Organizational Sustainability and TQM in SMEs: A Proposed Model

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Abstract
Organizational sustainability has become of great interest, and a high priority in today’s business environment by practitioners and researchers. Successful implementation of sustainability practices is becoming the cornerstone of organizational survival, success, superior performance, and competitive advantages. For organizations to be sustainable, organizations must determine working models on how to modulate organizational operations, and therefore the purpose of this paper is to critically attempt to offer an insight into the determining factors that influence organization sustainability in SMEs and assess the role of TQM towards achieving business sustenance. In the context of SMEs, they were chosen due to their vital key role in sustainable development and their dominance in any nation’s economy and contribution. In achieving the objectives of the study, explorative and descriptive analysis of literature were performed to offer a better understanding and develop a framework for SMEs. The study findings concluded that realizing the benefits of sustainability is dependent on the extent of activities performed by SMEs and the level of employee participation. The study revealed further that there is a significant correlation between TQM and sustainability based on the effective implementation of the proposed model of sustainability dimension.

Keywords: Sustainability, SMEs, TQM, Sustainable practices, Employee participation, Top management commitment.

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1. Introduction
Sustainability is becoming a priority for every organization as a global concern in today’s environment (Sancho et al. 2016). It’s based on the principle of allocating resources wisely for the current and future generations by efficiently managing and conserving them. “sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” according to Brundtland commission (www.iisd.org 2020). Contrarily organizational sustainability is a business strategy mainly focusing to identify resources available and allocating them effectively for the present and future needs for sustainable business growth considering economic, social, and ecological environment setting (Wales 2013). The concept of organizational sustainability is varied with no standard benchmarks and indicators to define sustainability in general across different organizations (Ollala & Palacios 2017).

Correspondingly there is an increased focus globally on organization sustainability envisaging companies to improve their integral capacities by identifying factors that inherently lead to business sustenance and performance (Adebisi & Bakare 2019; Ljunghom 2016). Within the approach of being competitive, organizations are becoming conscious to implement sustainability in their business operations essentially considering a holistic mechanism to business sustainability not restricting to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and public relations (PR) activities. According to UN sustainable development goals, 93% of the world’s largest companies are now reporting on sustainability (UN 2020). However, to drive organizations towards sustainability in business, it is vitally essential to identify factors and dimensions that influence and managing them effectively towards organizational goals. Further organizational sustainability depends on sustainable development practices proportionate to firms’ size, business level, organization structure, and strategic planning involving the three sustainable dimensions (Batista & Francisco 2018).

Given limited research studies and availability of standard working models on how to modulate organization operations to achieve business sustenance and continuity, this paper therefore critically attempts to understand the determining factors through empirical studies that influence organization sustainability in SMEs and also reviews previous studies on the role of Total Quality Management (TQM) towards achieving business sustenance.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Empirical studies of TQM in SMEs
Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are important for developing countries as they form a major share of global business establishments providing tremendous scope for employment opportunities for the growing population
while sustaining them will contribute to more than 50% of global GDP (Gherghina et al. 2020; Magd & Karyamsetty 2020). SMEs' success contributes to the development of a nation's economy through the creation of employment opportunities, wealth, social and economic development (Muller et al. 2017; Omri et al. 2015). Therefore, it is clear that SMEs can be classified as the backbone of any nation’s economy (Adebisi & Bakare 2019).

The growth and development of SMEs are intricate to the sustainability of these organizations over the long term by employing efficient management of resources possibly by adopting total quality management (TQM) as a management approach (Sahoo & Yadav 2018) and to remain competitive in the global market among larger firms. TQM can be defined as a holistic management philosophy that strives for continuous improvement in all functions of an organization, and it can be achieved only if the total quality concept is utilized from the acquisition of resources to customer service after the sale (Kaynak, 2003: 406). Earlier studies reveal that SMEs are far more flexible in conducting business operations, but the growing industrialization, globalization, and technological development continue to impinge these firms in terms of business continuity and sustenance with larger firms (Yoshino & Hayes 2016).

SMEs have to strategically adopt mechanisms that will facilitate them to overcome the specific challenges limiting their business performance regardless of empirical studies by various researches emphasize implementing TQM widely in many SMEs across different sectors maintains stability, improves business performance, and achieve competitive advantage (Kiselakova et al. 2020; Kutnjak et al. 2019; Sahoo & Yadav 2018; Basu & Bhola 2015), improve on SMEs innovations (Yunoh & Ali 2015; Garcia-Bernal & Garcia-Casarejos 2014; Kober et al. 2012) and improves customer and employee satisfaction (Kaur & Sharma 2014).

Thus, it’s worth considering TQM as a long-term strategy for competitiveness. Nasr et al. (2019; Mitрева et al. (2019); Domanska-Szaruga (2020) and achieving organizational sustainability in these firms. Beheshri & Lollar (2003) reported that TQM practicing firms presented higher performance than non-TQM firms through their study on two principle SMEs in the US, confirming to similar studies from Chileshe & Watson 2003 in SMEs in UK construction firms, despite this importance, SMEs are slow to implement TQM effectively in a range of firms due to recurring challenges (Ghobadian & Galleer 1996).

Empirical studies on the relationship between TQM and organization performance reveals that the extent of TQM practices in organizations specifically in SMEs justifies a positive relationship within the two variables assuring that TQM implementation in SMEs considerably improves product quality and business sustenance (Hilman et al. 2020; Kutnjak et al. 2019). Herzallah et al. (2014) from their study on Palestinian SMEs stated the significant influence of implementing quality management practices on organization performance which invariably enables SMEs to survive competition with larger firms to retain business continuity that is consistent with studies done by Mahmud & Hilmi 2014; Jabeen et al. 2014; Imran et al. 2018.

2.2 Organization Sustainability in SMEs
Sustainability is an important concept gaining much significance to every organization especially to SMEs in the current global market situation. Practically sustainability in organizations implies retaining business in the long term marginalizing the resources that largely depend on the onset of sustainable practices implemented by the firms, those oriented towards three dimensions of sustainability (Batista & Francisco 2018). Studies by Darcy et al. (2014) reviewed organizational sustainability through a resources-based dimension focusing on Carson’s models in SMEs sustainability. Das et al. (2020) reported that corporate sustainability is well-practiced in large organizations while SMEs have neglected the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability impacting the business of these firms in a long term. Conversely, the report by Johnson (2015) concluded that to achieve sustainability in organizations, SMEs must implement a range of management tools as an innovative mechanism to understand the extent of implementing the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Accordingly, researchers Lalangui et al. (2018); Kiesener & Baumgartner (2019) studied sustainable practices in SMEs from Ecuador and Austria and Schmidt et al. (2018) conducted studies on evaluation of these practices with SMEs in Brazil discussed the organizational sustainability outcomes from the overall level of awareness the employees and the management have in implementing the practices. Researchers Mustapha et al. (2017); Lozano (2018) have proposed frameworks such as sustainable green management systems and integrated management framework as a mechanism to draw business focus towards sustainability in organizations, which became crucial due to the increasing awareness of climate change and environmental protection globally.

3. Methodology
The study uses explorative and descriptive analysis of literature extensively reviewed by the authors to develop a research design based on the understanding of organizational sustainability in SMEs. A wide range of research articles was referred to on two principal aspects of the present study in different regions and organizational settings to achieve the objectives. While the focus of the study is on SMEs, within that approach of analysis hypotheses were set from the empirical studies from the previous work published by various researchers to evaluate the factors
that are significant to sustainability in SMEs. Substantial research studies cited in the literature section do indicate the view of sustainable practices adoption that leads to improving the performance of large, medium, and small organizations, that correspondingly depend on the type of practices that suit the nature of business operations.

3.1 Developing hypothesis from empirical studies
Reasonable studies on organizational sustainability have highlighted a range of sustainable practices as indicators for attaining improved performance and sustainability in both large firms and SMEs in different settings. Batista & Francisco (2018) emphasized organizational sustainable practices in corporate firms analogous to Gadenne et al. (2012) contemplating sustainable performance indicators in achieving business improvement which is central to evaluating organizational sustainability. From the empirical studies published by various researchers, the following hypothesis is framed to analyze and reach a better understanding of organizational sustainability in SMEs.

$H1$: Sustainable practices implementation to attain organizational sustainability in SMEs

$H2$: Identify specific practices that are indicators of organizational sustainability in SMEs.

$H3$: What factors will influence organizations in achieving sustainability in both large firms and SMEs.

$H4$: Is there any significant relationship between TQM implementation and organizational sustainability in SMEs.

3.2 Analysis of hypothesis
As a result of limitations existing in the present context in surveying the region to test the hypothesis, the authors have primarily referred to empirical studies on organizational sustainability in SMEs globally and outcomes from the hypothesis are analyzed to conclude the findings. A thorough and extensive literature analysis was conducted to understand the extent of research done concerning validating the hypothetical questions in this study and those observations are conceptualized by the authors to prepare a working model that would provide a pathway for SMEs in attaining organizational sustainability.

4. Discussion
The sustainability concept is becoming profoundly heard in organizations in either large firms or SMEs as a sign of environmental consciousness and awareness of consumers towards product quality. Inevitably, under the sustainable ideology consumers are gaining more focus and interest to understand the organization's role and participation in achieving sustainability in their business operations. Besides, that there have been specific amendments in the national, international, and local legislation to adopt sustainable practices in production, processing, and consumption in every sector towards meeting the goal. The concept of corporate sustainable practices (CSP) which is synonymous with corporate social responsibility (CSR) has come to the forefront of implementation in both large and SMEs as indicators influencing organizational performance.

$H1$: Sustainable practices implementation to attain organizational sustainability in SMEs

Further to that development, analysis of empirical studies published by various researchers on sustainable practices in organization extensively to validate the $H1$ hypothesis statement are judgmental to the findings. Studies by Akadiri & Fadiya (2013) highlighted the importance of sustainable practices in construction industries in the UK, essentially interpreting the need for adopting them as determinants for improvement in business and organization performance. Sustainability activities expected to bring certain advantages such as cut costs through a better understanding of business operations; build a good reputation and obtain marketing advantages over competitors; employee morale and retention will improve; improve organizational image which in turn will help in attracting funding; help in achieving a leadership position in the market (Mahmood et al. 2017; Stubbs et al. 2013; Searcy & Buslovich 2014; Higgins et al. 2015), and financial performance (Khattak et al. 2018; Malesios et al. 2018).

Choi & Yu (2014) categorized a set of corporate sustainable practices perceived to have a positive impact on the organizational citizenship behavior that in turn mediates the relationship between the CSP and organizational performance, concurrence to the studies by Das et al. (2020) on the emergence of corporate sustainability (CS) concept and influence of those practices towards organizations performance in SMEs specifically. Particularly in SMEs organizational structure, CS has not gained much familiarity as a concept over larger firms where sustainability is viewed as a mechanism to maintain the balance between the three dimensions.

In line with this understanding, organizational sustainability encompasses managing social, environmental, and economic aspects effectively to ensure that magnitude of business operations necessarily considers the triple dimension. On the other hand, research studies by Johnson (2015) have referred to sustainable management tools implementation and level of awareness among employees in SMEs are significant to organizational sustainability. Concurrent to this view, sustainable practices categorized into three-dimensional approaches have varying levels of implementations in SMEs from studies done by Lalangui et al. (2018), confirming that such practices can significantly contribute to organizational improvement. Further, results from studies by Maletic et al. (2015 &
and ultimately sustain their business growth in the long run (Natarajan & Wyrick 2011). Validating supportive evidence for the above hypothesis, Akadiri & Fadiya (2013) expressed critical practices that exhibit top management commitment, enforcement of government regulations and pressures from construction stakeholders as indicators that determine the adoption of sustainable practices in SMEs substantiating to studies from Zakuan et al. (2010). Consistent with the ideas expressed by many researchers on sustainable practices, Batista & Francisco (2018) viewed sustainable practices at a three-dimensional level- environmental, economic, and social aspects and implementing the practices consistently to maintain the balance between the three elements intricately determines the organizational sustainability.

Categorically implementing a set of practices within each dimensional level draws organizations closer to the reality of achieving sustainable goals in every organization however to realize these potential substantial efforts are needed from top management and employee participation enforcement through managers. Schiopoiu & Mihai (2019) have stressed upon CSR, innovation, and training that are positively correlated and implementation of these in SMEs as sustainable practices can yield profit, employee benefit, reduced total expenditure on business operations that act as indicators for organizational sustainability altogether creating a competitive advantage over larger firms in the market. Tan et al. (2015) suggested categorizing the indicators of organizational sustainability into four dimensions that critically reflect various practices through the subcategories under each dimension, while these indicators which are environmental protection, economic growth, social well-being, and performance management provide significant measurements to implement sustainable practices in SMEs.

Suriyankaithaewa & Avery (2015) concluded that the orientation of employee satisfaction an indicator of organizational sustainability. Their study proves that the hypothetical statements on the level and extent of sustainable leadership practices on employee satisfaction mediates organizations to achieve improved performance and sustainable growth that is consistent with the findings reported by other researchers described in this paper. Sundin et al. (2015) highlighted findings from empirical studies on indicators of environmental sustainability referred by different researchers in their work, however, sustainability holistically in an organization cannot be achieved through a contribution from a single dimension but is attributed from all the three elements.

Given the varying levels of sustainable practices implementation in organizations, Schmidt et al. (2018) observed that environmental practices had a low rate of adoption in SMEs due to the less significant size and nature of business operation however findings from Lalangui et al. (2018) on SMEs in Ecuador shows medium to a high level of implementation in all the three sustainable dimensions conforming to the findings of Batista & Francisco (2018), thus justifying an understanding that sustainable practices are specific to the nature, size and organization structure of every business. Therefore, analysis from the empirical studies sufficiently establishes that the range of sustainable practices implemented does lead to sustainability in SMEs which can be comprehended through their indicators henceforth validating the hypothesis H2 in this study.

Sustainability is built on the concept of the three dimensions environment, economic and social aspects, maintaining a balance between these entities consistently will influence the organizations to achieve sustainability primarily, on the contrary, empirical studies on factors that influence SMEs to achieve sustainability through the H3 hypothesis is tested to validate the findings reported by various researchers. Extensive studies by Das et al. (2020) revealed that collaborative work, facilitating government policies, supporting organization culture are factors that principally influence SMEs to achieve sustainability.

Without regard to the above conception, there are exhaustive factors influencing organizations towards sustainable performance studied in the context of different countries reported through empirical evidence. Those factors that contribute to sustainability through the adoption of government regulatory practices are reported in SMEs studied in UK, Spain, Norway, and Romania, referred by Fitjar (2011); Sima & Gheorghe (2011); Andres et al. (2011); Quader et al. (2016) (cited in Das et al. 2020). In conjunction with the studies published on this subject, subsidiary reports indicate CSR activities comprehensively concedes all the factors that influence
organizations towards sustainability.

Thematic analysis studies by Yadav et al. (2018) reveals external and internal factors as driving forces for sustainability in SMEs, where the culmination of both are essential to attain improvement in business performance. However, in absence of either of the factors would prove inefficiencies in the organization to achieve sustainable goals. Aboelmaged (2018) from his study proposed technology, organizational and environmental drivers (TOE) initially developed by DePietro et al. (1990) as approaches that contribute indirectly towards sustainability in SMEs. Analysis of the literature from the empirical studies reported by various researchers substantially denotes the range of factors particularly that is not limited to the observations made by the authors, hence proving the hypothesis statement H3 in this study.

H4: Is there any significant relationship between TQM implementation and organizational sustainability in SMEs.

Total quality management (TQM) is a management approach towards achieving long-term success principally integrating customer and employee involvement in the business operation. TQM has taken roots through the simple principles of scientific management from the 1920s to a comprehensive management system that is practiced currently in the modern world. During this phase, TQM has progressively gained more prominence and importance to both large and small firms widely and turned out as a benchmark for quality, organizational sustainability, and improved business performance. The concept of TQM is also widely studied by researchers in manufacturing and non-manufacturing firms and the results are consistent regardless of the nature of the business operation (Walley 2012). In addition to the proposition empirical studies also substantially justify the relationship between TQM implementation in SMEs results in performance improvement leading to sustainable business (Al Harbi et al. 2016), to a greater extent and increased profitability and competitive advantage over larger firms to a lesser extent (Beheshhti & Lollar 2003), while Herzallah et al. (2014) concluded that TQM practices show a positive and significant relationship with financial performance in SMEs.

Further studies by Robson et al. (2002) established that organizational performance is indicative to the extent of TQM initiatives implemented in firms and proportional to the constructs such as top management commitment, employee involvement, information and involvement, and strategic quality management analyzed through studies from Dow et al. (1999); Hassan & Kerr (2003); Pambreni et al. (2000). Despite differences existing in the level of implementation and the challenges TQM exhibit in SMEs, certain TQM characteristics such as effective communication, teamwork, employee awareness when implemented effectively would lead to positive results owing to the integrated nature of the business network in smaller firms (Ghobadian & Gallear 1996). Confirming the perception, empirical evidence through literature however support the relationship of TQM implementation with organizational sustainability especially in SMEs perceived through studies from Hilman et al. (2020); Imran et al. (2018) that TQM implementation can increase export performance in SMEs, bringing significant improvement in business performance (Jabeen et al. 2014), further confirming to Sahoo and Yadav (2018). Besides, wide studies are done by Beheshhti & Lollar (2003); Chileshe & Watson (2003) with relation to TQM implementation in SMEs in different geographical settings in the US, UK to understand the performance of these firms from adopting TQM.

In conclusion, various empirical findings analyzed relative to the H4 hypothesis sufficiently validates the association of TQM implementation in SMEs as significant to organizational sustainability thus proving that TQM practices implementation tend to lead organizations towards better firm performance, improved productivity, and maintaining stability in business growth.

Consolidating the observations arrived through the empirical findings, the literature studies referred from various researchers thoroughly validate the four-hypothesis framed by the authors in the study while the conclusions of the study are not only confined to prove the hypothesis through empirical analysis, but also to propose a model for achieving sustainability in SMEs from the theoretical and practical concepts of TQM and organizational sustainability. In pursuit of proposing the model, the authors considered the TQM characteristics and implementation for organizational sustainability in SMEs that are aligned with the objectives of this study. However, the model supposedly provides a framework to guide SMEs (manufacturing, non-manufacturing, and service sectors) towards achieving sustainability in business operation. Following the review from the empirical studies, a conceptual framework in Figure 1 is designed to illustrate the role of TQM in organizational sustainability in SMEs supporting the H4 hypothetical analysis of the study.

According to the framework, TQM implementation through the three prominent practices comparative to the TQM constructs would lead organizations towards sustainability specific to the current study on SMEs. The framework proposed would serve the purpose of guiding all kinds of SMEs including manufacturing, non-manufacturing, and sectors that adopt TQM practices to the extent that the three practices are involved in the approach to organizational sustainability. The proposed framework will provide a pathway for managers and decision-makers to effectively plan, prepare and execute tasks regarding implementing the TQM concept for achieving sustainability in SMEs. Further extending the framework, the authors propose a model that focuses on the two-dimensional approach to sustainability in SMEs about the hypothesis developed to validate the empirical
The proposed model Figure 2 suggested through this study offers a pathway for achieving sustainability in organizations especially in the context of SMEs and provides preliminary understanding and guidance to business establishment managers, decision-makers, and stakeholders, independent of the nature of business and operating structure in the organization. The proposed model is developed considering the validation of the hypothesis revealing that organizational sustainability is a combined input of TQM and sustainable dimensions in the organization, while each of the inputs internally is operated by indicators, internal factors that will influence the overall achievement of the sustainable goal. According to the model TQM implementation of practices are guided through external and internal drivers that are specific to every organization, those again depend on nature, size, business level, and organization structure combining with sustainability dimensions through the three levels together ultimately leading to achieving sustainability in the organization. Organizations that are marked sustainable are known to show consistent firm performance in design, product, quality, and customer satisfaction enhancing financial performance and improved business prospects among other business players in the market.

5. Conclusion
This paper analyzed the empirical studies done by various researchers on the concept of TQM and organizational sustainability specifically in the context of SMEs. The study revealed some interesting and significant observations made by the authors from the analysis of literature that led to the framing of the hypothesis to test and validate the empirical findings.

Examining the studies published, organizational sustainability is perceived differently by various SMEs mainly because of the level of awareness and orientation given by the top management to the employees. While the effectiveness of an organization in realizing the benefits of sustainability depends on the extent of practices, presumed to result in achieving sustainability notwithstanding the level of employee participation in the overall operating structure. On the other hand, many SMEs to meet the sustainable goals have developed and practiced different conceptual approaches such as corporate social responsibility, corporate sustainability, corporate sustainable practices, etc., all synonymous with the sustainable ideology, which depend on the nature of the business, size and geographical context.
The results emphasize that TQM implementation in SMEs is an additional instrument to enhance and catalyze the organizations' efforts to plan, prepare and execute the practices functional to sustainability. Contrary to this principle empirical studies also prove otherwise that organizations without TQM practices adopted have attained stability in business performance and showed improvement on par with TQM firms, therefore, confirming that organizational sustainability does not depend on the implementation of the practices alone, on the other hand, should be reinforced with employee involvement and top management commitment towards achieving the objective.

In conclusion, the practical implications from the study indicate sustainable practices, those particularly that act as indicators and factors are essential to influence organizations to attain sustainability in either large or small firms, and therefore a significant correlation exists between TQM implementation and sustainability in SMEs, thus reminds of an integrated two-dimensional approach to organizational sustainability that is proposed through the model in the study.

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