



The Role of Corporate Entrepreneurship in Enhancing Competitive Advantage through Organizational Learning: Evidence from Egyptian SMEs

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research is to empirically investigate the influence of Corporate Entrepreneurship (CE) on Competitive Advantage (CA) in the Egyptian SMEs. The objectives of this research are: to investigate the relation between Corporate Entrepreneurship and Competitive Advantage, to test the relation between Corporate Entrepreneurship and Organizational Learning (OL), to investigate the relation between Organizational Learning and Competitive Advantage, and to examine the mediation role of Organizational Learning between Corporate Entrepreneurship and Competitive Advantage. The methodology employed emphasizes quantitative analysis through an online survey instrument for data collection and AMOS software for structural equation modeling (SEM) studies. The primary findings of the study indicate a statistically significant direct effect between Corporate Entrepreneurship and Competitive Advantage, as well as a statistically significant direct effect between Corporate Entrepreneurship and Organizational Learning. Organizational Learning has a statistically significant direct influence on Competitive Advantage. The study concluded that Organizational Learning mediates the relation between Corporate Entrepreneurship and Competitive Advantage in Egyptian SMEs.

Keywords: Corporate Entrepreneurship, Organizational Learning, Competitive Advantage, SMEs, Egypt.

Introduction

Studies in the field of strategy provided managers with a deep understanding of how to achieve superior company performance, particularly when companies are oriented toward entrepreneurship, and advocate the moderating role of passion for research on the correlation between entrepreneurial orientation and organizational performance in dynamic environments, in pursuit of a competitive edge (Michaelis et al., 2020). Competitive advantage remains a major idea, both in strategic management studies and in the operation of firms in the market. On the other hand, the dynamic and inventive reality of market participants makes it difficult for companies to achieve their objectives and maintain long-term competitive performance (Dong et al., 2019). The scarcity of strategic resources in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can still exacerbate this challenge, significantly reducing their sources of competitive advantage (Dong et al. 2019). Due to their small staff size, SMEs are occasionally referred to as "island" businesses with "limited resources" (Pinho & Prange 2016) or according to their revenue and staff size.

The selection of investments and competitive advantages is one of the most significant challenges for SMEs (Rao et al. 2019). In this regard, sources of competitive advantage are particularly critical for SMEs when it comes to organizational decision-making. SMEs' competitive advantages are derived from their dynamism sources, basic capital structures, and degree of entrepreneurship in terms of capabilities and strategic assets. In other words, the relationship between the resources and capabilities of SMEs is influenced by strategic assets that are associated with organizational flexibility. This competitive advantage is a significant source for small enterprises, and their competitive attributes are articulated in terms of dynamic capabilities (Mudalige,

2015).

A key point for any strategic study should be that dynamic capabilities (Teece et al., 1997) are required for SMEs to make better capacity decisions. Several studies in the literature show this. (Eikelenboom & Jong 2018; Muhic & Bengtsson 2019) Dynamic capabilities may help SMEs in analyzing the environment, understanding the market, and developing and seizing opportunities.

Rashidirad & Salimian (2020) assert that the comprehension of how SME managers and decision-makers perceive the value of dynamic capabilities affects their willingness to endorse and invest in the development and utilization of these resources for their enterprises. Comprehending the critical aspects of their capabilities (and those that can be enhanced) can thus afford SMEs a competitive edge over market competitors. The main aim of this research is to investigate into the relation between Corporate Entrepreneurship and Competitive Advantage (CA) in the Egyptian SMEs, with the role of Organizational Learning(OL) as a mediating variable. Research questions could be stated as follows:

- 1- What is the impact of Corporate Entrepreneurship on Competitive Advantage in the Egyptian SMEs?
- 2- What is the impact of Corporate Entrepreneurship on Organizational Learning in the Egyptian SMEs?
- 3- What is the impact of Organizational Learning on Competitive Advantage in the Egyptian SMEs?
- 4- Does Organizational Learning mediate the relation between Corporate Entrepreneurship and Competitive Advantage in the Egyptian SMEs?

2. Literature Review

Corporate Entrepreneurship is considered as the independent variable, OL is considered as the mediator variable and CA is considered as the dependent variable. In the following subsections we will discuss:

2-1 Corporate Entrepreneurship

Furthermore, Kearney et al. (2008) defined CE as the process by which an individual exploits opportunity within the corporate in order to create new innovations within the corporate or even create a new corporate.

Simssek & Heavey (2011) assumed that CE has an impact on SMEs' knowledge-based capital and performance. A survey was carried out on a sample of enterprises in the Republic of Ireland. The findings revealed a positive relation between CE and knowledge-based capital, and hence with performance. Tang et al. (2015) presented their study topic, which was how human resource management may promote corporate entrepreneurship. Strategic human resource management was defined by researchers as a set of practices carried out by human resource management that are consistent with corporate strategy. Data was gathered through a survey of 201 Chinese manufacturing enterprises. Data collected confirmed a significant influence of strategic human resource management on corporate entrepreneurship, while devolved management style partially mediating this relation.

Moreover, Kassa & Raju (2015) explored the relation between CE and employee engagement. Management support, reward/reinforcement, work discretion/ autonomy, time availability, and organizational boundaries were the five dimensions used to assess corporate entrepreneurship. Structured questionnaires were delivered to employees at six leather footwear companies in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, and 332 responses were gathered. According to the findings, CE dimensions are significant predictors of employee engagement.

Additionally, Bierwerth & colleagues (2015) investigated the impact of CE on performance. To study this relation, researchers relied on past literature on the relation between CE and performance, and collected 43 independent samples from 13,237 enterprises. A meta- analysis was conducted, and the results proved that CE had a positive impact on both subjective and objective business performance.

In the same vein, Umrani et al., (2018) determined the role of CE and organizational culture in improving the business performance. Data were collected by making a survey that was distributed among middle managers of five banks located in Pakistan. Collected data was analyzed through structural equation modeling. The findings concluded a positive relation between CE and business performance, where organizational culture mediated this relation.

2-2 Competitive Advantage (CA)

The CA is the ability of a company to function, execute, innovate, and implement novel products and services in forms that cannot be matched by rivals (Kotler, 2000). CA can be defined as a company's ability to maintain and improve its competitive position in the market in order to survive against competitors for a longer period of time (Kadir et al., 2018).

Pongklee & Ussahawanitchakit (2008) examined the impact of CE and staff cynicism on Thailand's CA. The two researchers gathered primary data to investigate the required factors by sending emailed surveys to 217 Thai firms. Finally, the results suggested that the relation between corporate entrepreneurship, staff cynicism, and CA was partially supported.

Moreover, Hakkak & Ghodsi (2015) showed that organizations seek to turn into any standard procedure for the purpose of reaching a CA. Therefore, the researchers aimed to identify the sustainable CA and its relation with the balanced scorecard. Five-point scale questionnaire was done and distributed among 120 employees of organizations affiliated to the Social Security Department in North Khorasan Province. Analysis indicated that implementation of the balanced scorecard had a positive significant influence on the sustainable CA.

Zaridis (2016) demonstrated some aspects of the entrepreneur and the SME that provide a CA. A variety of tools and competences have been proposed as sources of CA in resource-based concepts, and new ones are constantly added. The hierarchy of sources of CA considering their sustainability seems to be struggling. Some important variables are company size, management, ownership, data relating to the sustainability and competitiveness of small and medium-sized businesses, revenue, profitability, liquidity, lack of trained staff, data and market knowledge on distribution networks, possible fundraising, use of innovation or new technology, organizational structure, capital control, networking, and clustering. These factors, which are among the characteristics of a successful small business, determine the company size of SMEs, such as entrepreneurial characteristics, management approaches, the influence of the external climate, and SME attributes.

There is no variation between SMEs failing and succeeding. Apart from environmental factors, three types of failures are listed: functional expertise, management skills, and managerial behavior, all of which are connected to the characteristics of entrepreneurs and SMEs. Further, Quaye & Mensah (2019) identified the relation between marketing innovation and sustainable CA in Ghana. The two researchers targeted the context of manufacturing SMEs in Ghana. Positivist methodology was adopted as well as a quantitative survey design was done through making a questionnaire. Data were collected from 591 manufacturing SMEs in Ghana. The findings of analysis proved that marketing innovation was a strong predictor for the sustainable CA.

In the same context, Nasifoglu et al., (2020) studied the relation between high-performance work practices and sustainable CA through the mediating effect of innovation behavior and moderating impact of employee creativity. Questionnaire was done and distributed among 405 front line employees at four- and five-star hotels at Turkey and 323 usable answers were collected. Findings proved that high-performance work practices had indirect influence on sustainable CA through the mediating role of innovation behavior. Finding also proved that the role of employee's creativity as a moderator was positive in the relation between high-performance work practices and innovative behaviors, while it was negative on CA.

2-3 Organizational Learning (OL)

OL is defined as the organizational capability of the organization to improve its performance depending on its previous experience (Saadat & Saadat, 2016). Ahmed et al. (2011) hypothesized a relation between CE and OL. To obtain data on the necessary factors, the researchers relied on a survey technique. The targeted setting was the textile sector in Pakistan, where the convenience sampling approach was used to distribute surveys to middle-level managers. The results of the study proved that CE has a positive and significant effect on OL.

Moreover, Zhao et al., (2011) examined the effect of entrepreneurship orientation on OL and firm performance. OL was measured by experimental learning and acquisitive learning. Questionnaire was done that targeted 607 firms in China. Finally, it was noticed that entrepreneurship orientation had a positive influence on experimental learning, while it had a negative effect on acquisitive learning. It was also found that both types of OL lead to enhancement of firm performance, although acquisitive learning had the weaker effect as well as it became insignificant when adding external knowledge to internal private knowledge of the firm.

Li et al., (2012) determined the relation between managerial ties, OL, and opportunity capture by collecting data from a sample of Chinese manufacturing firms located in the provinces of Guangdong, Jiangsu, Henan, Shaanxi, Jilin, and Shandong. The collected data revealed that ties with other firms had a greater beneficial impact (than ties with government) on opportunity capture. In addition, the findings of the research proved that managerial ties have a significant effect on OL, which has a positive impact on the organizations' opportunity capture.

Further, Eri-Nielsen (2015) investigated the relation between corporate entrepreneurship, OL, and knowledge implementation. The researcher used a qualitative technique, while a descriptive study and comparison were carried out. The collected data were analyzed and it was discovered that CE had a significant effect on both knowledge implementation and OL.

Vasconcelos et al., (2016) purposed to determine the relation between entrepreneurship orientation, OL and organizational performance. The researchers targeted small enterprises in the retail and service sector that was located in the Dirceu Arcoverde neighborhood in the city of Teresina, Piauí, in Brazil, where questionnaires were sent to 200 managers. The collected data had conducted many conclusions. Firstly, OL

was still in the need of better structured regarding the formal procedures inside Brazilian small enterprises. Secondly, OL had a significant impact on entrepreneurial orientation as well as OL had a significant effect on organizational performance. Finally, entrepreneurial orientation was proved to play a mediating role in the relation between OL and organizational performance

In the same vein, Lei et al. (2017) investigated the role of collaborative culture on OL and how it relates to CA. The data was gathered via questionnaires distributed among the CEOs, directors, or managers of 150 significant industrial and service firms located in Vietnam's three most developed regions. The final sample size was 298 respondents. The findings proved that OL has a moderating effect on the relation between collaborative culture and CA. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that collaborative culture practices and CA have a significant relation, either directly or indirectly through OL.

3. Conceptual Framework and Research Hypotheses

The independent variable “Corporate Entrepreneurship” is measured by 4 dimensions: (Management Support, Time availability, Rewards/Reinforcement and Organizational boundaries) (Hornsby et al., 2002), The variable “Organizational Learning” is measured by 7 items (Yavas & Celik, 2020) and the variable “Competitive Advantage” is measured by 2 dimensions: (Flexibility & Responsiveness) (Agha et al., 2012).

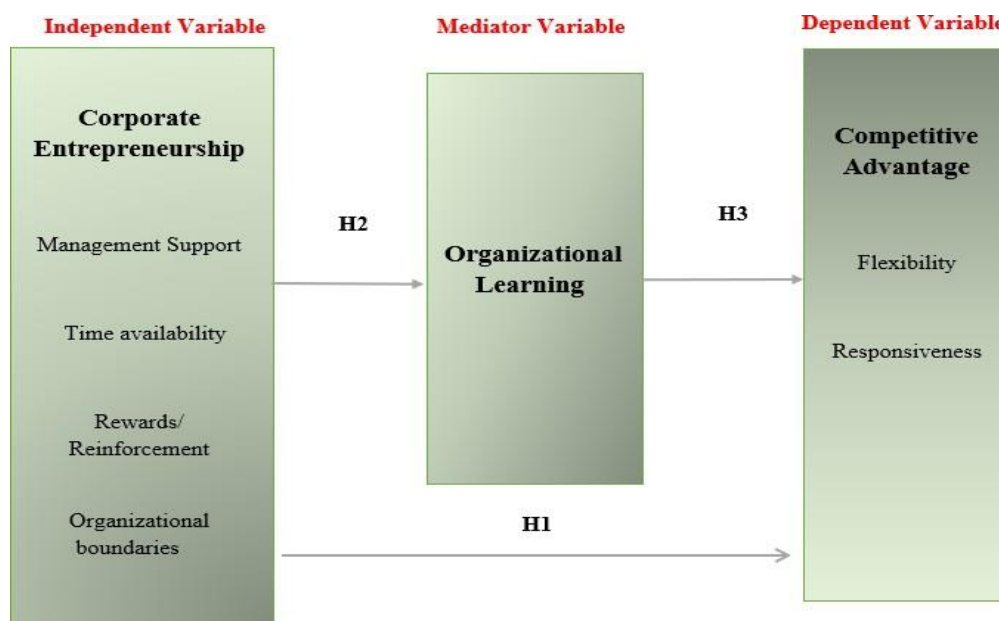


Figure 1 - Conceptual Framework

Based on the conceptual framework, the hypothesized model and reviewing of the related studies and theories, the study hypotheses were formulated as below:

H₁: It is expected that, Corporate Entrepreneurship has an impact on Competitive Advantage in the Egyptian SMEs.

H₂: It is expected that, Corporate Entrepreneurship has an impact on Organizational Learning in the Egyptian SMEs.

H₃: It is expected that, Organizational Learning has an impact on Competitive Advantage in the Egyptian SMEs.

H₄: It is expected that, Organizational Learning mediates the relation between Corporate Entrepreneurship and Competitive Advantage in the Egyptian SMEs.

4. Research Methodology

The research aims to investigate SMEs that exhibit corporate entrepreneurship, which narrows the population to those companies with specific strategic orientations. An organization-specific frame ensures that the sample drawn is relevant and fits the inclusion criteria. For the purpose of this study, the organization-specific sampling frame is employed focusing on Egyptian SMEs that actively engage in CE and OL. Egypt has established directories for SMEs through bodies such as the Egyptian Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (SMEDA) and Chambers of Commerce databases. These sources can provide a

comprehensive list of SMEs that can serve as a sampling frame. The questionnaire is divided in two broad categories. The first category is made up of general information and the second category is the body of the questionnaire that includes three sections: first: Corporate Entrepreneurship. Second section: OL and Third section: CA. A Likert-scale was used to measure opinions.

The research questionnaire was given to 700 employees, and 449 questionnaires representing 64.1% were returned, and 54 questionnaires representing 7.7% were incomplete or ineligible or refusals and 251 (35.9%) were not reached. There were 416 acceptable responses, a response rate 56.4%, which is very good given the nature of the study. The structural equation modelling (SEM) software package was utilized in this Research Paper to investigate the interrelations between the constructs of the hypothesized model. Testing Hypotheses After completing a confirmatory factor analysis, the structural model is valued by evaluating the hypotheses that underpin the research model.

5. Results and Findings

The reliability of a construct in the measurement model is possibly calculated using Composite Reliability (CR). CR determines the consistency of the construct itself and is a more presenting method of overall reliability (Hair et al., 2019). The research result shows the CR of (Management Support = 0.848, Time availability = 0.827, OL = 0.946, Rewards /Reinforcement = 0.921, Organizational boundaries = 0.882, Flexibility= 0.926 and Responsiveness =0.688). As a result, it is evident that all of the constructs in the measurement model are reliable.

The Average Variances Extracted AVE should always be above 0.50. (Hair et al., 2019). Overall, the (AVE) of the constructs (Management Support = 0.586, Time availability =0.561, OL =0.717, Rewards /Reinforcement =0.702, Organizational boundaries = 0.604, Flexibility= 0.714 and Responsiveness =0.520) are more than 0.500. Overall, the measurement results are satisfactory, indicating that the structural model may be evaluated.

Measurement model result: The 7 factor was CFA using the AMOS application. The value of DF was 539 (it should be more than 0), χ^2 / DF has a value of 2.795, that is less than 3.0 (it should be less than or equal 3.0). The RMSEA was .061 (it should be less than 0.08). The TLI index was .916 which is very close to 1.0 (a value of 1.0 indicates perfect fit). The CFI was .924. All indices are close to a value of 1.0 in CFA, indicating that the measurement models provide good support for the factor structure determined through the CFA.

Structural Model

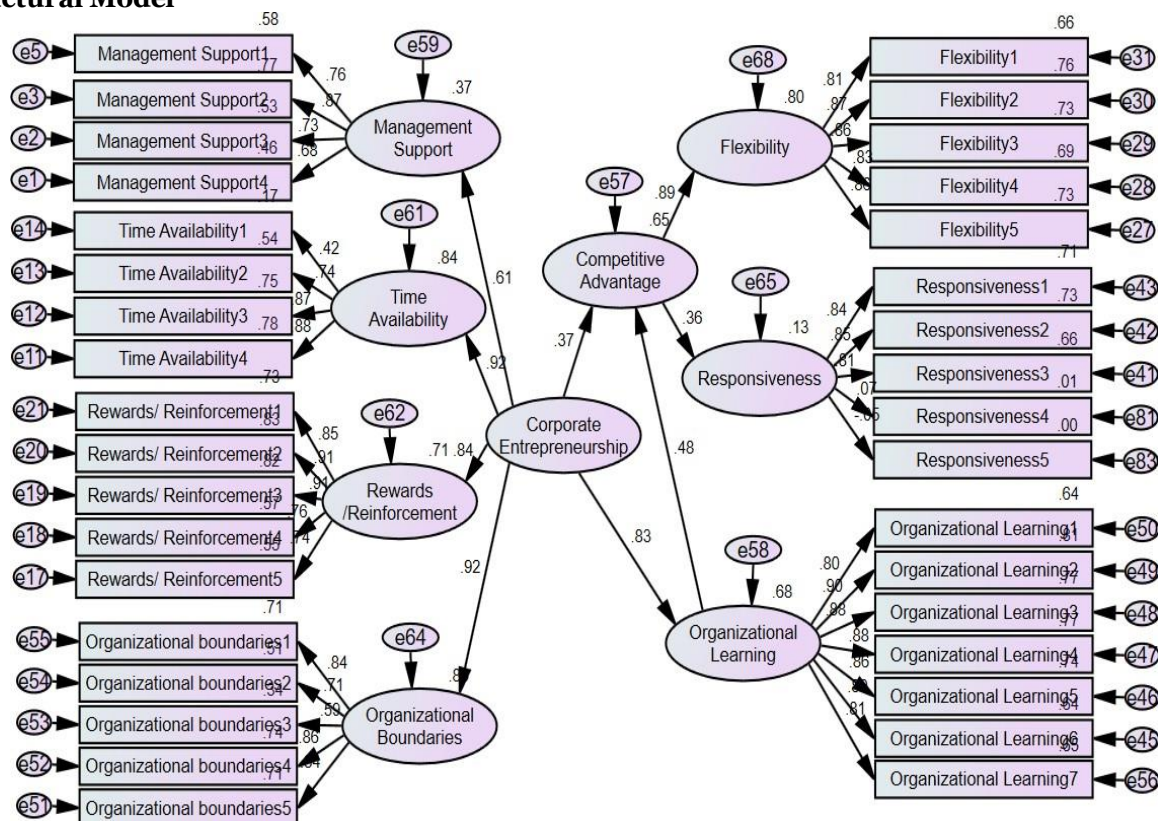


Figure (2) Structural Model

Structural model validity: The findings of the structural model using the AMOS software shows that DF was 551 (it should be more than 0), χ^2 / DF has a value of 2.860, that is less than 3.0 (it should be less than or equal 3.0). The RMSEA was .062 (it should be less than 0.08). The TLI index was .913 which is very close to 1.0 (a value of 1.0 indicates perfect fit). The CFI was .919. All indices are close to a value of 1.0 in CFA, indicating that the measurement models provide good support for the factor structure determined through the CFA.

Table- 1: Hypothesized path of the final structural equation model

Hypothesized path	Estimate	Critical (C.R)	Ratio	P-Value
Organizational <--- Corporate Learning Entrepreneurship	0.827	10.059		***
Competitive <--- Corporate Advantage Entrepreneurship	0.369	4.078		***
Competitive <--- Organizational Advantage Learning	0.475	5.579		***

6. Results discussions

The findings and hypothesis testing revealed that the independent variable (Corporate Entrepreneurship) had a significant positive effect on CA (dependent variable) in the Egyptian SMEs, CE has a positive effect on CA, CE has a positive effect on OL. OL has a positive effect on CA. Finally, in the Egyptian SMEs., OL mediates the relation between CE and CA in the following ways:

The first objective is to investigate the relation between CE and CA and **H₁**: It is expected that, CE has an impact on CA in the Egyptian SMEs. The findings reveal that CE has a substantial direct association with CA. ($\beta = 0.369$ CR (Critical Ratio) = 4.078, CR > 1.96, p = 0.000, p < 0.05). This is consistent with Chandra et al., 2013; Davidsson, 2016; and Sharpe, 2017 who emphasized that, embracing corporate entrepreneurship, SMEs can leveraging their agility and flexibility to innovate and adapt quickly to changing market conditions. In Egypt, CE is becoming increasingly important for SMEs as they seek to compete in a rapidly changing business environment (El- Kassas, 2019). Further, El-Kassas & Mahmoud (2020) found that CE is positively associated with CA and firm performance in Egyptian SMEs. They also found that SMEs that engage in CE are more likely to achieve sustainable growth and innovation.

The second objective is to test the relation between CE and OL. and **H₂**: It is expected that, CE has an impact on OL in the Egyptian SMEs. The findings reveal that CE has a significantly positive effect on OL. ($\beta = 0.827$, CR (Critical Ratio) = 10.059, CR > 1.96, p = 0.000, p < 0.05), This result is in the same vein with Kuratko et al., 2014; Real et al., (2014); and Shen & Chang, 2017 who demonstrated that, CE could help organizations to adapt to changing environments and market conditions. For example, research has found that CE can help SMEs to respond to market changes and customer needs more quickly and effectively.

Additionally, in the context of Egyptian SMEs, there is limited research on the impact of CE on OL. However, studies have shown that Egyptian SMEs face unique challenges, such as limited access to finance, regulatory barriers, and lack of managerial talent, which can hinder their ability to engage in CE and learning (Zahra & Covin, 2017).

The third objective is to examine the relation between OL and CA, and **H₃**: It is expected that, OL has an impact on CA in the Egyptian SMEs. The findings show that in Egyptian SMEs., OL has a significant direct relation with CA. ($\beta = 0.475$, CR (Critical Ratio) = 5.579, CR > 1.96, p = 0.000, p < 0.05). This finding is consistent with Chiva et al., 2007. Likewise, several studies empirically confirmed the positive links between OL, innovation and CA. For instance, Alegre and Chiva (2008) found OL orientation was positively associated with product innovation performance in ceramic firms.

Ngah & Ibrahim (2010) showed OL had a significant positive effect on intellectual capital and organizational performance of biotechnology SMEs in Malaysia. In Chinese high-tech firms, OL coevolved with CA over time (Li et al., 2010). Meanwhile, Ahmad & Al-Mamari (2018) investigated the effect of OL on CA in the context of SMEs in Oman. The authors find that OL has a positive impact on CA, and suggest that SMEs should prioritize the development of learning capabilities to stay competitive. The Egyptian SMEs were able to gain CA in international markets by leveraging CE practices to strengthen their commitment to learning, shared vision, open- mindedness and intra-organizational knowledge sharing (Fadzil et al., 2019). The researchers concluded that “a strong learning culture appears to be a necessary condition for SMEs to successfully internationalize” (Fadzil et al., 2019).

The fourth objective is to investigate the mediation role of OL between CE and CA. and **H₄**: It is expected that, OL mediates the relation between CE and CA in the Egyptian SMEs. The results indicate that partial mediation effect of the OL between the relation of CE and CA in the Egyptian SMEs. (P = 0.004, P < 0.05). This

finding is consistent with Hitt et al., (2001). In addition, several studies have found that OL mediates the relation between CE and CA. For example, Chang et al., (2014) examined 136 Taiwanese high-tech firms and found that OL partially mediated the effect of innovations and risk-taking on superior performance and CA. Similarly, Zhao et al., (2017) studied 286 Chinese manufacturing firms and reported that OL fully mediated the positive impact of corporate entrepreneurial orientation on CA. These findings suggested that OL helps firms convert entrepreneurial efforts into performance gains and strategic differentiation. Further, The Egyptian small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector faces unique challenges and opportunities. Adopting CE practices can enable Egyptian SMEs to leverage their agility, flexibility, and resource constraints to drive innovation and gain a CA (El- Nawawi & El-Nawawi, 2016). By fostering OL, these SMEs can continuously improve their capabilities, adapt to market changes, and achieve superior performance.

7. Conclusion

The focus of this research is to investigate into the relation between CE and CA in the Egyptian SMEs, with the role of OL as a mediating variable. The study used a quantitative correlational methodology to obtain primary sample data from 416 Egyptian SMEs employees. The regression analysis reveals that:

- 1- The direct effect between Corporate Entrepreneurship and Competitive Advantage is statistically significant,
- 2- The direct effect between Corporate Entrepreneurship and Organizational Learning is statistically significant.
- 3- The direct effect between Organizational Learning and Competitive Advantage is statistically significant.
- 4- The mediation effect indicates that there is partial mediation effect of the Organizational Learning between the relation of Corporate Entrepreneurship and Competitive Advantage.

According to the analysis, At the 5% significance threshold, all are considered significant. The estimated structural model corroborated the four hypotheses, as Corporate Entrepreneurship construct explained 68.4 % of Organizational Learning variance ($R^2 = 0.684$), Besides, Corporate Entrepreneurship through Organizational Learning explained 65.2 % of Competitive Advantage variance ($R^2 = 0.652$).

8. Research limitations

The degree to which the conclusions may be extrapolated to a larger population, cases, or situations is referred to as external validity. (Saunders et al., 2019) As a result, the researcher cannot presume that the findings apply to other situations, so the study excludes:

First, Because the participants in this study came from just one nation (Egypt) and are all Egyptian SMEs, the findings should be taken with a grain of salt. In spite of the fact that the research was conducted in a very specialized context, it is believed that the findings can be applied to a variety of other sectors, industries, and countries.

Second, cross-sectional data were used in this study to examine the relation between CE and CA, as well as the mediating role of OL in the Egyptian SMEs. As a consequence of this, the study only offers a picture of a single instant in time. This suggests that the findings of the research are only useful under certain conditions, including when external factors such as governmental regulations, economic activity, the competitive climate, and so on are unaffected.

Third, Data gathering from respondents over a set period of time utilizing a convenience sample approach had its limitations. The scope of potential responders was constrained by the short time span for data gathering. Because responses are collected based on the accessibility of respondents, this method may not produce a representative sample and may also lead to potential limitations in the range of respondents who would participate.

Fourth, The CBE definition of SME was issued on 2017, and despite the inflation rate and several actions of currency floatation, the SME definitions has not been modified till the date of issuing this paper.

9. Future research Suggestions

The following areas for further investigation are suggested based on the findings of this study: First, a study should be undertaken utilizing a qualitative technique or a mixed strategy using both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to acquire CE and CA views and expectations. Second, a longitudinal study should be done to examine the long-term relation between CE and CA in the Egyptian SMEs, with the mediating role of OL. Third, because the sample was limited to only Egyptian SMEs, a sample derived from other sectors, industries would improve the generalizability of the findings in the future. This would also aid in comparing the relation between CE and CA, as well as the role of OL in mediating the relation between CE and CA, in other sectors and industries.

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