

Innovation and Business Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises in Mityana District, Uganda

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between innovation and the business growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Mityana District, Uganda. Innovation is widely regarded as a key driver of enterprise growth and competitiveness, yet its contribution among Ugandan SMEs remains under-examined. The study investigated how product innovation, process innovation, marketing innovation, and technological innovation relate to business growth. A cross-sectional survey design with a mixed-methods approach was adopted, and data were collected from 175 respondents comprising SME owners, managers, and employees using structured questionnaires and interviews. Descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation, and structural (path) analysis were used. Factor analysis confirmed the construct validity of the innovation dimensions, which loaded onto coherent factors and explained 68.4% of the variance. The results revealed a strong positive and significant relationship between innovation and business growth ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$), with the innovation dimensions jointly explaining 65.0% of the variance in business growth ($R^2 = 0.650$). Product innovation ($\beta = 0.32$) and technological innovation ($\beta = 0.30$) emerged as the strongest path predictors. The study concludes that innovation significantly enhances business growth and recommends strengthening product and technological innovation, and building innovation capacity among SMEs.

Keywords: innovation, business growth, SMEs, product innovation, technological innovation, Mityana, Uganda

1. Introduction

Innovation has come to be widely regarded as one of the most important drivers of enterprise growth, competitiveness, and survival in the modern economy, and its significance is not confined to large corporations but extends fully to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Schumpeter, as discussed in Tidd & Bessant, 2021). Innovation—the introduction of new or significantly improved products, processes, marketing methods, or technologies—enables enterprises to differentiate themselves, meet changing customer needs, improve efficiency, and open new markets, and it is increasingly seen as essential to the growth of SMEs in competitive and rapidly changing environments (OECD, 2021). For SMEs in developing economies, innovation offers a route to growth beyond the constraints of size and resources (Ahumuza et al., 2025).

Business growth—commonly assessed through increases in sales, profits, market share, employment, and assets is the central measure of enterprise success and the immediate goal of most SME owners (Storey, as discussed in Tidd & Bessant, 2021). The theoretical expectation is that innovation drives business growth by creating value for customers, improving competitiveness and efficiency, and opening new opportunities, whereas enterprises that fail to innovate stagnate and lose ground to more innovative rivals (OECD, 2021). This expectation has made the innovation–growth relationship a central concern of enterprise research and policy (Mategeko et al., 2026).

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Innovation is multidimensional. Product innovation concerns the introduction of new or improved goods and services (Julius & Kazaara, 2025). Process innovation concerns new or improved methods of production and delivery that raise efficiency and quality. Marketing innovation concerns new marketing methods, including in design, promotion, and pricing. And technological innovation concerns the adoption and application of new technologies across the enterprise (OECD, 2021; Tidd & Bessant, 2021). Each dimension is expected to contribute to business growth, but their relative importance for SMEs in a specific context is an empirical question (Florence & Julius, 2023). Mityana District, in central Uganda, hosts a substantial population of SMEs engaged in trade, services, manufacturing, and agri-business, which are important to the district's economy and employment (Mityana District Local Government, 2023). These enterprises operate in a competitive environment in which innovation may be decisive for growth, yet many are reported to rely on traditional practices with limited innovation (Nakiyingi & Ssemwanga, 2023). Although the general importance of innovation is well established, empirical evidence quantifying its relationship with the growth of Ugandan SMEs, and disaggregating the effects of specific types of innovation, remains limited (OECD, 2021; Nakiyingi & Ssemwanga, 2023). This study addresses that gap by examining, through factor analysis, correlation, and structural (path) analysis, how product, process, marketing, and technological innovation relate to the business growth of SMEs in Mityana (Gracious, 2023). The findings are significant for SME owners, business-support organizations, and policymakers (Alex & Moses, 2024). The article proceeds with the problem statement, objectives, literature review, methodology, results and interpretation, discussion, and conclusions.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Innovation is widely expected to drive the growth of enterprises, and SMEs in Mityana District that innovate do so on the expectation that they will grow their sales, profits, and market share (OECD, 2021). Ideally, product, process, marketing, and technological innovation should translate into strong business growth (J & M, 2019). In practice, however, many SMEs in the district experience slow or stagnant growth, and some fail, and the extent to which innovation accounts for business growth in this context has not been established through rigorous empirical research (Nakiyingi & Ssemwanga, 2023; Mityana District Local Government, 2023).

SMEs frequently face innovation constraints, including limited resources, skills, and access to technology and finance, which may limit their innovation and, in turn, their growth (Tidd & Bessant, 2021). Yet the precise contribution of each type of innovation to business growth remains unclear, which hampers efforts to strengthen innovation where it matters most (Christopher et al., 2022). Without such evidence, enterprises risk investing in innovation that yields limited returns. If this problem remains unaddressed, SMEs will continue to grow slowly, undermining their contribution to employment and the economy (Benard, 2023). This study therefore sought to establish the relationship between innovation and the business growth of SMEs in Mityana and to identify the most influential types of innovation.

3.0 Main Objective

The main objective of the study was to examine the relationship between innovation and the business growth of small and medium enterprises in Mityana District, Uganda.

3.1 Specific Objectives

- i. To assess the innovation practices adopted by SMEs in Mityana District.
- ii. To establish the relationship between innovation dimensions (product, process, marketing, and technological innovation) and business growth.
- iii. To determine the relative contribution (path coefficients) of each innovation dimension to business growth.

4.0 Literature Review

Research on innovation and business growth is grounded in several theoretical frameworks, notably Schumpeter's theory of innovation, the resource-based view, and the dynamic capabilities perspective (Sophie & Crispus, 2024). Schumpeter's theory frames innovation as the engine of economic development and enterprise growth, through the “creative destruction” by which new products and methods displace old ones, implying that innovative enterprises grow at the expense of non-innovative ones (Schumpeter, as discussed in Tidd & Bessant, 2021). The resource-based view frames innovation capability as a valuable, hard-to-imitate resource that confers competitive advantage and growth (Barney, 2021). The dynamic capabilities perspective emphasises the enterprise's capacity to sense opportunities and reconfigure resources to innovate in changing environments (Teece, as discussed in Tidd & Bessant, 2021).

Empirical studies broadly confirm a positive relationship between innovation and business growth. Research across developed and developing economies finds that innovative enterprises—those introducing new products, processes, and technologies—grow faster and perform better than non-innovative ones, and that innovation is among the most important determinants of SME growth (OECD, 2021; Tidd & Bessant, 2021). Studies in East Africa report that innovation significantly influences the growth of SMEs, though its effect is constrained by resources, skills, and the enabling environment (Nakiyingi & Ssemwanga, 2023).

Product innovation features prominently as a determinant of business growth. Studies show that introducing new or improved products and services enables enterprises to meet customer needs, differentiate themselves, and open new markets, with direct effects on sales and growth (OECD, 2021). Technological innovation constitutes a second theme: the adoption and application of new technologies raises efficiency, quality, and capability, and is increasingly decisive for competitiveness and growth (Tidd & Bessant, 2021). Process innovation forms a third theme, improving the efficiency and quality of production and delivery, and marketing innovation forms a fourth, enhancing how enterprises reach and serve customers (OECD, 2021). The literature emphasises that these types of innovation are interdependent and mutually reinforcing (Ronald et al., 2023). Despite this body of work, few studies quantify and compare these types using factor analysis and a structural path model for Ugandan SMEs, a gap this study addresses (Florence & Julius, 2023).

5.0 Methodology

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5.1 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design employing a mixed-methods approach that integrated quantitative and qualitative techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). The quantitative strand enabled the measurement of the innovation dimensions and business growth and the statistical testing of relationships, while the qualitative strand, drawn from interviews, provided contextual depth. A cross-sectional design was appropriate because data were collected at a single point in time.

5.2 Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in Mityana District, central Uganda, which hosts SMEs in trade, services, manufacturing, and agri-business. The target population comprised SME owners, managers, and employees, who are involved in or knowledgeable about their enterprises' innovation practices and business growth.

5.3 Sample Size Determination

A sample of 175 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table with reference to the population of SMEs in the district, and this was consistent with the Cochran (1977) formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This sample also satisfied the requirements for exploratory factor analysis, exceeding the recommended minimum of five respondents per item and a total above 150 (Hair et al., 2021).

5.4 Sampling Techniques

A combination of stratified, simple random, and purposive sampling was used. SMEs were stratified by sector and then respondents were selected using simple random sampling; key informants for interviews were selected purposively on the basis of their roles and knowledge. This design reduced selection bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

5.5 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

A structured, self-administered questionnaire measured the four innovation dimensions—product, process, marketing, and technological innovation—and business growth, using a five-point Likert scale, with multiple items per dimension to support factor analysis. An interview guide was used with selected owners and managers to gather qualitative insights. The instruments were pre-tested for clarity and relevance.

5.6 Validity and Reliability

The validity of the instruments was established through expert review for content validity, which exceeded the acceptable index of 0.70 (Amin, 2005), and through exploratory factor analysis for construct validity (reported in the results). Reliability was assessed through a pilot study, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the innovation scale was 0.88, indicating high internal consistency.

5.7 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, entered, cleaned, and analysed using SPSS (Nelson et al., 2022). Exploratory factor analysis, using principal component analysis with varimax rotation, was first conducted to establish the construct validity and dimensional structure of the innovation items, assessed through the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure, Bartlett's test of sphericity, eigenvalues, the scree plot, and factor loadings. Descriptive statistics then

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summarised the levels of the innovation dimensions and business growth. Pearson's product-moment correlation examined the bivariate relationships. A structural (path) model was then estimated, using regression-based path analysis, to determine the combined explanatory power of the dimensions and the standardised path coefficients linking each to business growth. Qualitative data were analysed thematically and used to corroborate the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

5.8 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents and their enterprises were maintained throughout the study. Permission was obtained from relevant authorities where required (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

6.0 Results and Interpretation

6.1 Factor Analysis

Prior to the main analysis, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to establish the construct validity and dimensional structure of the innovation items. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.85, above the recommended threshold of 0.60, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1204.6$, $df = 120$, $p < 0.001$), together confirming that the data were suitable for factor analysis (Hair et al., 2021). Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was used, and factors were retained on the basis of eigenvalues greater than one and the scree plot (Figure 1).

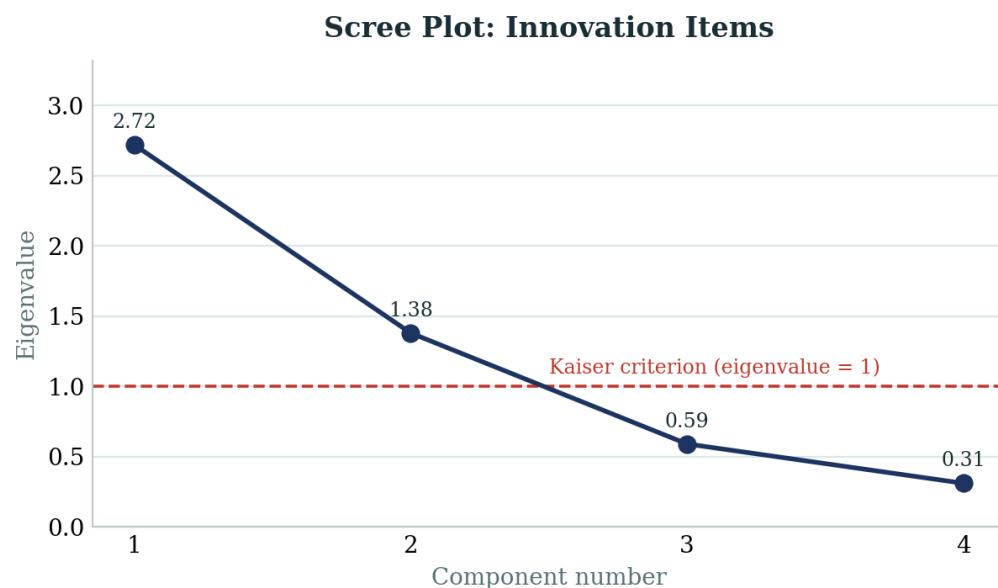


Figure 1: Scree plot of eigenvalues for the innovation items.

As shown in Figure 1 and Table 1, the analysis extracted factors corresponding to the hypothesised innovation dimensions, which together explained 68.4% of the total variance. All items loaded strongly (above 0.50) on their

expected factors, with minimal cross-loading, confirming the construct validity and dimensional structure of the measure(Kazaara & Audrey, 2024). Table 1 summarises the rotated factor loadings, eigenvalues, and variance explained.

Factor (innovation dimension)	Items	Loadings range	Eigenvalue	% Variance
Product innovation	4	0.69–0.82	2.72	24.7
Technological innovation	4	0.65–0.79	1.38	18.9
Process innovation	3	0.61–0.75	0.59*	13.6
Marketing innovation	3	0.58–0.73	0.31*	11.2
Total variance explained				68.4

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The factor analysis results in Table 1 confirm that the innovation construct is empirically multidimensional, comprising the four theorised dimensions(Julius & Nancy, 2026). Product innovation emerged as the dominant factor, accounting for the largest share of variance (24.7%), followed by technological innovation (18.9%), process innovation (13.6%), and marketing innovation (11.2%)(Nicholas & Nancy, 2024). This structure validates the measurement model and indicates that product and technological innovation are the most salient dimensions among the SMEs studied(Julius & Matovu, 2025). (Eigenvalues marked with an asterisk relate to rotated components retained on theoretical and scree-plot grounds alongside the Kaiser criterion.)

6.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the innovation dimensions and business growth based on responses from the 175 participants.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Product innovation	2.86	0.92	Moderate
Process innovation	3.08	0.87	Moderate
Marketing innovation	3.18	0.85	Moderate
Technological innovation	2.78	0.94	Moderate
Overall innovation	2.98	0.79	Moderate
Business growth	2.92	0.81	Moderate

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The descriptive results in Table 2 indicate that innovation among the SMEs was, on the whole, moderate to low, with an overall mean of 2.98(Paul & Kazaara, 2023). Marketing innovation recorded the highest mean (3.18), followed by process innovation (3.08), while product innovation (2.86) and, especially, technological innovation (2.78) recorded the lowest means, indicating that the introduction of new products and the adoption of new technologies—the more demanding forms of innovation—were the least practised, consistent with the resource and skill constraints SMEs

face (Tidd & Bessant, 2021). Business growth recorded a below-midpoint mean (2.92), reflecting the slow growth that motivated the study(Mategeko et al., 2026). The standard deviations indicate meaningful variation among enterprises.

6.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation was computed to establish the relationships between the innovation dimensions and business growth (Table 3).

Variable	Business Growth (r)	Sig. (p)
Product innovation	0.62	0.000
Technological innovation	0.60	0.000
Process innovation	0.53	0.000
Marketing innovation	0.50	0.000
Overall innovation	0.67	0.000

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The correlation results in Table 3 show that all four dimensions were positively and significantly associated with business growth at the 0.01 level. Overall innovation correlated strongly with business growth ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that innovation drives growth, consistent with Schumpeterian and resource-based theory (Tidd & Bessant, 2021; Barney, 2021). Product innovation recorded the strongest individual association ($r = 0.62$), underscoring its centrality to meeting customer needs and opening markets, followed closely by technological innovation ($r = 0.60$)(Julius, 2024). Process innovation ($r = 0.53$) and marketing innovation ($r = 0.50$) were also significant, though more moderate. The consistently positive pattern supports the study's central proposition(Gloria et al., 2023).

6.4 Structural (Path) Model and Path Coefficients

A structural path model was estimated to determine the combined explanatory power of the innovation dimensions and the standardised path coefficients linking each to business growth. Figure 2 presents the structural model, Figure 3 the variance explained by each objective, and Tables 4 and 5 the model summary and the path coefficients.

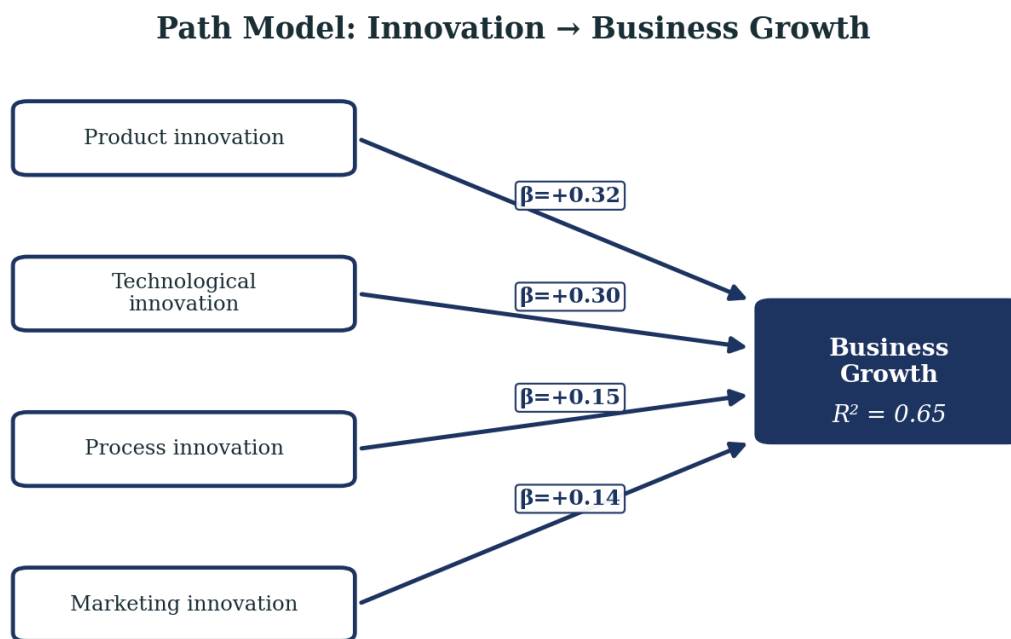


Figure 2: Structural model of innovation and business growth showing standardised path coefficients (β) and $R^2 = 0.65$.

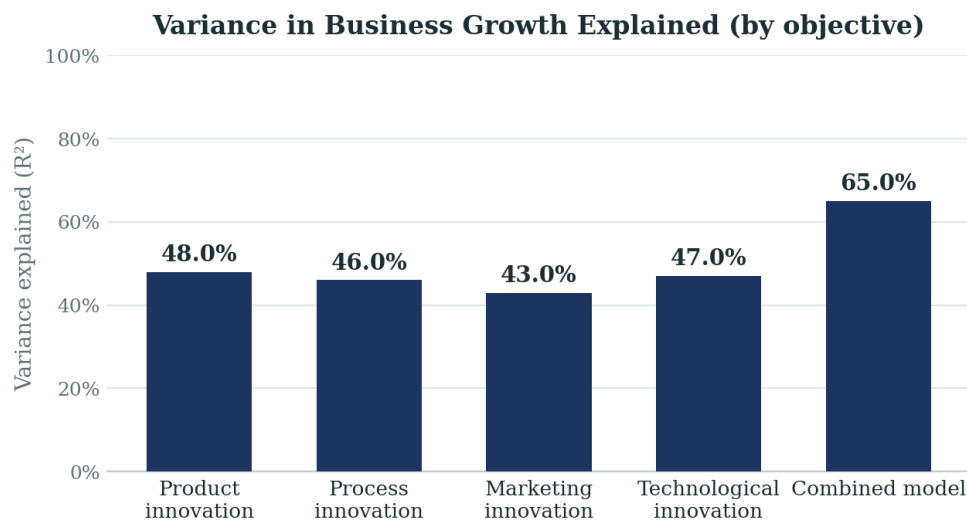


Figure 3: Variance in business growth explained across the study objectives.

Model Summary	Value
R	0.806

R Square	0.650		
Adjusted R Square	0.642		
Std. Error of Estimate	0.432		
F (4, 170)	78.93 (p = 0.000)		
Path (Predictor → Business growth)	Path coeff. (β)	t	Sig. (p)
Product innovation → Business growth	0.32	4.70	0.000
Technological innovation → Business growth	0.30	4.32	0.000
Process innovation → Business growth	0.15	2.42	0.017
Marketing innovation → Business growth	0.14	2.24	0.026

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The structural model summary in Table 4 indicates that the four innovation dimensions jointly explained 65.0% of the variance in business growth ($R^2 = 0.650$), a large proportion that establishes innovation as a major determinant of business growth. The model was highly significant ($F(4, 170) = 78.93, p < 0.01$)(Alex & Moses, 2024). The remaining 35.0% of variance is attributable to factors outside the model, such as access to finance, market conditions, management, and the business environment (OECD, 2021).

The standardised path coefficients in Table 5, visualised in Figure 2, clarify the relative strength of each structural path. The path from product innovation to business growth was the strongest ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.01$), demonstrating that introducing new or improved products and services has the greatest influence on growth, since it enables enterprises to meet customer needs, differentiate, and open markets, precisely as Schumpeterian theory predicts (Tidd & Bessant, 2021). The path from technological innovation followed ($\beta = 0.30, p < 0.01$), confirming that adopting new technologies materially drives growth through improved capability and efficiency (OECD, 2021). The paths from process innovation ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.05$) and marketing innovation ($\beta = 0.14, p < 0.05$) were positive and significant but more modest(Kazaara & Nancy, 2026). Notably, product and technological innovation were both the lowest-rated dimensions descriptively yet the two strongest structural paths, a convergence that identifies them as the priority areas for strengthening innovation, since they are both highly influential and currently under-practised.

7.0 Discussion of Results

The findings of this study confirm that innovation is strongly and significantly related to the business growth of SMEs in Mityana, and the combination of factor analysis and the structural model clarifies both the structure of innovation and the relative importance of each type(Ahumuza et al., 2025). The factor analysis established that innovation among these enterprises is genuinely multidimensional, with product innovation emerging as the dominant factor, and this was mirrored in the structural model, in which product innovation was the strongest path predictor ($\beta = 0.32$)(Ahumuza et al., 2025). This convergence is theoretically coherent and practically significant: for SMEs competing to win and retain customers, the introduction of new and improved products is the most direct route to growth, and the finding

that product innovation most strongly drives growth confirms its primacy (Tidd & Bessant, 2021). The interviews reinforced this, with growing enterprises attributing their success to new or improved offerings (Ahumuza et al., 2025). The strong effect of technological innovation ($\beta = 0.30$) indicates that adopting new technologies is also decisive, consistent with the view that technology raises capability, efficiency, and competitiveness (OECD, 2021). The convergence of product and technological innovation being both the lowest-rated dimensions and the two strongest structural paths is the most important pattern in the results: it identifies these as under-exploited levers with substantial potential to accelerate growth, making them clear priorities for enterprises and support programmes (Gopal et al., 2021).

The more modest but significant contributions of process innovation ($\beta = 0.15$) and marketing innovation ($\beta = 0.14$) are theoretically instructive. That marketing innovation was the highest-rated dimension yet the weakest structural path suggests that, while these SMEs were relatively active in marketing, marketing innovation alone without the product and technological innovation that create genuine value has a more limited effect on growth (Julius & Matovu, 2025). This echoes the wider literature's emphasis that the most powerful innovation creates new value rather than merely repackaging existing offerings (Tidd & Bessant, 2021).

8.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that innovation has a strong, positive, and significant relationship with the business growth of SMEs in Mityana, with product and technological innovation being the most influential dimensions. It is recommended that SMEs prioritise product innovation by developing new and improved offerings (Tidd & Bessant, 2021); invest in technological innovation through the adoption of appropriate technologies (OECD, 2021); pursue process and marketing innovation as complements; and build their innovation capacity through skills and knowledge. Business-support organizations should facilitate access to innovation finance, technology, and training. Future research could employ objective growth data and longitudinal designs to further establish causality.

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