

THE BARRIERS to Business Growth of Micro-Retail Enterprises in Nabunturan and Monkayo Districts of Davao de ORO

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ABSTRACT

Small businesses worldwide, including micro-retail enterprises, often encounter a range of challenges that hinder their growth and development. This study investigates the barriers to growth confronting micro-retail enterprises operating in Nabunturan and Monkayo Districts, Davao de Oro. Using a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design, the researcher examined the relationships among various barriers and business growth indicators among MREs. The key factors examined include financial, organizational, external, social, legal, and institutional barriers. Using adapted questionnaires, 150 randomly selected executives of micro-retail enterprises were surveyed. Pearson r and regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that respondents experienced a moderate decline in employment, sales, and value in 2023 compared to 2022. They also recognized the moderate adverse effects of organizational, external, social, and legal/institutional factors on business growth. Financial, organizational, and social barriers are identified as significant impediments to business growth, collectively explaining 31.9% of the variance in growth outcomes. The results confirmed the Unicist Theory and the Liabilities of Smallness Theory, emphasizing the importance of tailored strategies to mitigate these barriers.

KEYWORDS: *Business Management Financial, organizational, external, social, and legal and institutional barriers, correlational, Nabunturan, Monkayo*

INTRODUCTION

Many businesses fail due to a lot of reasons some of these include the lack of awareness about external and internal obstacles that impact business performance and the ever-changing nature of the modern economy that poses

challenges in accurately predicting future tasks (Gashi, 2016). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in economic development, constituting a significant share of businesses globally (Pucci et al., 2017). However, many SMEs struggle to sustain themselves beyond a few years due to internal and external barriers to growth (Abe & Proksch, 2017). These barriers include a scarcity of qualified human resources, limited access to finance, and cumbersome administrative procedures (Ogbole et al., 2019). In examining the growth dynamics of Micro Retail Enterprises, it is imperative to assess critical indicators, including employment and sales growth, both absolute and relative to competitors (Jones & Saundry, 2018). Owners and supervisors provide valuable insights into these metrics, offering a nuanced understanding of micro retail enterprises' operational dynamics and performance. Moreover, identifying and understanding the barriers hindering business growth, including financial, organizational, external, social, legal, and institutional barriers, is essential for supporting MREs in overcoming challenges and fostering sustainable development (Folta, 2016).

Notably, previous research found that these barriers can significantly influence business growth (Coad et al., 2018). These factors play a significant role in SMEs' economic development; hence, growth is crucial to their survival and to their contribution to the economy (Rauch & Rijskik, 2013). Business growth correlates with profitability and fosters innovation, adaptability, and resilience within organizations (Davidson, 2020). Additionally, according to Davidson, it creates opportunities for talent acquisition and development, thereby fueling economic progress and job creation. Moreover, numerous studies worldwide have identified barriers to business growth. For instance, in Pakistan, customs and trade regulations, political instability, and inadequate infrastructure hinder SME growth (Kularatne & Lopez-Calix, 2012). In Serbia, business growth is linked to the number of products or services offered, the number of employees managed, and the business's turnover rate (Arthur-Aidoo et al., 2016). Similarly, entrepreneurs in the Philippines face challenges such as limited infrastructure, distance from markets, access to financial resources, and government regulations (Biswas & Baptista, 2012).

Despite extensive research on barriers to business growth, there is a dearth of studies in specific regions, such as Davao de Oro. Hence, this study aims to address this gap by exploring the barriers to business growth in the region. The findings are expected to guide aspiring business owners, particularly those pursuing a master's in business administration at the University of

Immaculate Conception. Additionally, the study's findings will be disseminated through peer-reviewed journals, research forums, and conferences to reach a wider audience. Finally, copies of the report will be provided to the Commission on Higher Education and the University of Immaculate Conception library

Study Objectives. This research aims to compile and evaluate different ideas regarding the obstacles to micro retail firms' ability to expand. Examining topics such as financial availability, inefficient marketing strategies, government regulations, rivalry, corporate strategy, social capital, and regulatory restrictions is part of this. To support the expansion of new businesses and entrepreneurs in Davao de Oro, the study aims to offer a distinct perspective and serve as a guide, helping them understand and overcome these obstacles.

Theoretical Framework. This study is based on the Unicist Theory, which seeks to explore and clarify the fundamental catalysts of growth at macro and micro levels. Both were integrated into a unified field that enabled the development of future scenarios and the implementation of concrete strategies to promote growth. Belohlavek (2015) stated that the Unicist theory of business growth established the conditions that must be provided and the actions that must be taken to support business growth. In the context of this study, the macro and micro factors that may drive or hinder business growth include financial, organizational, external, social, legal, and institutional factors. Additionally, the Liabilities of Smallness theory, proposed by Edith Penrose, highlights the inherent disadvantages small firms face, such as limited resources, capabilities, and economies of scale, which impede their growth and competitiveness. Overall, the Liabilities of Smallness theory emphasizes the structural and resource-related challenges faced by small firms, which can act as barriers to their growth and expansion.

METHODS

Research Design. The study employed a quantitative descriptive correlational research design. Dulock (2013) defined descriptive research as a design used to systematically and accurately describe the facts and characteristics of a given population. It portrayed the characteristics of persons, situations, or groups, as well as the frequency with which the phenomenon occurred. It could also be used to discover associations or relationships between and among selected variables. In general, correlational investigations involve independent and dependent variables. However, the effect of the independent variable was observed on the dependent variable without controlling for it (Patidar, 2013). In this research, the barriers to business growth were described,

along with their regression with business growth.

Research Locale. This study was conducted in two selected first-class municipalities in Davao de Oro, Philippines: the Nabunturan and Monkayo Districts, which had a total of 1,487 registered MSMEs as of September 2020, according to the Department of Trade and Industry-Davao de Oro Provincial. According to the Cities and Municipalities Competitive Index, the Municipality of Monkayo ranked 225th in economic dynamism. It ranked 65th in local economy growth and 75th for active establishments in the locality. Moreover, the Municipality of Nabunturan ranked 80th for economic dynamism. It ranked 61st for local economy growth and 90th for active establishments in the locality. This was an ideal location for the study since it was one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Davao de Oro; Nabunturan was the capital, and Monkayo was the largest municipality.

Sampling and Respondents of the Study. The researcher surveyed 150 selected executives of micro-retail enterprises. The stratified random sampling was used. The first stratum was in Nabunturan, and the second stratum was from Monkayo. The respondents included owners and supervisors from the first-class municipalities in the Province of Davao De Oro. They have been engaged in the business of selling basic commodities to said municipalities for at least 2 years. The identified micro-retailers were required to have a monthly income between 20,000 and 100,000. However, these respondents could withdraw at any time if they felt threatened by the study's conduct.

Research Instruments. The researcher used survey questionnaires that were significantly modified for the Philippine context. The first tool is from the study by Louise and Macamo (2011), titled "Barriers to business growth: A study on small enterprises in Maputo." The tool yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients above .70. The questionnaire contained 35 statements, divided into three parts. The first part presented the respondents' demographic characteristics, while the succeeding parts contained the independent and dependent variables, along with their corresponding indicators. The second part for business growth has four indicators, including employment growth, sales growth, sales growth compared to competitors, and value growth compared to competitors, with eight statements. The third part it comprised twelve statements with five indicators: financial barriers, organizational barriers, external barriers, social barriers, and legal and institutional barriers.

Data Gathering Procedure. The researcher sent a letter to ask permission from the respective offices of the different micro retail enterprises. Once approved by the officers-in-charge of the different micro-retail enterprises, the researcher sought the HR department's help in administering the survey questionnaire face-to-face to the prospective respondents. The survey questionnaire was provided by the researcher. Furthermore, the survey questionnaire automatically relayed the results once respondents submitted them. The researcher also provided respondents with an orientation on the purpose of the study and explained how to proceed with the research instruments (questionnaires). Furthermore, the respondents were encouraged to answer honestly, without bias, by not leaving any item unanswered. The selected respondents were given the option to participate without any consequences, penalties, or loss of benefits. The research questionnaire was administered with respondents' consent. Each respondent was expected to complete the given questionnaire in approximately 5 to 10 minutes. Additionally, the survey lasted a month.

Statistical Tools. Mean. This tool was used to describe the level of barriers and the level of business growth. Standard Deviation. This instrument measured the consistency of respondents' responses. Pearson R. This technique was used to find the relationship between barriers and business growth of micro retail enterprises. Regression. This statistical tool was used to determine which barriers to business growth significantly influenced the growth of micro retail enterprises.

Ethical Statement

The University of Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee (UIC-REC) thoroughly reviewed the study's ethical aspects from the perspective of the ten dimensions of research ethics: social value, informed consent, vulnerability issues, risk-benefit ratio, privacy and confidentiality of information, justice, transparency, researcher qualification, adequate facilities, and community involvement. To improve organizational commitment among micro retail enterprises, the researcher also worked with managers and supervisors during the study to select respondents and collect data. The researcher also ensured that the community and other interested parties would benefit greatly from the study by disseminating its findings to enhance stakeholder engagement.

RESULTS

The data in Table 1 is the level of business growth of Micro Retail Enterprises as perceived by the owners and supervisors. It can be inferred that the overall mean business growth for micro retail enterprises is 3.11, which is average. This result generally indicates a decline in business growth in 2023 compared to 2022, with employment growth, sales growth, sales growth compared to competitors, and value growth compared to competitors being moderately evident.

Table 1

Level of Business Growth of Micro Retail Enterprises

Indicators/Statements	Mean	SD	Description
1.1 Employment Growth			
Having a lower number of employees compared to last year	2.97	1.34	Average
1.2 Sales Growth			
Having declining sales this year as compared to last year	3.20	1.10	Average
1.3 Sales Growth Compared to Competitors			
Having relatively lower sales compared to competitors	3.32	1.00	Average
1.4 Value Growth Compared to Competitors			
Believing that one's market value is relatively lower as compared to direct competitors	2.94	0.93	Average
Overall Mean	3.11	0.59	Average
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The standard deviation (SD) ranges from 0.93 to 1.34. Sales growth and value growth elicited heterogeneous responses, while employment growth and sales growth received homogeneous responses. Notably, among the indicators of business growth, the sales growth in relation to their competitors obtained the highest mean score of 3.32 (average). The decrease in sales could be attributed to modifications in customers' behaviors, adverse economic situations, adjustments in market demands, or internal difficulties such as poor product quality and inadequate sales tactics. While the value growth relative to its competitors was rated lower at 2.94, although still described as average. This suggests that the firm is not growing in value as well as its competitors, which makes it less appealing to investors and causes a decline in market share. These probable causes of the decline align with the PSA (2023) data, which show that other enterprises faced challenges such as supply chain disruptions and shifts in consumer preferences, leading to stagnation or decline.

Table 2

Level of Barriers to Business Growth

Indicators/Statements	Mean	SD	Description
2.1 Financial Barriers			

1. Having difficulty accessing financial sources for additional capital	4.16	0.92	High
2. Having difficulty maintaining the desired profit	3.24	1.08	Average
3. Having financial institution/bank offering a high-interest rate	3.92	1.00	High
4. Having no enough funds for additional investment	2.94	1.18	Average
Category Mean	3.57		High

2.2 Organizational Barriers

5. Having some problems recruiting employees	3.25	1.20	Average
6. Having some positions in company that are particularly hard to fill.	3.04	1.24	Average
7. Having hard time to develop the entrepreneurial skills	3.18	1.13	Average
8. Having hard time to develop a management team capable of handling growth in the coming years.	2.83	1.06	Average
9. Having a current workforce that does not possess the necessary skills and knowledge to handle growth and create strategies to make growth successful.	2.95	1.28	Average
Category Mean	3.05		Average

2.3 External Barriers

10. Having encountered an increase in competition in the industry.	4.08	1.01	High
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11. Having difficulties in finding the right supplier.	3.09	1.00	Average
12. Having experience low demand for the goods to sell	3.30	1.23	Average
13. Having difficulties in processing the renewal of business permit at the beginning of the year.	2.63	1.16	Average
14. Having difficulties with the business policy implemented by the municipal business bureau.	2.98	1.29	Average
Category Mean	3.22		Average

2.4 Social Barriers

15. Not finding a business association that could support the business.	3.35	1.19	Average
16. Having no trust with fellow business owners to share ideas or ask for help.	3.11	1.40	Average
17. Having some problems communicating and networking with other businesses.	2.80	1.11	Average
18. Having experienced practices of unfair business competition from the competitors such as dishonesty as a selling tactic, theft of trade secrets, trade libel, and false representation of products or goods.	3.13	1.36	Average
Category Mean	3.10		Average

2.5 Legal/Institutional Barriers

19. Having Government laws, rules, and regulations are	2.66	1.21	Average
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complex and hinder business growth			
20. Having Government taxation not favorable to business.	3.08	1.17	Average
21. Having Government legal regulations are discriminatory to business.	2.59	1.14	Low
22. Having the lack of awareness regarding government small enterprise programs serves as a significant barrier to business growth and development.	2.89	1.25	Average
23. Having find the government support to be insufficient in terms in terms of creating opportunities and motivation.	2.70	1.21	Average
24. Having government that has not done its best in promoting good conditions for small enterprises' growth	2.91	1.06	Average
Category Mean	2.81		Average
Overall Mean	3.22		Average

The data in Table 2 refers to the level of barriers to business growth of micro retail enterprises. It shows that the overall mean is 3.22, which is considered average, indicating that the financial, organizational, external, legal, and institutional factors are moderately able to hinder business growth. It conveys that the executives of micro retail enterprises agreed that unfavorable conditions in these areas would hinder business growth. The SDs ranged from 0.92 to 1.40, with the majority exceeding 1. This indicates heterogeneity in respondents' experiences, suggesting that different businesses face varying degrees of challenge.

Financial Barriers. The first indicator pertains to financial barriers and yielded the highest category mean of 3.57 (high), indicating that they typically lack access to traditional financing options such as bank loans due to their small

scale and limited collateral. This makes it difficult for them to invest in inventory, expand their businesses, or even cover day-to-day expenses. Notably, item 1 on difficulty accessing financial sources for additional capital has the highest category mean of 4.16 (high). It suggests that respondents have struggled to obtain funds from financial institutions. It could be due to a lack of collateral and insufficient financial information. On the other hand, item 4 pertaining to the insufficiency of funds for additional investment received the lowest mean score of 2.98 (moderate). This suggests that while the lack of funds for investment is a concern, it is not perceived as critically as the difficulty in accessing financial sources. The relatively lower score indicates that businesses may find other ways to manage their investments despite the financial constraints.

Organizational Barriers. The second indicator, organizational barriers, generated the category mean of 3.05, which is described as average. It indicates that the respondents recognize that human-resource-related issues in recruitment, hiring, and skill development at both managerial and staff levels deter business growth. This average effect affirms Price's (2023) conclusion that human resources are an essential driver of the growth and competitiveness of any organization. Hence, for him, investing in human resources is not a cost but an avenue for a business to thrive and grow.

External Barriers. The third indicator — external barriers — obtained an average category mean of 3.22 (moderately manifested). It indicates that respondents acknowledge that struggles with suppliers and the processing of business permits, as well as growing competition and declining demand, deter business growth. Notably, statement 10, having encountered an increase in industry competition, has the highest mean score of 4.08 (high), indicating that intensified competition is a significant external barrier for the businesses surveyed. Also, having difficulties in processing the renewal of business permits at the beginning of the year received the lowest mean score of 2.63 (average).

Social Barriers. The fourth indicator had an average category mean of 3.10, indicating a fair level of ability to impede business growth. It indicates that the respondents face challenges in building and leveraging social networks, accessing professional networks, finding mentors, and facing unfair business competition.

Legal/Institutional Barriers. The fifth indicator regarding the legal/institutional barriers yielded the lowest category mean of 2.81 (average),

denoting that these factors' ability to impede business growth is fairly manifested. It means that the respondents find complex and discriminatory government regulations (taxation), a lack of awareness of government enterprise programs, and the government's inefficiency in promoting good conditions for small enterprises to be deterrents to business growth. Conspicuously, item 20, having Government taxation not favorable to business growth, obtained the highest mean score of 3.08. It suggests that respondents consider the Philippine government's taxation system to be complex, which poses disadvantages for businessmen. And the statement that government legal regulations are discriminatory to business received the lowest mean score of 2.59 (low).

Table 3

Correlation Between Variables

Variables Correlated with Business Growth	r	p	Remarks
Financial Barriers	.347	.000	Significant
Organizational Barriers	.410	.000	Significant
External Barriers	.421	.000	Significant
Social Barriers	.459	.000	Significant
Legal/Institutional Barriers	.384	.000	Significant

The results of the correlation analysis are shown in Table 3. The data show that financial barriers, organizational barriers, external barriers, social barriers, and legal/institutional barriers significantly correlate with business growth ($p < .05$). This means that when any of these factors is experienced, the growth of micro retail enterprises is hampered. Also, the World Bank Organization survey results revealed obstacles to micro retail business growth,

including a lack of access to external financing. Finally, Owen et al. (2016) emphasized that ineffective government regulations and competition between comparable businesses all act as hindrances to SME growth.

Table 4

Significant Barriers to Business Growth

Variables	B	p	t	Remarks
Financial Barriers	.174	.003	3.000	Significant
Organizational Barriers	.289	.000	5.418	Significant
External Barriers	.068	.371	.895	Not Significant
Social Barriers	.278	.000	4.380	Significant
Legal/Institutional Barriers	-.012	.879	-.164	Not Significant
$r^2 = .319$	$F=28.914$	$p=.000$		

The result of the regression analysis is presented in Table 4. It shows that among the five independent variables, financial, organizational, and social are significant barriers to business growth ($p < .05$). This suggests that external and legal/institutional barriers require the support of the other variables to influence business growth. The beta coefficients of .174, .289, and .278 indicate that a unit increase in financial, organizational, and social barriers leads to a .174, .289, and .278 decline in business growth, respectively. The combined influence of financial, organizational, external, social, and legal/institutional barriers on business growth is 31.9 percent, as reflected by an R-squared of .319. It connotes that 68.1 percent of the changes in business growth are due to other factors not covered in this study.

This significant influence of the independent variables on business growth confirms the findings of Beck et al. (2019), who found that limited access to financial resources and high interest rates significantly impede SMEs'

ability to expand and invest in their businesses. These financial barriers restrict their capacity to innovate, scale up operations, and compete effectively in the market, ultimately hindering overall business growth. In addition, Rogovsky and Rothmann (2017) investigated organizational barriers affecting SMEs' growth and found that challenges in recruiting employees and filling key positions significantly hindered business development. Furthermore, the study highlighted the difficulty SMEs face in developing entrepreneurial skills among their workforce, a crucial factor for innovation and adaptability. These organizational barriers have direct implications for business growth, as they affect SMEs' ability to expand operations and compete effectively in the market. The results of this study confirmed the Unicist theory of business growth. Indeed, the respondents agreed that if conditions are not favorable across financial, organizational, external, legal, and institutional factors, this will hamper business growth. Moreover, the regression model, which accounts for 31.9 percent of the combined influence of these factors on business growth, is a manifestation of their significant impact on the growth or failure of retail enterprises. Also, it affirms the liabilities of smallness theory, in which respondents reported difficulty competing with larger firms due to their lack of necessary resources, capabilities, and economies of scale.

Conclusion. According to the study's findings, micro-retail businesses saw a slight reduction in business in 2023, with the biggest decline in sales growth when compared to competitors. Overall, there were a few obstacles to progress, but financial ones had a significant influence. A substantial correlation was found between firm growth and financial, organizational, external, social, and legal/institutional impediments; growth was particularly hampered by financial, organizational, and social factors. These three variables explained 31.9% of the variation in business growth, indicating that the remaining 68.1% was influenced by factors not included in the analysis. The results underline the difficulties micro businesses experience in competing with larger companies because of their restricted resources and competencies, supporting the Unicist theory of company growth and the shortcomings of the smallness theory

Recommendation. Based on the findings and conclusions, several recommendations are proposed to address declining business growth. Since the respondents reported declining business growth, they may consider allocating funds to expand their market reach by establishing a strong online presence through a dedicated website and active social media profiles, using platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter to reach a wider audience.

Also, they may empower the sales team through regular training sessions and seminars, keeping them up to date on the latest sales techniques, industry trends, and product knowledge. Marketing strategies may also be revitalized in order to maintain high product quality and build a strong reputation, fostering customer loyalty and attracting a larger customer base. The respondents' struggles encountered in accessing financial resources can be addressed through policy and regulatory frameworks that promote financial inclusion. To reduce barriers, financial institutions should be encouraged to serve underserved communities, while financial literacy programs and digital infrastructure should be boosted to enhance access to financial resources. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) can enhance outreach efforts by providing targeted assistance, access to financing, and networking opportunities to support microentrepreneurs. Creating a supportive ecosystem for growth can be achieved through community initiatives such as business incubators, which foster collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

To address increasing industry competition, entrepreneurs can consider offering discounts and promotions to attract more customers. Competitive pricing, through discount offers and pricing that compares favorably with competitors, can help differentiate the brand and engage customers. Social media marketing can be utilized to reach a broader audience, boosting brand visibility and customer engagement. Furthermore, companies ought to place a high priority on giving customers the best possible shopping experience through the provision of first-rate customer service, consistent product quality, and a flawless shopping experience. In addition, in-depth market research is essential for understanding and satisfying customer needs, as well as for promoting customer loyalty. Lastly, owners and supervisors may consider conducting market research; organizations can obtain valuable insights to create more successful, targeted marketing strategies that appeal to their target demographic, thereby increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Finally, since the combined effect of the barriers to business growth is only 31.9 percent, other researchers may conduct further research to explore the other factors, equivalent to 68.1 percent, that may enhance business growth. The researchers may also consider using different research designs, such as qualitative and mixed-methods designs.

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