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Growth Determinants of Newly Created SMEs: the Case of Niger

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Abstract: ***For several years, successive governments in Niger have continued to take initiatives to promote the creation of SMEs/SMIs in order to contribute to inclusive economic growth. Thanks to the reforms adopted to simplify the business creation process, around ten thousand businesses are created within 5 years. Thus, newly created SMEs must be able to survive and develop over time, provided that the start of an activity in no way guarantees its growth. This work aims to study the determining factors of the growth of SMEs in Niger. To achieve this, a quantitative study by questionnaire was carried out among 53 SMEs established in Niamey. The results showed that the growth of SMEs can be explained by several factors classified into four categories: Factors linked to the profile of the manager such as the age and assistance of partners, factors linked to financial capital such as the structure of the capital and financial support, factors linked to environmental characteristics such as the quality of the workforce and technical assistance and finally factors linked to the characteristics of the enterprise such as the size of the enterprise and its legal status.***

Keywords: SMEs, growth determinants, Niger, linear regression

1. Introduction

Small and medium - sized enterprises (SMEs) are considered the core of today's economy. The role they play is more essential than ever for the dynamization of an economy, as they are the driving force behind job creation, economic growth and innovation. According to the World Bank (2016) [1], SMEs provide more than half of the world's formal jobs. For this reason, the institution encourages states to make business creation the central element of their economic policies. The number of businesses created in a country is a relevant indicator of economic development and social balance. However, creating a business means creating jobs and many other forms of wealth likely to boost economic growth. But to achieve these objectives, newly - created SMEs need to be able to survive and grow over time. Provided, that is, that the start - up of a business in no way guarantees its longevity, due to a number of obstacles it may face, likely to hinder its normal growth. SME growth is one of the key development levers on which African countries must act (World Bank, 2006; Rivard, 2014). Research into the situation of newly - created small businesses all agree that they have difficulty getting through the introductory phase (the first phase of the business life cycle). Indeed, research by Mignon (2013) has shown that fewer than two out of three companies fail to celebrate their third anniversary, and only half survive beyond five years. According to Adcorp (2014), the mortality rate for small businesses in African countries remains very high, with five out of seven new businesses failing in their first year. Another study carried out in six African countries (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia) comes to the same conclusion (Mayegle & Ngo Omam, 2015). The difficulties encountered by these companies are generally financial, organizational and environmental. According to Aichounn's (2018) thesis, the specific determinants that underpin the growth of SMEs in Africa are access to energy; the profile of managers, investment in research and development; corporate social responsibility; the use of external skills, investment in infrastructure and indirect taxes and levies. The study by Boubakary et al (2017) shows that the desire for independence, self - confidence and emotional stability exert a significant influence on company growth, unlike the need for achievement and the predisposition to take risks, which have no significant influence on growth.

To our knowledge, no study has been carried out in Niger to determine the growth factors of newly - created SMEs. This is why this research question, frequently encountered in the literature, deserves to be revisited in the Niger context. **What are the determinants of SME growth in Niger**?

This work aims to determine the growth factors of new businesses created in Niger. According to the Niger Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIN), 21, 000 new businesses were created between 2014 and 2018. The work focuses on businesses created during this period, in order to understand their future. To measure growth, we are interested only in companies that have been in existence for at least five years. Company growth is generally measured by the evolution of several indicators, such as sales, number of employees and number of branches (Hoxha et al, 2010). In this study, the main focus is on the evolution of sales to measure company growth.

To achieve this objective, we have structured the work as follows: the first part presents a review of the literature on company growth factors. We then present the methodological approach adopted in the second part, before presenting and discussing the results we arrived at in the third part.

[1] World Bank (2016), Small businesses boost economic growth and create jobs

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2. Company Growth Factors: A Literature Review

Previous studies on the success factors of business creation have led to the hypothesis that three variables influence the growth of newly - created businesses: the human and social capital of the creator, the preparation for creation and the structural characteristics of the business at start - up (Lasch, Le Roy, & Yami, 2005). This hypothesis was tested on a sample of 500 companies, and the results showed that these three variables are generally at the root of the failure and/or success of newly - created businesses. Other, more recent results have shown that the growth of new businesses can only be apprehended from a multidimensional perspective, and argue for the adoption of a comprehensive theoretical model incorporating explanatory variables of various types (Sidrat & Boujelbene, 2017). The variables most commonly used to explain the growth of newly - established companies will be discussed below:

2.1. The manager's profile

Entrepreneurs play a central role in the success of their businesses. The company's growth is undoubtedly conditioned by its human, managerial and professional qualities. As Sammut (1996) points out, "the firm's growth depends on the manager's strategic awareness. Just as the human being is constantly changing as a result of his own functioning, the company he leads is also in a state of perpetual transformation". Several variables are used to explain the impact of the manager's profile on the company's survival and growth. These variables are classified into several categories (Lasch, Le Roy, & Yami, 2005).

2.1.1. Manager's share capital

Social capital has been the subject of several scientific debates since the last decade of the XX^{e} century. Authors interested in this conceptual have proposed multiple definitions (Mayegle & Ngo Omam, 2015). The central idea of all these definitions can be summed up in two expressions: contributions and social relations. According to Bordieu (1980), social capital is defined as "the set of actual or potential resources that are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relations of interconnaissance, or in other words, to belonging to a group, as a set of agents not only endowed with common properties (likely to be perceived by the observer, by others or by themselves), but also united by permanent and useful liaisons". Today, it is considered an important asset to protect, as it can create significant value for the company.

Clearly, a company is generally an inter - relational organization. However, its success depends on the degree to which it relates to the outside world, in particular customers, suppliers, administrative guarantors, etc. (Denieuil 1992). This relationship is nurtured by the trust and reputation built up and maintained over time by the manager in relation to his partners. This is why Putnam (2021), who spoke of the need for social relations and a high level of trust in cooperation, considers social capital as "the trust, network structures and norms that foster cooperation between actors within a society for their mutual benefit". Burt (1997), has developed the idea that the manager must be able to provide his company with at least three types of resources. These are financial, human and social resources. Anderson, Jack, & Drakopoulou, (2006) specify that social capital is not a resource in itself, but it does facilitate access to other external resources. In this sense, we can predict that social capital has a positive influence on a company's growth. This is especially true of start - ups, which increasingly need additional resources of all kinds to get through the introductory phase, the most difficult phase in their life cycle.

A recent study in Niger showed that, in a crisis situation, the managers of very small businesses first call on people who can help them overcome the threats as a matter of urgency. Then, they mobilize the people who enable them to introduce new practices or changes based on the lessons learned from the crisis. But a manager's ability to mobilize these relational networks in times of crisis is strongly influenced by his or her level of training, ethnicity, gender and the sector of activity in which he or she operates. The resources provided by those solicited generally concern emergency information, financial resources and administrative facilities (Adama Tahirou, Moctar Naba, & Ouma, 2019).

2.1.2. The manager's cognitive abilities

The leader's cognitive abilities are reinforced by his professional experience and the formal education he has received (Ouazzani & Barakat, 2018). They defined this education as all the knowledge acquired through a school curriculum and other training courses taken, which endow the entrepreneur with explicit knowledge. It is only natural to expect that the level of education of the manager will significantly promote the development of the company. A higher level of education can enable the manager to acquire technical skills that make it easier to run the business (Sidrat & Boujelbene, 2017). Several studies have confirmed that the manager's level of education has a positive and significant impact on business success (Cooper et al., 1994, Cressy 1996 and Papadaki & Chami, 2002). It is assumed that a manager's high level of education improves the quality of the decisions he or she will have to make. Montgomery et al (2005) see the underlying rationale for growth as resting on the central assumption that education improves people's skills and abilities. Ouazzani and Barakat (2018) assume that a well - educated leader will be better able to assess opportune circumstances and make profitable investments. Some authors go so far as to point to a link between the manager's level of education and staff recruitment. For example, Sine et al (2004) consider that education facilitates access to knowledge and capital, as well as the recruitment of qualified personnel.

However, the entrepreneur's professional experience, seen as the body of knowledge accumulated over the years, can also influence the company's growth. Usually, it is assumed that an experienced entrepreneur has experienced several failures in the course of his or her career, and every past failure is a learning experience. Experience provides an opportunity to hone entrepreneurial skills and make optimal decisions (Ucbasarana et al.2010 & McGrath 1999). Indeed, a manager's experience represents the bedrock on which he or

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she will build the foundations and orientations of his or her new venture (Cabrol & Frédéric, 2011).

A number of studies have examined the influence of the entrepreneur's cognitive abilities on business success. The table below summarizes these studies.

Table 1: Relationship between cognitive ability and the survival and performance of start - up SMEs

Element	Author (s) /year	Observation
Formal education	El Agy and Bellihi (2013); Fabre et Kerjosse (2006); Teurlai (2004); Garnier et al (1991); Cooper et al (1988)	Education plays a role in the longevity of a company. The chances of making it through to the third or fifth year are all the greater. The degree obtained by the company director is high. The specialization of studies in relation to the company's activity reinforces the chances of survival.
Informal education and experience	El Agy and Bellihi (2013); Bornard and Fonrouge (2012); Fabre and Kerjosse (2006); Lasch et al. (2005); Teurlai (2004); Cooper et al (1994); Cooper et al (1988).	The entrepreneur's lack of experience is a handicapping factor in the quest for survival. Start - ups. Conversely, all other things being equal, start - ups created by by older entrepreneurs are more likely to succeed. Age can be interpreted as an indicator of human capital indicator reflecting the entrepreneur's experience and "assets" (the sum of the tacit knowledge)

Source: Ouazzani and Barakat (2018)

2.2. Characteristics of the environment and the company

The environment in which a company operates naturally influences its development. Any young company located in a dense, affluent environment where purchasing power is appreciable and administrative procedures are flexible will have every chance of surviving and developing (Sahar, 2017). This development would be even faster, if the environment is characterized by a critical mass of skilled labor. According to the theory of organizational ecology, developed by Hannan and Freeman (1977), the environment naturally selects the companies that will survive and develop within it and those that will die, hence the process of natural selection. In other words, the company cannot rely solely on its own luck to succeed. Under these conditions, the entrepreneur will not succeed in developing his business, even if he has the resources and skills to do so (Ouazzani & Barakat, 2018). The reasons for these constraints can be multidimensional. They include tax policy, administrative bureaucracy, market regulation, unfair competition, intellectual property protection or weak start - up support for new businesses. They can also have an impact on access to resources, such as skilled labor, raw materials, distribution networks or information (Khelil, Smida, & Zouaoui, 2012). In such conditions, the newly - established company must adopt strategies that will enable it to propose adaptable organizational structures in order to meet the demands of the environment.

A number of studies have confirmed that the characteristics of the environment in which start - ups are located play a key role in their development. The ability of the environment to offer the companies located there a dense, resource - rich economy (particularly cognitive or financial), likely to generate significant urbanization economies, has a positive influence on their existence (Moati, Mazars, & Pouquet, 2006). Nevertheless, other results indicate that the influence of the environment on the success of companies may lie more in the local institutional context than in economic variables stricto sensu (Perraud, Moati, & Couvert, 2000). Nevertheless, these same results show that the influence of environmental characteristics on business growth is not as strong as that of characteristics linked to the entrepreneur's profile and the preparation of the start - up.

Studies also show that a company's own characteristics play a key role in explaining its growth. Indeed, company size is the factor most frequently cited in the literature. Most authors show a positive link between growth and company size (Kalleberg & Leicht, 1991). The age of the company is also cited by other authors as a factor determining SME growth (Harabi, 2007; Janssen, 2011).

2.3. Preparing for creation

Studies that have looked at this factor have presented ambiguous results, but most assume that start - up preparation increases the chance of success (Lasch, Le Roy, & Said). There are many variables linked to start - up preparation that can influence company growth. The most important are: the existence of a business plan, training, feasibility studies, market research, etc.

Indeed, entrepreneurial coaching seems to be the most important determinant, not only for the creation of the company, but also for the continuation of its activities. Coaching mechanisms have spread all over the world, especially in Africa, where young businesses have difficulty surviving for long periods. In Niger, the entrepreneurial support offered by technical and financial partners, both foreign and local, plays an undeniable role in promoting entrepreneurship. These are training, awareness - raising, assistance and follow - up schemes enabling young entrepreneurs to acquire the skills needed to launch and develop their businesses (Adama Tahirou, Moctar, & Maman Moustapha, 2017). These same authors justified the failure of thousands of young businesses in Niger by the weakness of their relational capital, the lack of experience, skills or entrepreneurial knowledge, the problem of access to credit and the poor quality of business plans. These technical, financial and relational difficulties can only be remedied by strengthening entrepreneurial and managerial capacities. This is why, since 2012, the relevant authorities and international institutions have set up technical and financial support structures to assist and support entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial activities.

The main aim of these commitments is to boost the growth rate of new businesses. Support schemes must be able to provide adequate assistance to entrepreneurs to overcome the difficulties of the post - incubation phase (Lai and Lin, 2015).

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Several studies have been conducted to measure the effects of entrepreneurial coaching on company growth (Schwartz, 2009, 2011; Mas Verdu et al.2015). The results of Mas Verdu et al. (2015) indeed demonstrated a positive and significant impact of coaching on the success of start - ups, but in combination with other variables such as size at inception and innovation intensity. In his conclusion, Taher Gheryaani (2017) pointed out that business survival is the result of several variables. But one of the most important is entrepreneurial support. The use of support has a positive effect on the survival of new businesses, especially through the personalized advice provided by support staff. But for him, this is not a sufficient condition: the personal characteristics of entrepreneurs and the specific features of their projects are also decisive for business growth.

At the same time, the structures in charge of providing support must have the necessary expertise and experience to offer suitable and relevant assistance to entrepreneurs in all areas (technical, financial, marketing. . .), otherwise support remains ineffective (Taher Gheryaani, 2017).

2.4. Financial capital

Given the vital role played by SMEs in a country's economic development, financing their activities is becoming a major concern for their managers and political authorities, in both developing and developed countries (Belletante and Levratto 2003). First and foremost, we know that throughout its life, a company will necessarily need adequate financial resources to enable it to respond to environmental turbulence and make investments to sustain its growth. These resources may come from the capital invested at start - up, or from debts contracted with credit institutions. Unfortunately, limited access to financing is one of the main difficulties facing SMEs (Berrah & Boukrif, 2018).

Previous studies show that the amount of capital invested at start - up can explain a company's success (Cooper, Gimeno - Gascon, & Woo 1994; Béziau & Bignon 2017; Fabre & Kerjosse 2006). The larger this amount, the longer the company is likely to survive. Sahar's study (2017) concludes that the capital invested at start - up is one of the two most important determinants (start - up financial capital and social capital) for business survival. However, the study by Trovato et al. (2002) states that lack of capital limits the probability of survival as well as the rate of growth.

However, once it has launched its activities, the new company will need additional resources, especially of a financial nature, to support its growth. The constraints on access to finance that new businesses face today are a key determinant of their growth. The study by Bellone et al (2010) shows that a company that has easier access to financing will be more resilient than others. One of the hypotheses tested in this study confirms the idea that a company's financial health is correlated with its productive efficiency. In such a situation, public development aid for SMEs that have difficulty gaining access to financing is encouraging. It enables them to overcome barriers to development (Bellone, Musso, Lionel, & Stefano, 2010).

3. Research Methodology

For this study, we opted for a hypothetico - deductive approach based on a quantitative questionnaire survey of SME managers who had been in business for at least five years. The aim was to determine the factors behind their growth. We will exclude any company that has not been in business for at least five years, so as to be able to assess growth, which is measured by changes in sales. According to Mountassif and Larhrissi (2019), sales are the indicator that best explains a company's growth, compared with other indicators such as profit or headcount. The target population consists of all businesses created between 2014 - 2018 at the Niamey formality center. The sample size was determined using a non - probability method (convenience), with 53 companies surveyed in the period from September to November 2023.

The mode of administration adopted was the face - to - face interview, which enabled us to obtain the maximum amount of information from the respondent. The survey took place only in Niamey, which accounts for 82.72% of businesses created in Niger. Data processing was carried out using SPSS software. Several types of analysis were carried out. First, a descriptive analysis to understand the characteristics of our sample, and a regression analysis to assess the influence of independent variables on growth (dependent variable).

4. Presentation and discussion of results

This section is devoted to presenting and discussing the results of our empirical study. We begin with a descriptive analysis of the characteristics of our sample, followed by an analysis of the linear regression models used to identify the factors determining SME growth in Niger.

4.1. Descriptive data analysis

Tables 3 and 4 provide information respectively on the characteristics of the companies and owner - managers in our selected sample of 53 SMEs. Table 3 shows that, of the 53 SMEs surveyed, 44 (83.02%) have at least 5 employees, 75.47% of these companies started their activities with an initial capital of less than one million euros, 58.4% of these companies believe that their staff are qualified or highly qualified for the work, and the overwhelming majority (86.79%) state that their sales have increased or fluctuated over the last five (5) years

Table 2: Characteristics of companies in the sample

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Number of employees			
- 1 à 5	44	83, 02	83, 02
- 6 à 10	5	9, 43	92, 45
- 11 à 15	3	5, 66	98, 11
- 16 à 20	1	1, 89	100, 00
- 20 to more	0	0, 00	**100, 00**
Total	**53**	**100, 00**	
Initial capital size			
- Less than $300, 000	21	39, 62	39, 62
- 300.000 à 1.000.000	19	35, 85	75, 47

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- 1.000.000 à 5.000.000	9	16, 98	92, 45
- Over 5, 000, 000	4	7, 55	**100, 00**
Total	**53**	**100, 00**	
Quality of workmanship			
- Not qualified	22	41, 51	41, 51
- Qualified	26	49, 06	90, 57
- Highly qualified	5	9, 43	**100, 00**
Total	**53**	**100, 00**	
Sales trend			
- Growth	17	32, 07	32, 07
- Fluctuation	29	54, 72	86, 79
- Stagnation	7	13, 21	**100, 00**
Total	**53**	**100, 00**	

Source: SPSS results

With regard to the characteristics of owner - managers (Table 4), the results of the analysis show that the vast majority of businesses (92.45%) were created by men, and 69.81% of owner - managers were under 35 years of age. These results also show that 56.60% of these entrepreneurs have a level of education of at least BAC + 2, 43.40% received training support during the creation of their businesses, and a single person holds the majority of the capital in 84.91% of the businesses surveyed.

Table 3: Characteristics of the company's owner – manager

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Gender			
- Male	49	92, 45	92, 45
- Female	4	7, 55	**100, 00**
Total	**53**	**100, 00**	
Age			
- Under 25	16	30, 19	30, 19
- 25 to 34 years old	21	39, 62	69, 81
- 35 to 44 years	15	28, 30	98, 11
- 45 to 54 years	1	1, 89	**100, 00**
Total	**53**	**100, 00**	
Education level			
- No level	2	3, 77	3, 77
- Primary	7	13, 21	16, 98
- Secondary	14	26, 42	43, 40
- Superior	30	56, 60	**100, 00**
Total	**53**	**100, 00**	
Creation training support			
- Yes	23	43, 40	43, 40
- No	30	56, 60	**100, 00**
Total	**53**	**100, 00**	
Majority shareholding by one person			
- Yes	45	84, 91	84, 91
- No	8	15, 09	**100, 00**
Total	**53**	**100, 00**	

Source: SPSS results

4.2. Linear regression analysis

In this section, we relate the various explanatory factors mentioned in the literature review to SME growth. For the purposes of this study, we agree with Gueguen, Janssen and Giacomin (2015) that SME growth is measured by changes in sales. Sales remain the variable that best explains company growth, alongside headcount, whose evolution is merely the consequence of that of sales (Janssen 2004).

The factors that explain SME growth can be grouped into several categories: Factors related to company characteristics, managerial profile, environmental characteristics and financial capital. To analyze the link between these different variables and SME growth, we used multiple linear regression analysis. The results show that the model is globally significant at the 5% level. The different variables included in the model explain the evolution of sales.

Table 4: Overall model characteristics

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of squares	ddl	Medium square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	114, 531	5	22, 906	158, 582	**, 000**[b]
	Residues	21, 233	147	, 144		
	Total	135, 765	152			

Overview of models				
Model	R	R - two	R - two adjusted	Standard error of the estimate
1	, 918[a]	**, 844**	**, 838**	, 380
Source: our data				

Source: SPSS results

The adjusted R^2 of the estimate is 83%. This means that the model's explanatory variables explain around 84% of the variability in SME growth. We can therefore conclude that the model is well fitted.

Table 5 identifies nine variables that are significant at the 5% level.

- Two variables linked to company characteristics: company size and legal status;
- Three variables linked to the manager's profile: age, assistance from partners, and level of education;
- Two financial capital variables: capital structure and financial backing,
- Two variables linked to the characteristics of the environment: technical assistance and the quality of the workforce.

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Table 5: Model estimation

Model		B	Standard deviation	t	Sig.
Characteristics of the company	Legal status	, 178	, 089	1, 999	**, 041**
	Company size (number of employees)	- , 077	, 033	- 2, 320	**, 025**
	Business sector (s)	, 007	, 020	, 355	, 724
Manager profile	Age	, 264	, 040	6, 545	**, 000**
	Training area	, 004	, 012	, 316	, 752
	Technical and/or vocational training	, 100	, 107	, 931	, 353
	Partner support	, 215	, 082	2, 622	**, 010**
	Education level	, 126	, 019	6, 613	**, 000**
Financial capital	Ownership structure	, 360	, 083	4, 318	**, 000**
	Capital size	- , 057	, 061	- , 932	, 353
	Source of capital	, 051	, 026	1, 929	, 136
	Financial support	, 457	, 127	3, 590	**, 000**
Environmental features	Business plan	, 258	, 125	2, 073	, 240
	Technical assistance	, 583	, 162	3, 587	**, 000**
	Customer type	, 005	, 015	, 351	, 726
	Workforce quality	, 305	, 074	4, 117	**, 000**

Source: SPSS results

Indeed, the results of our study show that the growth of SMEs in Niger can be linked to their own characteristics. The two variables linked to company characteristics that determine growth are company size and legal status. This study shows a negative relationship between company size and growth. This relationship confirms the results of several previous studies (Delmar, 1997; Dunkelberg and Cooper, 1982). The results also show that company growth depends on the company's legal status. This had a significant impact on SME growth in Niger. This link has already been demonstrated by some authors in the past. Indeed, American and British studies have shown that companies that have opted for a limited liability form of company grow faster than other forms of firm (Storey, 1994b; Kalleberg and Leicht, 1991).

According to several authors, the leader's profile is the most decisive factor in SME growth (Herron and Robinson, 1993). The characteristics of the entrepreneur - manager remain the main explanatory factors in the emergence of a new business (Gueguen, 2010). However, our survey revealed that three variables linked to the profile of the manager influence the growth of SMEs in Niger. These variables are linked in particular to the entrepreneur's cognitive capital (level of education) and social capital (partner support and age). Thus, the level of education of the entrepreneur - manager emerged in this study as a determining factor in the growth of SMEs in Niger. This result is perfectly in line with those of numerous studies showing that the educational level of the manager has a positive and significant impact on the survival and growth of the company (Sidrat & Boujelbene, 2017; Cooper et al, 1994, Cressy 1996 and Papadaki & Chami, 2002). It also emerges that the assistance of social partners is significant to SME growth. This result confirms the thesis of Adama Tahirou et al (2019) that the resources provided by those solicited (relatives, customers, etc. . .) strengthen the resilience of small businesses in Niger.

Financial capital is generally regarded as a lever for business growth Teurlai (200). The literature review highlighted several variables linked to financial capital that are likely to influence SME growth. Of these variables, only ownership structure and financial support are significant at the 5% level. This result corroborates those of Bellone et al. (2010). They demonstrated that companies with easier access to financing are more resilient than others. Ownership structure can also be seen as a key determinant of company growth. Jensen and Meckling (1976) assert that capital ownership by the manager leads the latter to concentrate on maximizing the company's value, and to avoid any attitude likely to hinder growth. It also increases opportunities by reducing the agency conflict Fama and Jensen (1983).

Among the environment - related variables mentioned in the literature review, two are significant at the 5% level. These are the quality of the workforce and the technical assistance offered by consulting and training establishments. Indeed, the quality of the workforce available to the company from the environment has a significant influence on the growth of SMEs in Niger. In addition, it was found that the technical assistance provided to SMEs by consulting firms is a key factor in determining SME growth. These results are in line with population ecology theory (Hannan and Freeman, 1977), which maintains that the conditions present in the firm's exogenous environment are the main determinants of its survival and growth. According to Starbuck (1976), a generous environment is theoretically conducive to business growth.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this research is to determine the growth factors of new businesses created in Niger. To achieve this, we opted for a hypothetico - deductive approach based on a quantitative questionnaire survey of 53 SME managers who had been in business for at least five years. Two types of analysis were carried out on the data collected: a descriptive analysis to understand the characteristics of our sample, and an analysis using a linear regression model that enabled us to assess the influence of different factors on SME growth. The results of this study enabled us to highlight a positive and significant effect of legal status, promoter age, partner assistance, promoter education level, capital structure, financial support, technical assistance and workforce quality on the growth of newly - created SMEs, and a negative and significant effect of the number of employees on SME growth. We therefore conclude that the growth of newly -

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created SMEs can be linked to the characteristics of the company itself, the profile of its manager, financial capital and the characteristics of its environment.

From a managerial point of view, this work could serve as an enlightenment for many SME managers. Owner - managers need to be more dynamic and aggressive in their partnerships. Particular attention must also be paid to workforce qualification.

Like any scientific work, this study is not without its limitations. The first is the modest size of our sample (53 companies) in relation to the size of the population. In addition, the survey only covered companies located in the urban center of Niamey. However, the sample could be expanded to include other regions of the country where there is a high concentration of SMEs, as part of a future study.

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