



LEARNING ORIENTATION AND PERFORMANCE IN MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES: A PRISMA-BASED SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract: Learning orientation has emerged as a strategic organisational capability for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), yet the literature remains fragmented with limited systematic understanding of its core dimensions and contextual influences. This study conducts a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review of 34 peer-reviewed articles from the Scopus database, covering the period from 2015 to 2025. Thematic synthesis of literature identifies eleven categories, spanning learning orientation as a direct performance driver, an innovation enabler, an entrepreneurial orientation mediator, an export capability, a sustainability-oriented construct and a resilience mechanism. Grounded in the Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities Theory, the findings establish learning orientation as a multidimensional construct. Future research should prioritise longitudinal designs, underrepresented regional contexts and the intersection of learning orientation with digital transformation and green innovation in MSMEs.

Keywords: Learning Orientation, Micro Small and Medium Enterprises, SMEs, Competitive Advantage, Dynamic Capability

Introduction

In the digital era, with the rapid technological change, market uncertainty and intensifying competitive pressure have fundamentally altered the business

environment for micro, small and medium enterprises. MSMEs contribute significantly to employment generation, innovation, entrepreneurship, poverty reduction and inclusive economic growth (Beck et al., 2005). However, these enterprises operate under resource constraints, limited institutional support and heightened environmental uncertainty, which critically shape their learning behaviour and strategic responses (Elia et al., 2021). Within this context, learning orientation has emerged as a strategically important organisational capability, enabling MSMEs to foster innovation, strengthen adaptability and resilience and sustain long-term competitiveness.

A learning orientation further enables MSMEs to develop digital capabilities, including technology adoption, knowledge sharing, digital transformation readiness and informed strategic decision-making (Abbu & Gopalakrishna, 2019). Theoretically, learning orientation aligns with the Resource-Based View as an intangible strategic resource that generates sustainable competitive advantage and with Dynamic Capability Theory, which emphasises an organisation's ability to sense opportunities, integrate knowledge and adapt to a changing business environment (Nguyen et al., 2023). Empirical evidence consistently associates learning orientation with improved innovation performance, business growth and sustainability outcomes (Espinoza et al., 2023). There is growing interest in the literature on learning orientation in MSMEs, yet it remains fragmented, with limited understanding of its core dimensions and contextual influences. This study conducts a systematic literature review to identify and categorise the key dimensions of learning orientation in MSMEs.

2. Research Background

This section discusses the key concepts of our study, namely learning orientation and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

2.1. Learning Orientations

Learning orientation is a fundamental dimension of strategic orientation, reflecting an organisation's values, attitudes and practices that support knowledge creation, continuous learning and organisational adaptation (Calantone et al., 2002). Grounded in the Resource-Based View, learning orientation constitutes an intangible strategic resource that is difficult to imitate, enabling firms to generate sustainable competitive advantage through superior knowledge acquisition and application (Gong et al., 2009). In the context of MSMEs, learning orientation serves

as a business-level capability that facilitates innovation, operational adaptability and informed strategic decision-making (Sawaeen & Ali, 2019). Furthermore, it supports the development of digital capabilities, including technology adoption, digital transformation readiness and knowledge sharing, which are increasingly essential for MSME competitiveness in dynamic markets (Arraya, 2022). Collectively, these attributes position learning orientation as a core strategic construct that enhances MSMEs' performance and long-term sustainability.

2.2. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

Micro, small, and medium enterprises constitute a dominant socio-economic sector globally, contributing substantially to employment generation, entrepreneurship, innovation, economic growth and regional development. However, MSMEs increasingly face significant challenges, including technological disruption, market uncertainty, intensifying competition and limited financial and human resources (Merín-Rodriguez et al., 2024). In response, the adoption of digital technologies and development of digital capabilities have become essential for MSMEs to sustain growth, enhance innovation and strengthen market competitiveness (Arroyabe et al., 2024). From a strategic perspective, learning orientation offers MSMEs a valuable business-level capability that supports knowledge development, organisational adaptability, informed decision-making and continuous innovation in dynamic business environments (Karpacz & Wojcik-Karpacz, 2024). By cultivating a learning orientation, MSMEs can build a stronger competitive advantage and achieve superior performance (Isichei et al., 2023). Understanding the strategic role of learning orientation in MSMEs is important for promoting knowledge acquisition, organisational adaptability and innovation, which collectively contribute to long-term performance and sustainable growth. Accordingly, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To systematically review the literature on learning orientation in MSMEs to identify and categorise its key dimensions.
2. To identify research gaps and propose future research directions in the study of learning orientation within MSMEs.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a systematic literature review approach, reported in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021), to synthesise existing knowledge

on the relationship between learning orientation and MSMEs' performance. The review focuses on peer-reviewed studies to identify key theoretical perspectives and research gaps in this domain. The review process comprised four stages: Identification, Screening, Eligibility and Inclusion. A PRISMA 2020 flow diagram presented in Figure 1 summarises the sequential reduction of records across these four stages.

3.1. Identification of Studies

Relevant literature was identified through a systematic search of the Scopus database. Search terms were derived through a two-stage process: an initial review of the top ten highly cited articles on learning orientations and MSMEs, followed by content analysis of those articles to identify the most recurring keywords. This process yielded the following key terms: "learning orientations," "micro, small and medium enterprises," and "small and medium enterprises". The following search string was applied across title, abstract and keyword fields in Scopus: (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("learning orientations")) AND ((TITLE-ABS-KEY ("micro small and medium enterprises") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("small and medium enterprises") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("MSMEs"))).

The initial Scopus search yielded 159 records. The search results were refined through a stepwise filtering process to ensure relevance and quality. First, the search was restricted to journal articles only, excluding 19 records and resulting in 140 articles. Next, 3 non-English articles were removed. To enhance subject relevance, 12 articles classified outside the subject areas were excluded. The final subject areas considered for this review included Social Sciences, Business, Management and Accounting and Economics, Econometrics and Finance, resulting in 125 articles. Further, the publication period was restricted from 2015 to 2025 to capture the most recent and relevant literature, reducing the number of articles to 98. Finally, duplicate records and articles with insufficient data for extraction were removed, resulting in a final dataset of 96 articles for the screening stage.

3.2. Screening

Following the identification stage, 96 articles were subjected to title and abstract screening to assess their preliminary relevance to the study objectives. During this stage, 49 articles were excluded as they did not adequately align with the research focus. The primary reasons for exclusion included conceptual irrelevance and papers

focusing on only one of the core constructs. As a result, 47 articles were retained for full-text screening.

3.3. Eligibility

Following title and abstract screening, 47 articles were retrieved in full text and assessed against the predefined eligibility criteria. Articles were included if they directly addressed the core research constructs and their relationship within the study context. Articles were excluded at the full-text stage if they (a) examined

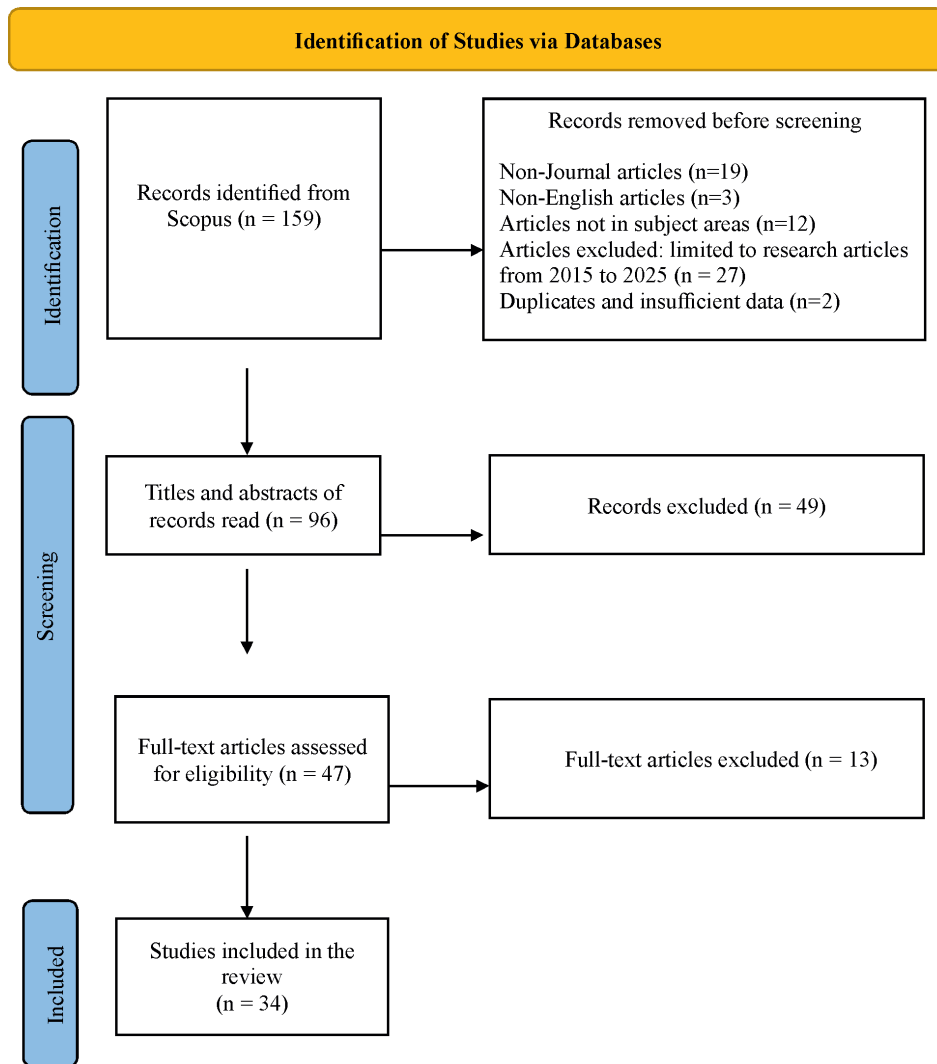


Fig. 1: Study selection, assessment and inclusion

only one of the focal constructs without analysing their relationship, (b) did not provide sufficient methodological or empirical information for reliable data extraction. Applying these criteria, 13 articles were excluded, primarily due to insufficient alignment with the research objectives, limited empirical contribution and inadequate accessibility. This process yielded 34 articles for final inclusion.

3.4. Inclusion

After screening and eligibility assessment, 34 empirical articles were retained for final inclusion. These studies met all predefined inclusion criteria and constituted the dataset for descriptive and content analysis in the subsequent sections.

4. Results

The literature review identified categories of learning orientation in MSMEs and their key dimensions, which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Identified Categories and Key Dimensions of Learning Orientation in MSMEs

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Learning Orientation Dimensions</i>	<i>Representative Studies</i>
Learning Orientation as a Driver of Organisational Performance	This theme conceptualises learning orientation as an independent strategic capability that directly and positively shapes financial, operational and overall organisational performance in MSMEs.	Commitment to learning Shared vision Open-mindedness Knowledge-based dynamic capability	Karpacz & Wojcik-Karpacz (2024); Mensah et al. (2025); Beneke et al. (2016)
Learning Orientation, Innovation and Product Development	This theme highlights learning orientation as an organisational antecedent that activates product innovation, process innovation and new product development capabilities.	Commitment to learning Shared vision Open-mindedness Intra-organisational knowledge sharing	Marrucci & Rialti (2024); Espinoza et al. (2023); Phuangrod et al. (2017)
Learning Orientation as Mediator between Entrepreneurial Orientation and Performance	This theme positions learning orientation as an intervening organisational mechanism that channels the performance effects of entrepreneurial orientation.	Commitment to learning Open-mindedness Shared vision Knowledge acquisition and dissemination	Wolff et al. (2015); Meekaewkunchorn et al. (2021); Allammari et al. (2025)

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Learning Orientation Dimensions</i>	<i>Representative Studies</i>
Learning Orientation and International/Export Performance	This theme explores learning orientation as a strategic export capability that enhances the international competitiveness of MSMEs.	Export learning orientation Commitment to learning Shared vision Open-mindedness Intra-organisational knowledge sharing	Assadinia et al. (2019); Abubakar et al. (2024); Kazemi et al. (2023)
Learning Orientation, Multiple Strategic Orientations and MSMEs' Performance	This theme examines learning orientation as one component within a broader portfolio of strategic orientations, including market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation and explores their joint effects on MSMEs' competitive advantage, marketing performance and business performance.	Commitment to learning Shared vision Open-mindedness Intra-organisational knowledge sharing	Lonial & Carter (2015); Margaretha & Suryana (2023); Guerra & Camargo (2023)
Learning Orientation and Innovation Capacity	This theme focuses on learning orientation as a foundational organisational value that enhances firm performance, specifically through the mediating role of innovation-related mechanisms.	Commitment to learning Shared vision Open-mindedness Learning as an investment in employees	Sawaeen & Ali (2019); Kaur et al. (2025); Wahyono & Hutahayan (2020)
Green Learning Orientation and Environmental Performance	This theme represents an emerging stream that extends the learning orientation construct into the sustainability domain, conceptualising green learning orientation as a firm-level commitment to acquiring, sharing and applying eco-friendly knowledge.	Green learning orientation Commitment to learning Shared vision Open-mindedness Green digital learning orientation	Rehman et al. (2024); Alshuaibi et al. (2024); Asif & Abu (2025)
Learning Orientation, Managerial Capabilities and International Competitiveness	This theme examines learning orientation as an intervening organisational mechanism that converts top management team knowledge and experiential capabilities into superior international performance in SMEs.	Commitment to learning Shared vision Open-mindedness Facilitated leadership Decentralised strategic planning	Mazida et al. (2023); D'Angelo & Presutti (2018); Arraya (2022)

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Learning Orientation Dimensions</i>	<i>Representative Studies</i>
Learning Orientation, CSR and Competitive Advantage	This theme explores learning orientation as a strategic organisational resource that bridges CSR activities and competitive advantage in SMEs.	Commitment to learning Shared vision Open-mindedness Employee learning as organisational investment	Ratnawati et al. (2018); Torkkeli & Durst (2022); Mauludin et al. (2023)
Team-Level Learning Orientation, Employee Well-Being and Micro-Level Outcomes	This theme positions learning orientation at the team and individual employee level rather than the firm level, examining how collective learning culture within MSMEs teams shapes adaptive performance, psychological well-being and individual work behaviour.	Team learning orientation Proactive learning Knowledge sharing Feedback solicitation Employee learning orientation	Shahid et al. (2025); Zahoor et al. (2022)
Learning Orientation and Organisational Resilience	This emergent theme examines the role of learning orientation in MSMEs resilience, strategic renewal and crisis management, specifically in contexts of financial distress or market dynamism.	Commitment to learning Adding new learning agents Open-mindedness	Mayr et al. (2022); Manalu et al. (2025)

Source: Researcher's Compilation

5. Discussions

Thematic synthesis of the 34 reviewed studies reveals eleven theoretically distinct and mutually exclusive categories, collectively demonstrating that learning orientation has evolved beyond its original conceptualisation as a unidimensional construct into a contextually sensitive, multi-positional organisational construct in MSMEs research. Across the identified themes, learning orientation is variously theorised as a direct strategic capability driving organisational performance (Karpacz & Wojcik-Karpacz, 2024; Mensah et al., 2025), an innovation-enabling mechanism operating through innovation capacity and knowledge competence (Sawaeen & Ali, 2019; Kaur et al., 2025), an intervening mediator translating entrepreneurial orientation into measurable firm outcomes (Wolff et al., 2015; Meekaewkunchorn et al., 2021; Allammari et al., 2025) and a boundary-conditioned export capability whose

effectiveness is shaped by psychic distance, network capacity and export knowledge (Assadinia et al., 2019; Kazemi et al., 2023; Abubakar et al., 2024).

The literature further positions learning orientation as a complementary strategic orientation amplifying market and competitive performance (Lonial & Carter, 2015; Guerra & Camargo, 2023), a dynamic pathway to product and process innovation (Marrucci & Rialti, 2024; Espinoza et al., 2023) and an emergent sustainability-oriented construct driving green innovation and environmental performance (Rehman et al., 2024; Alshuaibi et al., 2024; Asif & Abu Bakar, 2025).

Additionally, Learning orientation is examined as a conduit through which managerial capabilities generate international competitiveness (Mazida et al., 2023; D'Angelo & Presutti, 2018), a mediating resource linking CSR to competitive advantage (Ratnawati et al., 2018; Torkkeli & Durst, 2022; Mauludin et al., 2023), a micro-foundational team-level mechanism shaping employee adaptive performance and well-being (Shahid et al., 2025; Zahoor et al., 2022) and a resilience-enabling dynamic capability in crisis and reorganisation contexts (Mayr et al., 2022; Manalu et al., 2025).

6. Research Gaps Identified

The reviewed studies provide important insights, but multiple research gaps continue to exist. Most studies use cross-sectional quantitative methods, which make it difficult to understand the long-term effects of learning orientation. Very few studies have used longitudinal designs. Geographical coverage remains concentrated in Asian and European countries, with limited representation from African and Latin American MSME contexts. A green and sustainable learning orientation is also underexplored. In addition, employee and team-level aspects of learning orientation are understudied. Limited attention has also been given to the influence of socio-economic factors, such as market conditions, resource constraints and institutional support, on the development of learning orientation in MSMEs. Qualitative and mixed-method studies are also limited, which reduces a deeper understanding of how learning orientation develops and works in MSMEs across different sectors.

7. Implications of the Study

Theoretically, this review provides an understanding of learning orientation in MSMEs by showing that it is a multidimensional construct. Across eleven different thematic areas and based on the ideas of the Resource-Based View and Dynamic

Capabilities Theory, learning orientation functions as a direct performance driver, innovation enabler, entrepreneurial mediator and resilience mechanism, offering a clear framework for future theory building. From a managerial perspective, MSME owners and leaders should encourage learning, shared vision and open-mindedness as strategic priorities and combine learning orientation with entrepreneurial and market orientations. For policymakers and MSME support institutions, the findings highlight the need for targeted training and support programmes, especially in less-studied regions, to encourage learning practices, green innovation and digital readiness for sustainable growth and long-term competitiveness.

8. Future Research Directions

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to understand how learning orientation changes over time and affects the performance of MSMEs. More studies are also needed in regions such as Africa, Latin America and South Asia to improve the wider applicability of findings. The growing area of green learning orientation should be explored further, especially its role in supporting green innovation in the digitally transforming business environment for MSMEs. Researchers should also study learning orientation at the team and employee levels as separate areas of analysis. In addition, comparative studies across industries and countries can help explain how institutional, social, economic and resource-related factors influence its impact on the overall performance. Finally, qualitative and mixed-method research can provide a deeper understanding of how learning orientation develops and functions in different MSME contexts.

9. Conclusion

This systematic literature review, guided by PRISMA 2020, synthesised 34 peer-reviewed studies sourced from the Scopus database to identify and categorise learning orientation research in MSMEs, thereby addressing both stated research objectives. Collectively, these themes reveal that learning orientation has evolved beyond a unidimensional performance antecedent into a contextually sensitive, multi-positional dynamic capability simultaneously functioning as a direct performance driver, an innovation enabler, an entrepreneurial mediator, an export competence, a sustainability construct and a resilience mechanism. Grounded in Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities Theory, the findings establish learning orientation's theoretical significance as a multidimensional strategic

resource generating sustainable competitive advantage. Practically, MSME managers and policymakers must embed learning-oriented cultures within capacity-building strategies, particularly across underrepresented regions, to foster innovation, digital readiness and long-term organisational viability.

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