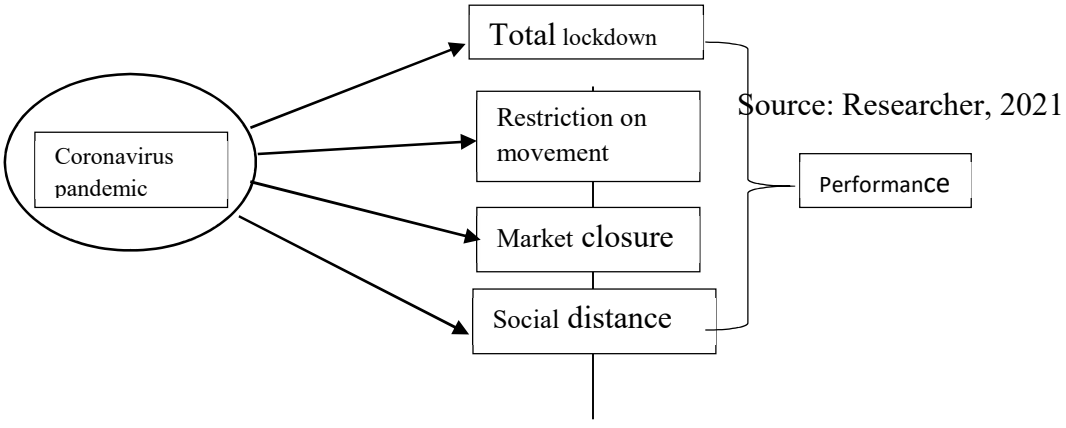
For now, they are scanty literature on Covid-19 pandemic in Cross River State and its environs. Moreover, researchers that have carried out investigations in this area concentrated on the impact of Covid-19 on education and health. This study fills the gap by delving into investigating the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Calabar Metropolis.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this paper is to assess the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on performance of Small and Medium Enterprises in Calabar Metropolis - Cross River State. Other specific objectives are: to evaluate the effect of total lock down on Small and Medium (SMEs) Enterprises performance within Calabar metropolis, to examine the impact of restrictions on movement on the performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) within Calabar metropolis, to x-ray the effect of market closure on the performance Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) within Calabar metropolis, evaluate the effect of social distancing on performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) within Calabar metropolis.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework showing coronavirus pandemic and performance of SMEs in Calabar Metropolis

The conceptual framework depicts the linkage between the independent variables (total lockdown, restriction on movement, market closure and social distance) on dependent variable (performance of SMEs).



Theoretical Framework

The study anchored on Viral Modernity Theory (VMT) propounded by Michael A. Peters (2020). This theory is based on the nature of viruses, the ancient and critical role they undergo in evolution and culture as well as the basic application to knowing the role of information and forms of bio-information in the social world (Peters, Jandri and MCLaren, 2020). Viral modernity theory evaluates the impact of informationon infectious diseases and their consequential effects on education, businesses and socio-cultural activities of people. The proponents also explain that media plays part in the fight against pandemics and identifies some journalists,and bloggers as messengers of inaccurate information on social media and described it as a way of helping to fuel panic, hysteria and stigma that are associated with infectious diseases outbreak (Peters et al., 2020). This study used modernity theory to discuss the epidemiology of COVID-19 in Calabar and its environs and its impact on businesses.

Literature and empirical review

Tailor (2020) explored the effect of Covid – 19 on Nigerian socio-economic well-being, health sector pandemic preparedness and the role of Nigeria social workers in the war against Covid – 19. The study used phenomenological and exploratory research design. The study concluded that Covid – 19 had a devastating impact on the socio-economic well-being of Nigerians as practically all sectors of Nigerian economy was shut down except the medical sector. The study added that the Nigerian health care system was under equipped, funding problems and not proactive to handle any epidemic. It was recommended that government should give more care to the Nigerian health sector in terms of financing, equipping hospitals, and training and retraining of medical staff.

Adiyoh, Ze and Dalibi (2020) x-rayed the effect of Covid – 19 pandemic on small and medium scale businesses in Nigeria. The paper's major objective was implication of the Covid- 19 pandemic on Nigeria's economy and ways that have been put in place to slow down the effects were looked into or addressed. The study used descriptive statistics such as graphs, bar charts etc for further analyses. It was discovered that the constraint to movement, the gradual slow in consumer spending power and reduction in buying of foreign goods directly affecting SMEs in Nigeria. The paper concluded that Covid – 19 pandemics has brought hardship to Nigeria's health sector and the economy. The paper recommended that government should do more in terms of intervention mechanism to enable SMEs be more proactive in adjusting to this novel condition.

Musa and Aifuwa (2020) explored the topic titled "Coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria: How can Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) cope and flatten the curve? The major objective was to bring out measures and strategies to be put in place for the survival of businesses. The method of analyses was theoretically driven as literature on Covid – 19 was reviewed comprehensively. Tables and graph were used for further description. The study came up with a model on how businesses in Nigeria can survive and assist lighten the curve of the deadly disease through severe adherence to health policies and counselling, use of technological mechanisms and provision of isolation room on temporal bases with basic protective kits in business organizations.

Upoalkpajor et al (2020) explored the impact of Covid – 19 on education in Ghana. The objectives of the study were to find out the correlation between corona virus disease and education as well as determine the preventive measures of Covid – 19 in educational sector. The paper used descriptive research survey design. The population of the study was made up of all senior students and all senior high school teachers in Tamale Metropolis. The major instrument used in the research paper was questionnaires. It was found that relationship exist between corona virus disease and educational sector. Moreover, there was impact of Covid – 19 on education while social distancing measures should be implemented and extended school dismissals was also recommended if substantial transmission is noticed.

Nantwi and Boateng (2020) x-rayed Covid – 19 and education in Ghana: A tale of chaos and calm. The paper explored extend at which the dreaded diseases had made life unbearable and strategies put up by government to limit the spread. The paper threw its weight on emergency e-learning as adopted by other countries. The theory used was viral modernity theory by Michael A. Peters (2020) and

conspiracy theory. The paper concluded that the government, educational bodies or agencies, parents and all stakeholders should put necessary arrangements in place to promoting continuous education. The paper recommended that online training or virtual learning should be adopted within this period for smooth operation in education. It added that partnership/collaboration between governments, educational agencies, institutions and telecommunication agencies to offer free data to lecturers and students within this period. Finally, there should be basic fumigation and disinfection in schools to create a healthy environment for learning.

Ngogi (2020) examined the applicability of blended learning in academic recovery during epidemic outbreak and discussed the impact of Covid – 19 on education. The paper used simple percentages, tables, pie chart, bar chart for illustrating number of learners affected by Covid – 19 across the world and Africa. The paper was theoretically examined. It was found out that the lock down of schools regionally and locally in many countries all over the world predicted on prevention of the spread of Covid – 19. The author noted that there was no existing vaccine for the virus and that the pandemic may not be totally cured in the nearest future. It was also discovered that blended learning would enable learners and lecturers have access to online learning materials as interaction between the lecturers and students are carried out. It was recommended among other things that computer application technology should be made compulsory subject in all schools. Lastly, schools should have access to technology – based learning.As at the time of writing this paper, they are scanty literature on Covid-19 pandemic in Cross River State, particularly, the Capital city known as Calabar Metropolis and its environs. In addition, scholars that carried out theoretical investigation in this area concentrated on the impact of Covid-19 on education and health. This study fills the gap by delving into empirical investigation of the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Calabar Metropolis.

Research Methodology

Descriptive cross sectional research design was adopted for this study. This design tries to find out the what, where and how of an event or activity. The design inspects the prevalence of a disease or condition in a defined population at a single point in time without influencing the variables. (Okoi, Okoi & Akeh, 2023). . The purposive (opinion) sampling technique was used because it serves the purpose of the researcher in terms of which units are included in the sample. In this study, the Taro Yamane formula was used to compute. This method is chosen in order to enable us use it as a generalization using the findings. Therefore, a total population of 10,568 was used. The population sample size used for the study which is 385 respondents was computed using Taro Yamane formula. Since the finite population is known, the formula is used as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N\,(e)^2}$$

Where n = Sample size

N = Actual population

e = level of tolerable

1 = constant

Therefore:

n =?

N = 10,568

e = 0.05

1 = constant

Thus:
$$n = \frac{10,568}{1 + 10,568\,(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{10,568}{1 + 10,568\,(0.0025)}$$

$$= 385.41$$

n = 385 approximately

Based on the computation above the sample size that best represent the population used for the study is 385 respondents. In addition, personal interviews present a good platform for close interaction and rapport between the researcher and the respondents. Simple linear regression was adopted to test lock down, restrictions on movement, market closure and social distancing against performance of small and medium-scale enterprise in Cross River State.

The modelling follows:

$$Y = ß_0 + ß_{1x1} + ß_{2x2} + ß_{3x3} + ß_{4x4} + \varepsilon$$

Where: Y= Profitability of SMEs; X_1=Lock down; X_2 = Restriction on movement; X_3 =Market closure; X_4 = Social distancing; ε=Error estimate; $ß_1$-$ß_4$=Regression coefficients; $ß_0$=Constant

4.0 Data presentation and Discussion of Results

4.1 Table 4.1

Covid -19 has affected the performance of businesses in Calabar Metropolis

Items	SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%
Business profit has dropped significantly during coronavirus in Calabar Metropolis	65	18.79	72	20.82	83	23.99	61	17.63	65	18.77
Business growth is becoming difficult during the pandemic period	69	19.94	78	22.54	56	16.18	77	22.25	66	19.09
Business work at restricted hours because of Covid-19 thereby affecting returns	68	19.65	82	23.73	67	19.34	58	16.76	71	20.52

Source: *Computed by researcher, 2021.*

The result in table 4.1 confirmed that 65 (18.79 per cent) of the respondents strongly agreed that business profit has dropped significantly during covid-19 pandemic, 72 (20.82 per cent) agreed, 61 (17.63 per cent) disagreed, 65 (18.77 per cent) strongly disagreed, while 83 (23.99 per cent) were undecided. 69 (19.94 per cent) of the respondents strongly that business growth is becoming difficult during covid-19 period in Calabar, 78 (22.54 per cent) agreed, 77 (22.25 per cent) disagreed, 66 (19.09 per cent) strongly disagree, while 56 (16.18 per cent) were undecided. Moreover, 68 (19.65 per cent) of the respondents strongly agreed that business work at restricted hours because of covid-19 thereby affecting returns, 82 (23.73 per cent) agreed, 58 (16.76 per cent) disagree, 71 (20.52 per cent) strongly disagreed, while 67 (19.34 per cent) were undecided.

There was loss of sales due to market closure.

Table 4.2

Items	SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%
I found it difficult collecting debt owed me during lockdown in Calabar Metropolis	101	29.19	109	31.51	46	13.29	50	14.45	40	11.56
Lockdown measures has affected my turnover rate in business	83	23.99	88	25.43	60	17.34	64	18.50	51	14.74
Salaries of some workers have been slashed due to Covid-19 pandemic lockdown	91	26.30	86	24.86	69	19.94	57	16.47	43	12.43

Source: Computed by researcher, 2021.

The result in table 4.2 revealed that 101 (29.19 per cent) of the respondents strongly agreed that collection of debt was difficult during the pandemic, 109 (31.51 per cent) agreed, 50 (14.45 per cent) disagreed, 40 (11.56 per cent) strongly disagreed, while 46 (13.29 per cent) were undecided. 83 (23.99 per cent) of the respondents strongly that lockdown measures affected turnover rate of business, 88 (25.43 per cent) agreed, 64 (18.50 per cent) disagreed, 51 (14.74 per cent) strongly disagree, while 60 (17.34 per cent) were undecided. Moreover, 91 (26.30 per cent) of the respondents strongly agreed that some salaries of workers were slashed due to covid-19, 86 (24.86 per cent) agreed, 57 (16.47 per cent) disagree, 43 (12.43 per cent) strongly disagreed, while 69 (19.94 per cent) were undecided.

Restrictions on movement affected the performance of SMEs within Calabar Metropolis

Table 4.3

Items	SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%
My businesses cannot cope due to Covid-19 pandemic in Calabar	80	23.12	92	26.59	78	22.54	62	17.92	34	9.83
Movement restriction has slowed down sales this period	67	19.36	27	7.82	96	27.74	75	21.67	81	23.41
There was reduction in customer traffic due to movement restrictions	79	22.83	82	23.70	105	30.34	52	15.03	28	8.09

Source: Computed by researcher, 2021.

The result in table 4.3 revealed that 80 (23.12 per cent) of the respondents strongly agreed that business cannot cope due to covid-19 pandemic, 92 (26.59 per cent) agreed, 62 (17.92 per cent) disagreed, 34 (9.83 per cent) strongly disagreed, while 78 (22.54 per cent) were undecided. 96 (27.74 per cent) of the respondents strongly that there was a great loss of customers due to movement restrictions in Calabar, 75 (21.67 per cent) agreed, 67 (19.36 per cent) disagreed, 27 (7.82 per cent) strongly disagree, while 81 (23.41 per cent) were undecided. Moreover, 79 (22.83 per cent) of the respondents strongly agreed that there was

reduction in customer traffic due to movement restrictions, 82 (23.70 per cent) agreed, 52 (15.03 per cent) disagree, 28 (8.03 per cent) strongly disagreed, while 105 (30.34 per cent) were undecided.

Effect of market closure on the performance of SMEs within Calabar metropolis.

Table 4.4

Items	SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%
There was loss of sales due to market closure	98	28.32	78	22.45	73	21.10	52	15.03	45	13.10
The closure of market brought my sales turnover down during the pandemic period in Calabar	72	20.81	82	23.70	68	19.65	59	17.05	65	18.79
Hotels and other businesses complained of low returns in business operations because of market closure	82	23.70	86	24.86	63	18.21	55	15.90	60	17.34

Source: Computed by researcher, 2021.

The result in table 4.4 revealed that 98 (28.32 per cent) of the respondents strongly agreed that there was loss of sales due to market closure during covid-19 pandemic, 78 (22.45 per cent) agreed, 52 (15.03 per cent) disagreed, 45 (13.10 per cent) strongly disagreed, while 73 (21.10 per cent) were undecided. 72 (20.81 per cent) of the respondents strongly agree that market closure affects the demand for products and services of business in Calabar, 82 (23.70 per cent) agreed, 59 (17.05 per cent) disagreed, 65 (18.79 per cent) strongly disagree, while 68 (19.65 per cent) were undecided. Moreover, 82 (23.70 per cent) of the respondents strongly agreed that hotels and other businesses complained of low returns in business, 86 (24.86 per cent) agreed, 55 (15.90 per cent) disagree, 60 (17.34 per cent) strongly disagreed, while 63 (18.21 per cent) were undecided

Effect of social distancing on performance of SMESs within Calabar Metropolis

Table 4.5

Items	SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%
Social distancing policies affect business operations	75	21.68	85	24.57	90	26.01	69	19.94	27	7.80
Social distancing dropped the volume of my products	76	24.46	95	27.46	75	21.66	55	15.90	45	13.01
Social distancing has caused low patronage in my business	75	21.68	69	19.99	86	24.86	56	16.18	60	17.34

Source: Computed by researcher, 2021.

The result in table 4.5 revealed that 75 (21.68 per cent) of the respondents strongly agreed social distancing policies affected business operations during covid-19 pandemic, 85 (24.57 per cent) agreed, 69 (19.94 per cent) disagreed, 27 (7.80 per cent) strongly disagreed, while 90 (26.01 per cent) were undecided. 76 (24.46 per cent) of the respondents strongly agree that business income has declined as a result of covid-19 in Calabar, 95 (27.46 per cent) agreed, 55 (15.90 per cent) disagreed, 45 (13.01 per cent) strongly disagree, while 75 (21.66 per cent) were undecided. Moreover, 75 (21.68 per cent) of the respondents strongly agreed that social distancing had caused low patronage in business, 69 (19.99 per cent) agreed, 56 (16.18 per cent) disagree, 60 (17.34 per cent) strongly disagreed, while 86 (24.86 per cent) were undecided

Discussion of findings

The goal of the study was to examine the impact of Covid-19 on performance of SMEs in Calabar Metropolis. Coronavirus is a novel disease that has affected nations globally. The disease has affected practically almost all sectors of the economy. The paper highlighted the effects of Coronavirus on financial performance of SMEs in Calabar Metropolis.

Data analysis and test of hypothesis revealed a significant effect of lockdown measures on performance of SMEsduring the pandemic in Calabar Metropolis. This suggests that lock down during the pandemic has significantly affected the profitability of SMEs in Calabar. The businesses of these SMEs are no more booming since the novel disease- Covid - 19 set in Calabar Municipality, as most traders witnessed low sales and stock piles which resulted in very marginal profit. The findings is in line with Bularafa and Adamu (2021). The author noted the damaging economic effect of Covid-19 on inhabitants of Taraba State.

From hypothesis two, it was discovered that there was a significant positive relationship between restrictions on movements as a result of Covid-19 pandemic in Calabar Metropolis. This affected sales of bars and restaurants, hotels and other SMEs within Calabar Metropolis. The sale of most restaurants dropped significantly and affected operational base of these businesses. Some could not pay salaries and other logistics within the period under review while others are still trying to cope with the post Covid-19 challenges.

From hypothesis three, it was discovered that there was significant impact of market closure on SMEs operators in Calabar Metropolis. This has caused many businesses or hotels complain of low returns in their operational business. These findings is in line with Wan (2020) who examined Education and Covid-19 and discovered that school closure has paralyzed the movement of pupils, students and other populace as teaching was made through virtual learning during this period. Many occasions, services and other important duties could not be attended to during this period.

From hypothesis four, it was discovered that there was a significant effect of social distancing on performance of small and medium enterprise within Calabar Metropolis. Social distancing policies affect business operations. Social distancing constrained many SMEs from meeting their organizational target, thereby affecting their performance over time.

From the test of hypothesis five, it was found that there was significant relationship between Covid-19 and financial performance of SMEs in Calabar Metropolis. This implies that the novel disease has significantly affected profitability of SMEs within Calabar Metropolis. Business profit dropped significantly during coronavirus pandemic in Calabar Metropolis. Business growth was difficult during the pandemic period. Businesses worked under restricted hours because of covid-19 pandemic thereby affecting returns. Bularafa and Adamu (2021)who examined the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on SMEs in Nigeria and found out that a positive relationship exist between Covid-19 and the performance of SMs in Nigeria.

The findings of this study does not disprove the theoretical underpinnings of viral modernity theory. The theory clarifies the impact of information on infectious diseases and their consequential effects on socio-cultural and economic activities of people. The theory explains that as the rate of pandemic expands, there is probability that economic and social activities undertaken by businesses will be affected in long and short run. Moreover, the findings is in concurrence with the social ecological theory that support the claim that serious attention should be given to shaping and embracing healthy behavior. These actions are

sanitization, social distancing, movement restriction, ban on worship, testing suspects, isolation, quarantining, and business closures as part of containment of pandemic of any nature.

Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper sets out to examine significantly Covid-19 and performance of SMEs in Calabar Metropolis. The study revealed that there was significant positive effect of coronavirus pandemic (lock down measures, restrictions on movement, market closure, social distancing) on performance of SMEs in Calabar Metropolis. Moreover, all the explanatory variables have positive significant relationship with Covid-19 pandemic. In accordance with the findings, the study inferred that the novel Coronavirus pandemic affected all the explanatory variables used in this study for the period under review. Covid -19 affected major economic activities in Calabar Metropolis rendering businesses difficult to operate as sales, income and most economic activities were truncated.

Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations:

i. The study recommended that lockdown should be implemented with caution during Covid -19 pandemic to avoid shortage of economic goods and total collapse of SMEs, especially SMEs that engages in production should be encouraged to move their products to customers.

ii. Palliatives in form of survival fund should be given to vulnerable SMEs to boost their business operations within Calabar Metropolis. While there is a consensus that the government needs to do more to protect SMEs from the effects of the pandemic, businesses also need to play their part to ensure their survival. In particular, SMEs should change their business models to become more online-based.

iii. Market Closure is inimical to businesses and should not be full option during pandemic. The study recommends government interventions in creating alternative markets to ensure that businesses are sustained

iv. Since social distancing cannot be discouraged in view of the pandemic, the study recommended that SMEs should adopt online shopping platforms deployment for their customers in order to improve their sales turnover and remain profitable.

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