



Entrepreneurial Competencies and Performance Drivers of Restaurant Entrepreneurs: A Proposed Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial competencies are essential determinants of small business success, yet their role within restaurant entrepreneurship, where culinary creativity, service quality, operational discipline, and continuous learning intersect, remains underexplored. This study conducts a systematic review of 37 peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2025 across Scopus and Web of Science to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework explaining how entrepreneurial competencies shape performance outcomes in the restaurant and hospitality sector. Thematic synthesis revealed five dominant competency clusters: (1) strategic vision and opportunity recognition, encompassing innovation mindset, creativity, and entrepreneurial self-efficacy; (2) operational and technical mastery, including functional management skills, culinary expertise, financial literacy, and product or process innovation; (3) interpersonal and network management, emphasizing communication, customer relations, and social capital; (4) self-management and resilience, capturing commitment, emotional regulation, and motivational discipline; and (5) dynamic learning and adaptation, reflected in learning orientation, absorptive capacity, and digital or technological capability. These competencies influence performance through key mediating mechanisms, including innovation capability, human capital development, strategic orientations, and internal knowledge communication. Outcomes associated with strong competency configurations include higher customer satisfaction, competitive advantage, operational efficiency, and long-term business sustainability.

The proposed framework illustrates how entrepreneurs leverage competency clusters to recognize opportunities, adapt to shifting market conditions, enhance service experiences, and respond to competitive pressures. This study provides a theoretically grounded model for future empirical testing and offers practical implications for designing competency-based self-assessment tools, capability-building interventions, and entrepreneurship education tailored to the restaurant industry.



Keywords: Entrepreneurial Competencies, Restaurant Entrepreneurship, Innovation Capability, Absorptive Capacity, Systematic Literature Review

Introduction

The restaurant and hospitality industry stands as one of the most dynamic and economically vital sectors worldwide, making substantial contributions to employment and economic growth (National Restaurant Association, 2023; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024). In particular, the restaurant sector represents one of the most volatile segments within the broader hospitality industry, characterized by high levels of uncertainty and frequent business failure. Recent industry reports indicate that a significant proportion of restaurants fail within the first three to five years of operation, primarily due to intense competition, high operational costs, and rapidly shifting consumer preferences (National Restaurant Association, 2023; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025; Restroworks, 2025). This high failure incidence underscores the urgent need to better understand the underlying drivers of restaurant performance beyond conventional operational factors.

Entrepreneurial competencies have long been recognized as critical determinants of small business performance, influencing opportunity recognition, strategic decision-making, innovation, and long-term business survival (Man et al., 2008). Within the restaurant and hospitality sector, an environment characterized by intense competition, high operational complexity, and rapidly shifting consumer expectations, the role of entrepreneurial competencies becomes even more vital. Unlike traditional SMEs, restaurant entrepreneurs must simultaneously manage service quality, menu innovation, customer experience, digital capability, and dynamic team environments, requiring a unique blend of managerial, technical, and adaptive competencies (Lee et al., 2016; Martínez-Ros et al., 2025). Despite the sector's economic importance and vulnerability to failure, scholarly work examining entrepreneurial competencies in this context remains comparatively limited.

Recent studies highlight that restaurant performance depends not only on operational efficiency but also on an entrepreneur's ability to innovate, learn continuously, and integrate knowledge across the organization (Sancho-Zamora et al., 2022; Hael et al., 2024). Innovation capability, whether in product development, service delivery, or business model transformation, has been identified as a core mechanism linking entrepreneurial competencies with performance outcomes (Ariyanto et al., 2025; Wimpertiwi et al., 2024). Human capital, including prior experience, technical expertise, and learning orientation, further shapes entrepreneurial behavior and enhances opportunity recognition and innovation processes (García-Cabrera et al., 2023; Dias et al., 2022). These findings align with the broader competency literature showing that



entrepreneurs with stronger cognitive, relational, and strategic skills are better equipped to navigate uncertainty and competitive pressures (Yüceol & Can, 2023).

Dynamic capabilities, such as the ability to sense opportunities, seize them through innovation, and reconfigure operational resources, have also become increasingly relevant in hospitality contexts (Flechas Chaparro et al., 2021; Hael et al., 2024). Absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990), a key dynamic capability enabling entrepreneurs to acquire, assimilate, and exploit new knowledge, is linked with innovation and organizational learning in restaurants, where rapid adaptation is essential. Studies in culinary and gastronomic entrepreneurship similarly emphasize creativity, market sensing, sustainability orientation, and experiential service quality as emerging capability requirements (Martínez-Ros et al., 2025).

Furthermore, interpersonal and relational competencies, including communication, customer empathy, and network management, play a central role in service-intensive settings. Customer satisfaction in restaurants is directly shaped by trust, reliability, and empathy (Abdul Razak et al., 2020), while internal communication between chefs, managers, and service staff is crucial for translating innovation into consistent service outcomes (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2022). Leadership and team coordination skills are especially important for managing high employee turnover and culturally diverse workforces typical in hospitality SMEs (Asa & Nautwima, 2025).

Despite the growing recognition of these multidimensional competencies, there remains no integrated framework that synthesizes the range of entrepreneurial competencies specifically required in the restaurant industry. Existing models often focus on general SME competencies, innovation management, or hospitality operations, but they do not fully capture the blended managerial–culinary–service complexities unique to restaurant entrepreneurship. Moreover, gaps remain regarding how competencies interact with mediating mechanisms such as innovation capability, learning orientation, and knowledge communication to influence performance (Yahaya & Nadarajah, 2023; Somwethee et al., 2023).

Given these gaps, a systematic synthesis of empirical evidence is essential to consolidate fragmented findings and propose a cohesive conceptual framework tailored to restaurant entrepreneurship. By reviewing 37 peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2025, this study identifies dominant competency clusters and performance mechanisms, offering a theoretical foundation for future empirical testing and practical tools for competency development within the restaurant sector.



Objectives

1. To review and synthesize existing literature on entrepreneurial competencies and performance drivers in restaurant and hospitality entrepreneurship.
2. To identify core competency domains and examine how these competencies interact with mediating mechanisms, such as innovation capability, absorptive capacity, human capital development, and knowledge communication, to influence restaurant business performance.
3. To develop a competency-based conceptual framework that links entrepreneurial competencies with key performance outcomes in the context of restaurant entrepreneurs.

To achieve these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What entrepreneurial competencies are consistently identified in the existing literature as essential for restaurant and hospitality entrepreneurs?

RQ2: How do these competencies interact with mediating mechanisms—such as innovation capability, absorptive capacity, human capital development, and knowledge communication—to influence entrepreneurial performance within the restaurant sector?

RQ3: What performance outcomes (e.g., customer satisfaction, competitive advantage, operational efficiency, sustainability) are most strongly associated with specific competency clusters within the restaurant sector?

RQ4: How can the synthesized findings be integrated into a conceptual framework that advances theoretical understanding of entrepreneurial competencies within the restaurant sector?

Concept Theory Framework

Entrepreneurial competencies (ECs) have long been established as foundational determinants of small business success, shaping entrepreneurs' capacity to recognize opportunities, mobilize resources, innovate, and adapt to dynamic environments (Man et al., 2008). Within the restaurant and hospitality sector, these competencies are particularly critical due to the industry's operational complexity, intense competition, and reliance on both service quality and continuous innovation. Scholars increasingly emphasize that high-performing restaurateurs must integrate culinary expertise, managerial capability, customer-oriented service behaviors, and strong learning orientation to sustain long-term performance.

Human Capital as the Foundation

Human capital, comprising accumulated knowledge, skills, and experience, forms the basis upon which entrepreneurial competencies are developed. Studies show that



human capital significantly enhances opportunity recognition, innovation capability, and entrepreneurial self-efficacy, ultimately contributing to improved restaurant performance (Lee et al., 2016; García-Cabrera et al., 2023). Furthermore, Dias et al. (2022) demonstrate that human capital, especially when complemented by social capital and balanced skillsets, is essential for nascent entrepreneurship in hospitality contexts.

Innovation as a Central Mechanism

Innovation capability consistently emerges as a key mechanism linking entrepreneurial competencies to business performance. Innovations in restaurants span product, process, service, and marketing domains. Competencies such as creativity, leadership, opportunity recognition, and calculated risk-taking are shown to enhance innovation-driven outcomes (Wimpertiwi et al., 2024; Ferreira et al., 2023). In culinary SMEs, dynamic capabilities—specifically management capability and e-commerce capability—play a pivotal role in enabling innovation and shaping organizational performance (Wimpertiwi et al., 2024; Teece, 2018).

Dynamic Learning and Absorptive Capacity

Learning orientation and absorptive capacity (AC), defined as the ability to acquire, assimilate, transform, and apply new knowledge (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990), are increasingly recognized as essential for entrepreneurial adaptation and sustained competitiveness. Building on this foundation, Zahra and George (2002) conceptualize absorptive capacity as a multidimensional construct comprising knowledge acquisition, assimilation, transformation, and exploitation. AC supports continuous innovation, enabling restaurateurs to interpret market trends and convert knowledge into new offerings (Flechas Chaparro et al., 2021; Sancho-Zamora et al., 2022). Organizational learning further mediates AC's effect on innovation, highlighting the importance of knowledge communication within restaurant teams (Sancho-Zamora et al., 2022). Hael et al. (2024) confirm that learning-oriented cultures significantly enhance innovation outcomes in hospitality firms.

Relational Competencies in Service-Centric Contexts

Interpersonal and relational competencies are vital in hospitality environments where service interactions directly shape customer satisfaction. Key service quality attributes—assurance, empathy, reliability, and price fairness—are shown to strongly influence customer satisfaction and require refined social and communication competencies from entrepreneurs (Abdul Razak et al., 2020). Leadership, team management, and staff development further support organizational capability and innovation implementation (Asa & Nautwima, 2025). Effective knowledge communication among chefs, managers, and service staff is also essential for innovation diffusion and operational consistency (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2022).



Strategic and Managerial Competencies

Strategic competencies, including planning, organizing, visioning, and financial literacy, are consistently linked to superior performance in restaurant SMEs. Strategic orientations such as market orientation, learning orientation, and entrepreneurial orientation contribute to performance improvement (Yahaya & Nadarajah, 2023). Management capability, encompassing coordination, leadership, and resource stewardship, is a strong predictor of operational and financial outcomes (Wimpertiwi et al., 2024).

While prior studies consistently emphasize the importance of entrepreneurial competencies, some inconsistencies remain in literature. Not all competencies exert uniform effects across contexts, and their impact may vary depending on firm size, resource availability, and market dynamics. In the restaurant sector, where businesses operate under high uncertainty, tight margins, and intense competition, such constraints may limit entrepreneurs' ability to fully leverage innovation and learning capabilities. Moreover, the effectiveness of specific competencies may differ across operational, service, and strategic dimensions of restaurant management. These variations suggest that the relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and performance is highly context-dependent, reinforcing the need for a sector-specific and integrative framework tailored to restaurant entrepreneurship.

Literature Gaps

Despite growing interest in ECs, several gaps persist. Existing competency frameworks remain fragmented, lack contextual specificity, and insufficiently address the unique combination of culinary, creative, relational, and adaptive demands in restaurant entrepreneurship (Martínez-Ros et al., 2025). The interplay between ECs and mediating mechanisms, such as innovation capability, absorptive capacity, and knowledge communication, remains empirically underexamined. There is also a notable absence of integrated, competency-based conceptual frameworks tailored to the restaurant sector, reinforcing the need for systematic synthesis and theoretical integration.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize and integrate existing knowledge on entrepreneurial competencies and performance mechanisms within restaurant and hospitality entrepreneurship. The SLR approach provides methodological rigor through a transparent, replicable, and structured process for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing peer-reviewed scholarship.

1. Review Protocol and Guidelines

The review process follows established SLR guidelines proposed by Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003), as well as the PRISMA framework (Moher et al., 2009) for



enhancing transparency in literature selection and reporting. These procedures ensure systematic identification, screening, and synthesis of relevant studies while minimizing researcher bias.

2. Data Sources and Search Strategy

Two major academic databases were selected due to their high coverage and indexing standards: Scopus and Web of Science (WoS).

A comprehensive search was conducted using Boolean combinations of keywords related to entrepreneurial competencies and restaurant entrepreneurship. The search strings included:

“entrepreneurial competenc*” OR “entrepreneurial skill*”
OR “human capital”) AND
 (“restaurant” OR “hospitality” OR “culinary” OR “food service”)
AND
 (“performance” OR “innovation capability” OR “dynamic
capabilit*”).

The search period was limited to 2010–2025, aligning with contemporary developments in hospitality innovation and entrepreneurial capability research.

3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles or conference papers.
- Studies focusing on entrepreneurship, hospitality, restaurant, or gastronomy.
- Research examining competencies, capabilities, innovation, or performance.
- Empirical studies, theoretical papers, or systematic reviews.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Non-academic sources (e.g., blogs, magazines, trade publications).
- Studies without clear methodological reporting.
- Articles not addressing competencies or performance drivers
- Duplicate publications across databases

A total of 37 studies met all eligibility criteria after screening titles, abstracts, and full texts.

4. Screening and Selection Process (PRISMA)

The review followed four PRISMA stages:

4.1 Identification: All retrieved records from Scopus and Web of Science were imported and merged; duplicates were removed.

4.2 Screening: Titles and abstracts were examined for relevance to



entrepreneurial competencies and performance.

4.3 Eligibility: Full texts were assessed based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

4.4 Inclusion: Final studies (n = 37) were selected for data extraction and synthesis.

A PRISMA flow diagram is provided in Figure 1 to illustrate the selection process.

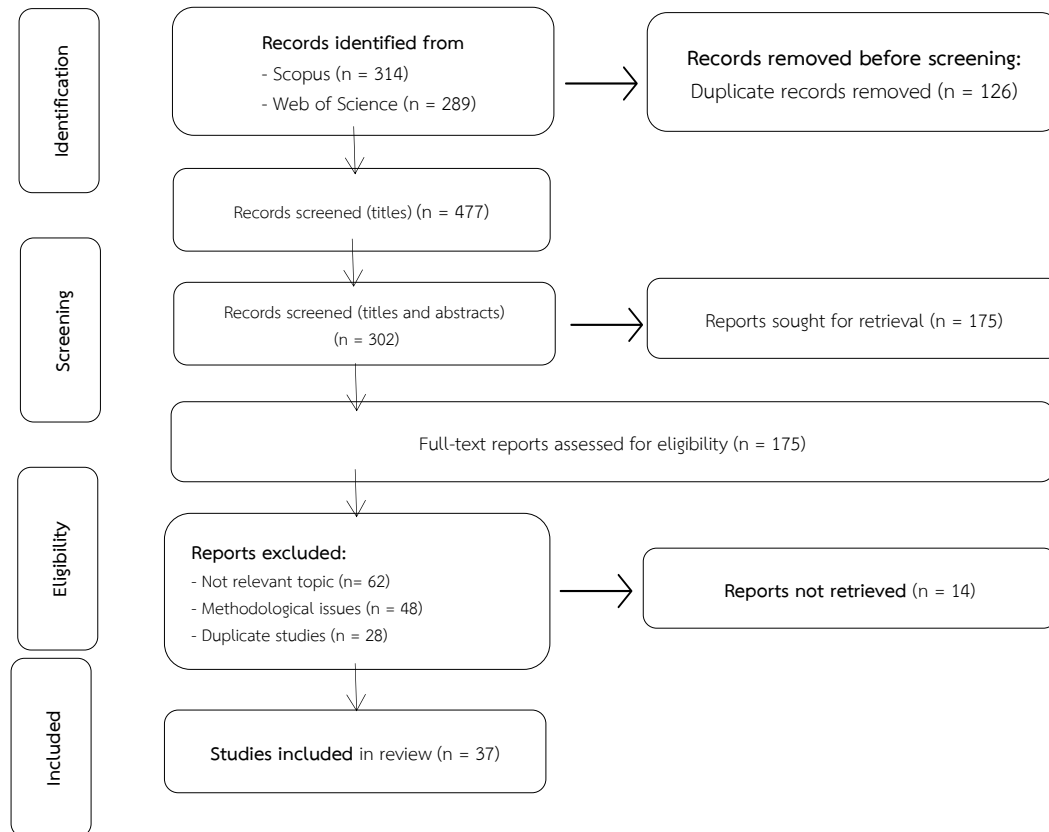


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process

5. Data Extraction and Coding

A structured extraction template was developed to record Author(s), year, publication outlet, research purpose, methods and sample characteristics, Key findings related to entrepreneurial competencies, reported performance mechanisms (e.g., innovation, absorptive capacity), Competency domains or constructs emphasized

The coding and data organization processes were conducted using Microsoft Excel to ensure systematic categorization, transparency, and traceability of extracted information.



The coding process followed a structured multi-step procedure. First, all selected articles were carefully read to extract relevant text segments related to entrepreneurial competencies and performance mechanisms. These segments were then assigned initial open codes based on recurring concepts. Subsequently, similar codes were grouped into higher-order categories through iterative comparison. The coding framework was refined through multiple rounds of review to ensure consistency, clarity, and alignment with the study's theoretical foundations.

Initial codes were generated inductively and deductively based on competency theory (Man et al., 2008), dynamic capabilities theory (Teece, 2007), and absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990).

6. Thematic Synthesis

A multi-stage thematic synthesis was conducted:

6.1 Open Coding: Competency-related statements were segmented and coded across all 37 papers.

6.2 Descriptive Theme Formation: Codes were clustered to identify repeated concepts such as human capital, innovation capability, relational skills, leadership, resilience, and learning orientation.

6.3 Analytical Theme Development

These analytical themes were developed by interpreting relationships among the identified descriptive themes, focusing on how entrepreneurial competencies interact with key performance mechanisms. This stage involved iterative comparison and refinement of themes to ensure conceptual coherence and theoretical alignment. These analytical themes formed the foundation of the proposed conceptual framework.

7. Quality Assessment

All studies were evaluated for methodological rigor based on predefined criteria, including clarity of research design, appropriateness of data collection methods, validity of measurement, transparency of analysis, and theoretical relevance.

Studies that lacked clear methodological reporting or did not provide sufficient empirical or conceptual contributions were excluded from the final synthesis.

To minimize potential bias, studies were selected based on transparent inclusion criteria, and multiple sources were cross-checked to ensure consistency. Although a formal risk-of-bias scoring system was not applied, the selection process prioritized peer-reviewed and methodologically robust studies.

As the coding process was conducted by a single researcher, reliability was ensured through repeated review, consistency checks, and alignment with established theoretical frameworks.



8. Synthesis and Framework Development

Findings were synthesized to identify how entrepreneurial competencies interact with mechanisms mediating (innovation capability, absorptive capacity, human capital, strategic orientation, and knowledge communication) to influence performance. This synthesis informed the development of a competency-based conceptual framework for restaurant entrepreneurs.

Results

This section presents the synthesis of 37 studies across three areas: (1) existing literature on entrepreneurial competencies and performance drivers, (2) identification of core competency domains and mediating mechanisms, and (3) development of an integrated conceptual framework for restaurant entrepreneurship.

1. Synthesis of Existing Literature on Entrepreneurial Competencies and Performance Drivers

The systematic review of 37 peer-reviewed articles (2010–2025) reveals a fragmented yet increasingly convergent body of knowledge on entrepreneurial competencies (ECs) and performance drivers within restaurant and hospitality entrepreneurship. Although individual studies emphasize different aspects—such as human capital, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, innovation capability, or service quality, they consistently confirm that competency development is fundamental to entrepreneurial effectiveness in hospitality sectors.

According to the reviewed literature, five major themes emerged:

1.1 Human Capital as a foundation of entrepreneurial capability (Lee et al., 2016; García-Cabrera et al., 2023).

1.2 Innovation capability as a mediator linking competencies to performance outcomes (Wimpertiwi et al., 2024; Ferreira et al., 2023).

1.3 Learning orientation and absorptive capacity as dynamic enablers of adaptation (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Flechas Chaparro et al., 2021; Sancho-Zamora et al., 2022).

1.4 Relational and service-related competencies influencing customer satisfaction (Abdul Razak et al., 2020).

1.5 Strategic and managerial competencies driving organizational capability and competitive advantage (Yahaya & Nadarajah, 2023).

This synthesis establishes that ECs in the restaurant context are inherently multidimensional, encompassing both individual attributes and learned organizational capabilities.



2. Identification of Core Competency Domains and Their Interaction with Mediating Mechanisms

2.1 Five Core Competency Domains Identified Through Thematic Synthesis

The thematic coding produced five robust competency clusters as follows:

1) Strategic Vision and Opportunity Recognition

– creativity, innovativeness, opportunity recognition, entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

2) Operational and Technical Mastery

– culinary expertise, process efficiency, financial literacy, managerial capability.

3) Interpersonal and Network Management

– communication, empathy, teamwork, stakeholder relationships, social capital.

4) Self-Management and Resilience

– commitment, persistence, emotional regulation, coping with challenges.

5) Dynamic Learning and Adaptation

– learning orientation, absorptive capacity, digital capability, reflective learning.

For example, concepts such as “culinary expertise,” “financial literacy,” and “process efficiency” were grouped under the theme of operational and technical mastery, while “customer empathy,” “communication,” and “team coordination” were categorized under interpersonal and network management.

These domains appear consistently across multiple studies and contexts, confirming their relevance to restaurant entrepreneurship.

2.2 Interaction with Mediating Mechanisms

The review reveals clear evidence that ECs do not influence performance directly; instead, they operate through four mediating mechanisms:

a. Innovation Capability (Strongest Mediator)

Competencies such as opportunity recognition, creativity, and leadership enhance the firm’s ability to innovate in products, processes, service, and business model (Wimpertiwi et al., 2024; Ferreira et al., 2023).

b. Absorptive Capacity (AC)

Entrepreneurs with high learning orientation and analytical skills more readily acquire and apply new knowledge, accelerating innovation and responsiveness (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Sancho-Zamora et al., 2022).

c. Human Capital Development

Education, prior experience, and culinary or managerial expertise strengthen key



ECs and support performance drivers (Lee et al., 2016; García-Cabrera et al., 2023).

d. Knowledge Communication

Knowledge transfer between chefs, managers, and frontline staff influences consistency, service quality, and innovation implementation (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2022).

Overall, the interaction between competency clusters and mediators forms a multi-layered pathway shaping restaurant performance. All these results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Core Competency Domains and Their Interaction with Mediating Mechanisms

Core Competency Domain	Key Components	Mediating Mechanisms Activated	Evidence From Literature
1. Strategic Vision & Opportunity Recognition	– Opportunity recognition	Innovation Capability (strong effect)	– ESE predicts innovation & restaurant performance (Lee et al., 2016)
	– Creativity & innovativeness	Human Capital Development	– Creativity & opportunity recognition linked to innovation outcomes (Chang et al., 2011)
	– Risk-taking & proactiveness		– Opportunity recognition crucial in hospitality entrepreneurship (Dias et al., 2022)
	– Entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE)		
2. Operational & Technical Mastery	– Culinary/technical expertise		– Technical & management skills drive performance (Asa & Nautwima, 2025)
	– Process & service operations	Human Capital Development Knowledge Communication	– Chef competence → innovation & knowledge transfer (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2022)
	– Financial literacy		– Human capital boosts ESE and innovation in restaurants (Lee et al., 2016)
	– Managerial capability		
3. Interpersonal & Network Management	– Customer service skills		– Service quality dimensions (empathy, assurance, reliability) enhance satisfaction (Abdul Razak et al., 2020)
	– Communication & team management	Knowledge Communication Innovation Capability	– Communication strengthens team innovation alignment (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2022)
	– Relationship building		– Social/relational skills shape entrepreneurial outcomes (García-Cabrera et al., 2023)
	– Social capital		



Core Competency Domain	Key Components	Mediating Mechanisms Activated	Evidence From Literature
4. Self-Management & Resilience	- Commitment & persistence	Human Capital Development (indirect)	- Commitment identified as crucial EC (Man et al., 2008)
	- Coping with challenges	Learning Orientation	- Resilience supports sustained restaurant performance (hospitality SME studies)
	- Motivation & emotional regulation		- Personal strength linked to EC frameworks in H&T (Martínez-Ros et al., 2025)
	- Passion & self-drive		
5. Dynamic Learning & Adaptation	- Learning orientation	Absorptive Capacity (core mechanism)	- AC enables knowledge acquisition & innovation (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990)
	- Absorptive Capacity (AC)	Innovation Capability	- Organizational learning mediates AC → innovation (Sancho-Zamora et al., 2022)
	- Digital capability (e-commerce, tech adoption)		- Dynamic capabilities (digital + management) drive SME performance (Wimpertiwi et al., 2024)
	- Reflective learning		- Learning culture strengthens innovation intensity (Hael et al., 2024)

3. Development of a Competency-Based Conceptual Framework

The synthesis of 37 studies culminated in the development of an integrated conceptual framework that explains how entrepreneurial competencies lead to performance outcomes in restaurant entrepreneurship.

3.1 Entrepreneurial Competencies (ECs)

Entrepreneurial competencies are organized into five core domains: strategic vision and opportunity recognition, operational and technical mastery, interpersonal and network management, self-management and resilience, and dynamic learning and adaptation. These competencies represent the foundational capabilities that restaurant entrepreneurs must possess to navigate the complexities of the hospitality sector.

3.2 Learning and Capability Mechanisms

The framework identifies five mediating mechanisms structured into two interrelated layers. The first layer consists of learning mechanisms—learning orientation and human capital development—which represent the foundational processes through which competencies are developed and refined. The second layer comprises capability mechanisms—absorptive capacity, innovation capability, and knowledge communication—which operationalize learning into actionable organizational capabilities. Together, these mechanisms form a sequential pathway through which entrepreneurial competencies are translated into performance outcomes.

3.3 Performance Outcomes

The framework identifies five performance outcomes: customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, service innovation, competitive advantage, and business sustainability. These outcomes reflect both immediate operational performance (customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and service innovation) and longer-term strategic performance (competitive advantage and business sustainability).

A key insight is that entrepreneurial competencies do not directly drive performance; instead, their effects are realized through layered learning and capability mechanisms that enable knowledge integration, innovation, and organizational adaptation. While Table 1 presents a comprehensive mapping of competency–mechanism relationships, the conceptual framework selectively integrates the most theoretically grounded pathways to ensure parsimony and clarity. The proposed framework is illustrated in Figure 2.

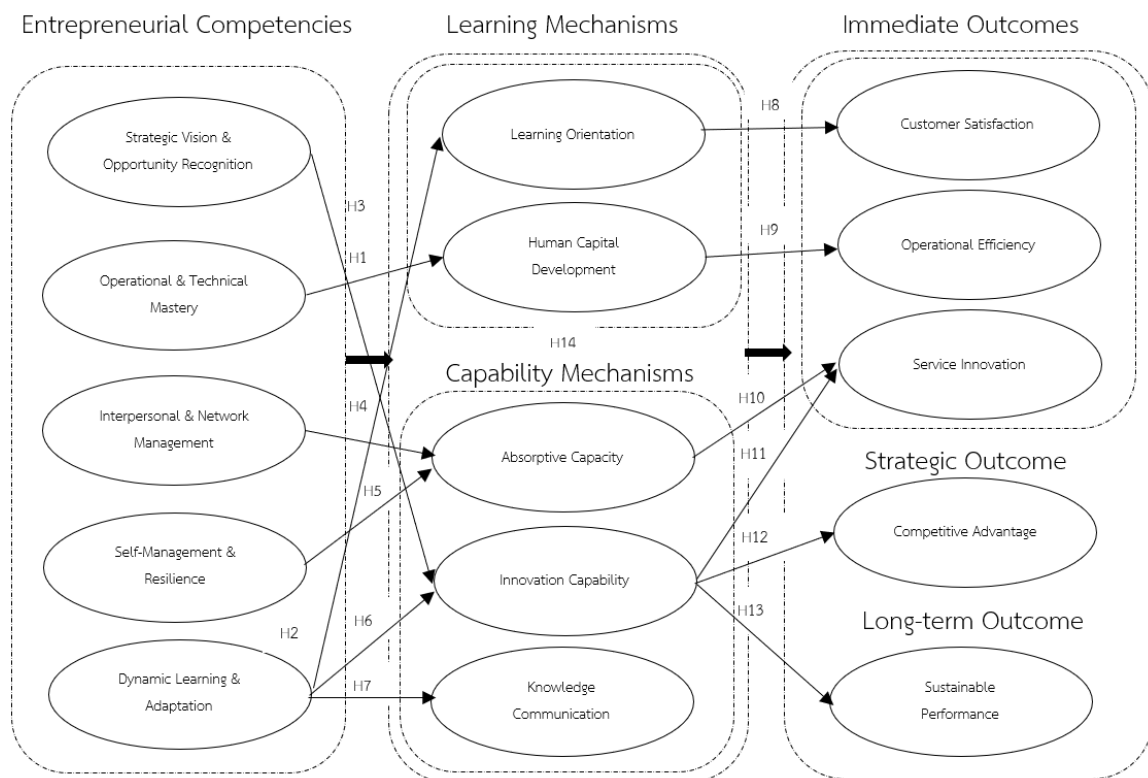


Figure 2: Competency-Based Conceptual Framework

Building upon the systematic synthesis of the literature, this study proposes a set of theoretically grounded hypotheses to explain how entrepreneurial competencies influence performance outcomes in restaurant entrepreneurship. The hypotheses reflect the multi-layered relationships identified in the SLR, particularly the role of learning and



capability mechanisms as mediating pathways.

Entrepreneurial Competencies → Learning Mechanisms

H1: Operational and technical mastery positively influences human capital development.

H2: Dynamic learning and adaptation positively influences learning orientation.

Entrepreneurial Competencies → Capability Mechanisms

H3: Strategic vision and opportunity recognition positively influences innovation capability.

H4: Interpersonal and network management positively influences absorptive capacity.

H5: Self-management and resilience positively influences learning orientation.

H6: Dynamic learning and adaptation positively influences innovation capability.

H7: Dynamic learning and adaptation positively influences knowledge communication.

Learning Mechanisms → Immediate Outcomes

H8: Learning orientation positively influences customer satisfaction.

H9: Human capital development positively influences operational efficiency.

Capability Mechanisms → Immediate Outcomes

H10: Absorptive capacity positively influences service innovation.

H11: Innovation capability positively influences service innovation.

Capability Mechanisms → Strategic Outcome

H12: Innovation capability positively influences competitive advantage.

Capability Mechanisms → Long-term Outcome

H13: Innovation capability positively influences sustainable performance

Indirect Effect

H14: Entrepreneurial competencies indirectly influence performance outcomes through learning and capability mechanisms

Discussion

The findings from this systematic literature review highlight the multidimensional nature of entrepreneurial competencies (ECs) in restaurant and hospitality entrepreneurship and reveal how these competencies shape business performance through a set of layered learning and capability mechanisms. Consistent with prior



foundational work, ECs function as the behavioral and cognitive capabilities that enable entrepreneurs to recognize opportunities, innovate, and effectively manage complex environments (Man et al., 2008). Across the 37 reviewed studies, a clear convergence emerges that restaurant entrepreneurs require an integrated blend of strategic, technical, interpersonal, adaptive, and resilience-based competencies—reflecting the industry’s inherently dynamic and service-intensive structure.

First, the identification of five core competency domains—strategic vision and opportunity recognition, operational and technical mastery, interpersonal and network management, self-management and resilience, and dynamic learning and adaptation—extends earlier competency models by demonstrating how these capabilities uniquely manifest in restaurant contexts. For example, prior research confirms that opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial self-efficacy are central to innovation outcomes (Lee et al., 2016), and our synthesis shows that these competencies are particularly influential in restaurants where product and service innovation must respond rapidly to changing consumer tastes.

Second, the results strongly indicate that the influence of ECs on performance is not direct but occurs through two interrelated layers of mediating mechanisms—learning mechanisms (learning orientation and human capital development) and capability mechanisms (innovation capability, absorptive capacity, and knowledge communication). This layered structure aligns with the proposed conceptual framework and corresponding hypotheses, which emphasize indirect and mediated relationships rather than direct effects.

Innovation capability emerges as a key pathway through which ECs translate into competitive performance (Wimpertiwi et al., 2024; Ferreira et al., 2023). Similarly, absorptive capacity (AC) plays a pivotal role by enabling entrepreneurs to acquire and apply new knowledge, thus enhancing innovation potential (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Flechas Chaparro et al., 2021). In parallel, learning orientation and human capital development contribute to immediate performance outcomes, particularly customer satisfaction and operational efficiency, as reflected in the hypothesized relationships. Additionally, digital transformation and AI-related competencies are becoming increasingly critical in restaurant entrepreneurship, enabling data-driven decision-making, personalized customer experiences, and operational efficiency improvements.

Third, restaurant entrepreneurship is uniquely shaped by interpersonal and service-based competencies. Service quality dimensions—such as empathy, assurance, reliability, and communication—demonstrate strong associations with customer satisfaction (Abdul Razak et al., 2020), highlighting that relational and communication skills are not peripheral but essential performance drivers. This is further supported by studies



showing that effective knowledge sharing within restaurants, particularly between chefs, managers, and frontline staff, enhances both innovation implementation and operational consistency (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2022).

Additionally, the importance of operational and technical mastery—including culinary expertise, financial literacy, and managerial capability—reinforces findings that human capital is a foundational driver of entrepreneurial success (Lee et al., 2016; García-Cabrera et al., 2023). This sector-specific emphasis on technical competence extends the broader entrepreneurship literature by illustrating that gastronomic ventures require more specialized competencies than typical SMEs (Martínez-Ros et al., 2025).

Finally, the conceptual framework developed from this review integrates fragmented insights into a cohesive model, demonstrating how ECs interact with layered mediating mechanisms to influence multiple levels of performance outcomes—immediate (customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, service innovation), strategic (competitive advantage), and long-term (business sustainability). This framework responds directly to calls in the literature for context-specific competency models tailored to gastronomic and restaurant entrepreneurs (Martínez-Ros et al., 2025).

Overall, this discussion reinforces that ECs are necessary but not sufficient drivers of restaurant success. Their effects are realized indirectly through structured learning and capability mechanisms, consistent with the proposed hypotheses (H1–H14), which collectively explain how competencies are transformed into performance outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

This study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the review includes only English-language publications, which may exclude relevant studies published in other languages. Second, the literature search was restricted to Scopus and Web of Science databases, potentially omitting relevant research indexed in other databases or grey literature sources. Third, the review focuses on studies published between 2010 and 2025, which may limit the inclusion of earlier foundational work. Fourth, as a systematic literature review, the study relies on existing published research and does not empirically test the proposed hypotheses, which should be validated in future studies. Finally, the synthesis reflects variability in research designs, contexts, and measurement approaches across the included studies, which may influence the generalizability of the findings.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several important theoretical contributions to entrepreneurship and hospitality literature. First, it develops a context-specific competency framework



tailored to restaurant entrepreneurship, extending existing models that are primarily based on general SME contexts.

Second, the study introduces a layered mechanism perspective by distinguishing between learning mechanisms and capability mechanisms. This structure advances prior research by demonstrating that entrepreneurial competencies influence performance through indirect and multi-level pathways rather than direct effects.

Third, the study contributes by organizing performance outcomes into immediate, strategic, and long-term levels, offering a more nuanced understanding of how entrepreneurial actions translate into both operational effectiveness and sustainable performance.

Finally, the integration of the conceptual framework with explicitly defined hypotheses enhances theoretical clarity and provides a foundation for future empirical validation.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several practical implications for restaurant entrepreneurs, educators, and industry stakeholders. Restaurant entrepreneurs should adopt a competency-based development approach focusing on the five core domains identified in this review—strategic vision, operational and technical mastery, interpersonal and network management, self-management, and dynamic learning and adaptation—as strengthening these competencies enhances their ability to recognize opportunities, drive innovation, and maintain consistent service quality in rapidly evolving environments.

To support this process, restaurants should implement structured knowledge-communication systems, including standardized recipes, knowledge transfer routines, pre-shift briefings, and digital documentation practices, to ensure operational consistency and effective innovation implementation.

At the institutional level, training providers and hospitality schools should design integrated competency-based programs that combine culinary expertise, financial literacy, digital capability, and innovation management. Embedding experiential learning and real-world problem-solving activities will further enhance entrepreneurial readiness.

Additionally, the proposed framework can serve as a diagnostic tool for assessing competency gaps and guiding targeted capability development strategies aligned with performance outcomes.

Managerial Checklist

To translate the conceptual insights into actionable guidance, this study proposes a managerial checklist derived from the synthesized findings. The checklist highlights key areas where restaurant entrepreneurs can focus their efforts to enhance performance



outcomes. Based on the findings, the following Table 2 checklist provides actionable guidelines for practitioners:

Table 2: Managerial Checklist for Restaurant Entrepreneurs

Area	Key Action
Strategic Vision	Monitor market trends and customer preferences
Operational Mastery	Standardize processes and control costs
Interpersonal Skills	Enhance communication and service quality
Learning Capability	Promote continuous learning and feedback
Innovation	Experiment with menu and service innovations
Knowledge Communication	Implement structured knowledge-sharing practices

This checklist serves as a practical tool to guide competency development and capability enhancement in restaurant entrepreneurship.

Future Research

Future research should further extend this study by empirically validating the proposed conceptual framework. Future studies are encouraged to employ quantitative approaches such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the proposed hypotheses and examine the strength of the relationships among variables.

Additionally, future research should operationalize the identified competency domains using measurable indicators. For example, strategic vision may be measured through opportunity recognition and innovation orientation, operational mastery through process efficiency and financial management capability, and interpersonal competencies through communication and customer relationship measures. Such operationalization will enable rigorous empirical testing and enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review consolidates current knowledge on entrepreneurial competencies (ECs) within restaurant and hospitality entrepreneurship and highlights their critical role in shaping business performance. The synthesis of 37 peer-reviewed studies demonstrates that ECs in this sector are inherently multidimensional, reflecting the dual demands of operational complexity and service intensity characteristic of restaurant environments. Five core competency domains consistently emerged across the literature: strategic vision and opportunity recognition,



operational and technical mastery, interpersonal and network management, self-management and resilience, and dynamic learning and adaptation. These domains collectively explain the unique blend of strategic, technical, relational, and adaptive abilities required of restaurant entrepreneurs.

A central conclusion of this review is that ECs exert their influence on performance primarily through indirect pathways involving learning and capability mechanisms, rather than as direct drivers of outcomes. Innovation capability emerged as the strongest pathway linking competencies with competitive performance, while absorptive capacity, human capital development, and knowledge communication further enhanced an entrepreneur's ability to learn, innovate, and maintain service quality.

The proposed conceptual framework and corresponding hypotheses provide a structured explanation of these relationships and offer a foundation for future empirical validation. Overall, this study demonstrates that entrepreneurial success in the restaurant sector depends not only on competencies themselves but on the entrepreneur's ability to transform these competencies into knowledge-driven, innovation-oriented, and adaptive organizational processes.

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