



Does Environmental Sustainability Influence the Competence of SMMEs? Evidence from the eThekweni Municipality in South Africa

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Abstract

An important global concern is the condition of the environment. In many world cities, effluence has reached a dangerous level. Concerns regarding “green gases” are widespread, and newfangled directives have severely impacted several industries. As people tend to be dissimilar when it comes to an environment, business owners must understand the risks and possibilities that come with their environment. This study aims to determine whether Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) are acquainted with environmental issues that impair their business operations. The study used a quantitative approach, with structured questionnaires to gather data from SMMEs in the eThekweni Municipality of Durban. The sample demographics were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis, and the variables’ means and standard deviations were then calculated. Prominent discoveries of this study revealed that some entrepreneurs care for their environment through job provisioning to the disadvantaged to curb the rate of unemployment and poverty. The concerning issue that emerged from the responses of the participants was that entrepreneurs were unable to spot business opportunities around them.

Subject Areas

Economics

Keywords

Competence, Entrepreneurs, Economy, SMMEs, Municipality, Environment and South Africa

1. Introduction

Presently, it is impossible to overstate the contributions Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) have made to numerous economies globally. This is because they have a greater influence on domestic spending and consumption than larger enterprises, SMMEs are recognized as the local multiplier effect (Dladla 2016) [1]. Even though the importance of SMMEs varies depending on different countries' levels of development, they support economic activities by resolving financial problems and raising the standard of living for many people (Ahuja 2016) [2]. This is supported by the studies conducted by Jili, Masuku and Selepe (2017) [3] and Petersen (2018) [4], that SMMEs are crucial to a country's standard of living, for steady and sustainable growth, employment provisioning, and the development of entrepreneurial skills. Cant and Rabie (2018) [5] note that for SMMEs to keep providing people with jobs, SMMEs must have processes for the jobs that people are seeking. These fundamental measures must concentrate on setting up the right outlines that will enable entrepreneurs to generate employment and inspire them to achieve their objectives. Furthermore, Makwara (2019) [6] acknowledges the significance of SMMEs in enhancing innovation in the nation. SMMEs engage in creative activities. They leave a lasting impression on clients and investors by being innovative. Innovation-driven economic growth has the potential to strengthen and maintain the national economy. Nevertheless, some SMMEs struggle to maintain their operations despite their significance to the economy. Fewer of the factors that impact their growth end up leading to their failure. This study aims to determine whether entrepreneurs are acquainted with environmental issues that impair their business.

The following is how this article is organized. The conceptual framework and a review of the literature are presented after the introduction, highlighting the knowledge gap that still exists and providing context for the investigation. Thereafter the research approach is then explained. Following data extraction and analysis from the 229 SMMEs surveyed, the results section gives recommendations for more research as well as a summary of the key findings.

2. Conceptual Framework

Researchers are increasingly focusing on the sociology of entrepreneurship. Over time, many perspectives have been offered to explain how the socio-cultural context influenced the emergence of entrepreneurship. The sociological theory by Max Weber was one of the first to address the socio-cultural context of en-

trepreneurship with the view that the environment plays a significant effect in the development of entrepreneurs (Swedberg 2018) [7]. According to Weber, a person's lifestyle and beliefs greatly influence his or her ability to become an entrepreneur. This is a result of people acting primarily with their beliefs. A person's competence as an entrepreneur depends on their beliefs and values, which give them control over their economic actions (Giwa and Babakatun 2019) [8]. Following the sociological theory of entrepreneurship Ali and Anwar (2021) [9], learning from beliefs facilitated the expansion of entrepreneurship in societies. From the entrepreneurship sociological perspective, Schou, Bucher and Waldkirch (2022) [10] note that one important aspect that drives entrepreneurship is the surrounding environment.

Since cultural norms, way of life, and beliefs are seen to be the most likely elements influencing an entrepreneur's behaviour, Max Weber's sociological theory of entrepreneurship is best suited for this study (Zafar, Khan, and Khan 2022) [11]. Therefore, beliefs, lifestyles, and social standards can all be connected to the difficulties that this study is examining. The views, ways of life, and social conventions of the environment where entrepreneurs operate might be linked to the challenges they encounter. Today's South African entrepreneurs have a barrier related to the level of education and training, which stems from societal situations and education policies implemented by both the pre-1994 and post-1994 governments. The standard of instruction provided in the nation's public school system serves as evidence of this. Furthermore, historically, the minority group was the only one with access to training and education. Due to this, South Africa now has a small number of entrepreneurs with the right degrees of education and training. Since society has momentous control over the growth of entrepreneurs (Mulaudzi and Schachtebeck 2022) [12], entrepreneurs must be conscious of the culture, religion, and environment in which they operate.

The fact that an entrepreneur needs clients from that environment to maintain their business makes the culture and religion of the area in which they operate crucial. Entrepreneurs must take into account the lifestyle and pious beliefs of the community to identify potentially profitable business operations within that community (Junaidi, Anwar and Sahrir 2023) [13]. The sociological approach suggests that people's beliefs, environment, and lifestyle are influenced by their opinions, thus small business owners should take these opinions into account while interacting with customers. Everyone is vital to the operations of an entrepreneur.

3. Competence

Competence is defined by Sandberg (2000) [14] as the intellectual resources (knowledge and talents) that a manager, employee, or business owner possesses to carry out responsibilities in an organization. The resources in this situation, according to the author, go beyond using knowledge and abilities to complete tasks. It incorporates a manager's or employee's capacity to know what must be

done, how to do it, and what tactic to use to make the task feasible (Sandberg 2000) [14]. Using an interpretative technique to clarify competence, Sandberg (2000) [14] concluded that, to carry out tasks in an organization effectively, particularly when it comes to work requiring a professional touch, managers, employees, and entrepreneurs must possess experience.

According to Gibb (2008) [15], competence is the ability to take ownership of one's actions and to demonstrate one's application of knowledge and skills gained through education and training in the performance of one's job. Such individuals possess a trait that demonstrates their behavioural competence and experience in task performance, enabling them to successfully offer high-quality results without questioning their judgement.

Hellriegel, Jackson, Slocum, Staude, Amos, Klopper, Louw, and Oosthuizen (2008: 98) [16] note that a person is competent if they have the following: a) explicit and tacit knowledge b) skills to demonstrate the best way to apply the knowledge one has learned; c) experience to display how frequently knowledge is implemented; and d) value judgement consisting of feelings, morals, and ethics. According to Hellriegel *et al.* (2008) [16], these elements show the level of enthusiasm and moral behaviour used in the company to identify and retain the best employees, enhance employee performance, and guarantee that business operations are carried out to high standards.

According to Sajgalikova, Bajzikova, Polakova, and Wojcak (2012) [17], a manager's competency is based on the availability, accuracy, and reliability of information that could lead to creative ideas. Because technical challenges are those on which judgements are made by using knowledge, abilities, and experience, the manager is therefore dedicated to providing a compelling response (Sajgalikova 2012) [17].

According to a finance competency model created by the University of Michigan Health System UMHS (2012) [18], many organizations use the term "competence" as a benchmark for evaluating workers' ability to complete tasks by applying their knowledge, skills, and abilities. The methodology uses basic competencies, finance-specific competencies, and finance core competencies to help work activities show specialization in managers, employees, or entrepreneurs. On the other hand, the University of Michigan Health System UMHS (2012) [18] asserts that managers' effectiveness is determined by how well they apply their knowledge and abilities to address difficult problems within the company. In the view of UMHS (2012), the manager is assigned certain responsibilities under this orchestration design. The behavioural attitudes that comprise the abilities to solve problems, meet the demands of consumers right away, communicate effectively inside an organization, and uphold moral and ethical standards are known as core competencies. To fulfil these responsibilities, managers must also be skilled at using technology to spot possibilities, build and collaborate with teams, and be economical (UMHS 2012) [18]. With the help of the Finance Core Competencies model, anyone can effectively manage any finance-related

issue. The application of components such as technical skills, self-management, interpersonal awareness, skilled and practical ideas, and industrialized and organizational knowledge is justified by this model (UMHS 2012) [18]. The KSAs deemed essential for carrying out the tasks associated with finance are known as financially specific competencies. The aforementioned competencies encompass financial analysis, strategic planning, reimbursement, information technology systems, data extraction, and project management, ensuring that every team member makes timely contributions and generates noteworthy results.

Bucur (2013) [19] observes that competence is a multifaceted concept that encompasses moral intelligence, motivation, social perception, and emotions. These components represent an individual's experience with applying knowledge and skills as the cornerstone for job performance. Bucur (2013) [19] establishes that managers must create an environment where workers can develop intelligence by using information, fortes, and proficiencies as rungs on the steps to achieving business success.

According to Blašková, Blaško, and Kucharčíkova (2014) [20], competence is the display of distinct capabilities and patterns of conduct that workers, supervisors, and business owners combine to accomplish objectives while carrying out their roles and obligations. In the authors' view, an operative's accretion of experience is a major factor in whether a company succeeds or fails, even as they address the theory of the effect of working behaviour on motivational competence. Results of Blašková, Blaško, and Kucharčíkova (2014) [20] indicate that an individual's proficiency in the business domain might function as a source of motivation for the work of others.

Competence is defined by Trivellas and Reklitis (2014) [21] as learning that a person attained above and beyond the threshold for entering the workforce. The key motivation for this is to maintain the business's survival for extended periods by managing internal and external difficulties both inside and outside the business area.

The scholars' dialogues above show that competency is a crucial element that serves as a foundation for SMME operations to flourish globally. Small and medium-sized business (SMME) managers and operators need to be competent in the following areas to support economic growth: knowledge, skills, abilities, assessment, values, attitudes, experience, behavioural traits, social networking, and professional competence.

4. Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability according to Abere and Opara (2012) [22], is the duty to preserve natural resources and safeguard global ecosystems to promote health and well-being both now and in the future. A vital component of environmental sustainability is its forward-thinking aspect, as many decisions that influence the environment take time to manifest. Similarly in business, Hassanand Lee (2015) [23] observe that the increasing unpredictability of the envi-

ronment has increased the need for SMMEs to monitor environmental change and its implications. This is because SMMEs are faced with a considerable number of challenges that hamper their business operations. On that basis, the question is what precisely is affecting their success and strength in the environment where SMMEs operate. It would have been despairingly perplexing to have to consider every single factor without any basis to organize information. A diversity of influences, ranging from mystical and social values to virtuously expected effects, can be acknowledged as determining factor variables in the business environment (Charman 2017) [24]. The environment where a business operates consists of factors that influence the continued and successful existence of an enterprise of a business (Fatoki 2018) [25]. These factors, according to Wikström (2020) [26], are those situational events that cause the environment to change. Examples of these factors are the climatic factor, information technology, ozone depletion, tropical deforestation, and business opportunities. These problems will be elucidated as they have acted as roadblocks to environmental growth.

i) Climatic Factor

The release of greenhouse gases (GHGs) into the atmosphere as a result of energy use, industrial gas, gas disposal from transportation, the use of fossil fuels, and land use, among other human activities, has caused the earth's surface to warm, endangering the lives of all living things on the planet, including people, animals, plants, and microorganisms (Banuri and Opschoor 2007) [27]. Due to the current circumstances, all living things are vulnerable to dangers and adversities like drought, famine, and floods, which lowers the output of agricultural produce. The struggle that resulted from it has caused hunger and poverty, the immediate effects of which are felt most acutely by the impoverished and in less developed nations. Therefore, the government must implement adaptation plans that can aid in lowering greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere. According to (Banuri and Opschoor 2007) [27], governments should create, fund, and implement renewable energy to address the difficulties relating to climatic conditions. To prevent harmful emissions of greenhouse gases from industry, transportation, and other sources into the present and future environment, public education campaigns should be initiated by the government (Banuri and Opschoor 2007) [27].

The study of Meyer and Odeku (2009) [28] has pinpointed the change in weather patterns as one of the main issues impeding growth in the modern world. Many people in the community have been impacted by these difficult problems, which has left them impoverished and unable to find a solution. This has hampered their ability to secure their present and future goals. The authors discovered that due to variables incorporating drought, flooding, melting glaciers, global warming, bleaching, and increasing sea levels, this condition significantly impacts the ecology, particularly the poor. Agriculture-related products suffer as a result of this.

According to a study by Edge on Economic Development and Growth in eThekweni Edge (2013) [29], people in the KwaZulu-Natal region of South Afri-

ca's eThekweni Municipal Area suffer from poverty as a result of the region's climatic cataclysm, which is also experienced by people in other parts of the world. The Municipal Climate Pattern Programme is one example of a climate project that the government should try to finance, according to the study (MCP). Additionally, restrictions resulting from the inadequate use of water for farming and drinking need to be considered by implementing different irrigation schemes. These schemes can prevent issues faced by individuals operating small and medium-sized agricultural businesses by providing funding for their operations, allowing them to produce an abundance of goods. Additionally, public education campaigns about the need to improve the environment for a happy life must be launched in media outlets including radio, television, and billboards (Oduntan 2014) [30]. This highlights the government's need to carry out this initiative as well as everyone's obligation to promote low-carbon growth and emission reduction. More importantly, the government must make an effort to form advantageous alliances with other nations that have gone through comparable experiences to collaborate on strategies and plans to deal with this problem.

Economic development has been the main objective of many nations, as noted by Hassan and Lee (2015) [23] and Meyer and Odeku (2009) [28] in their studies on sustainable urban development (SUD) in municipal areas. In addition to several African nations, many Asian nations including China, India, Korea, and the United Arab Emirates aspire to sustainable development. On the other hand, nearly every one of the earlier named nations from various continents is dealing with climate-related issues. The discharge of gases into the environment has disturbed people's way of life because a large portion of human activities depend on natural resources for survival. Examples are agriculture, urbanization, desertification, quarrying, water and air pollution, as well as soil erosion. People now face poverty, illness, excessive living expenses, and illogical behaviour like criminality as a result of some of these resources being extinct from the environment.

The two primary variables impacting climate change, according to Hassan and Lee (2015) [23], are sociocultural factors and gases emitted by vehicle combustion. One option to lessen the quantity of petrol emissions into the atmosphere is to invest in motorized vehicles that run on electricity rather than fuel or oil. To help members of the working class live closer to their places of employment, the government should also improve its public programmes for private and municipal organizations. In terms of improving the social, economic, and environmental conditions, this strategy will work better.

ii) Information Technology

According to Vergragt (2006) [31], the emergence of technology in the 21st century was brought about by many nations, including China, India, and Korea. From there, it extended to other parts of the world, including Latin America, Africa, and Asia. As a result, communication via devices like phones, and tablets, has greatly improved. Science-based technology has made life easier by reducing waiting times, increasing productivity, and addressing other difficult-to-live-with

issues. However, the author has shown that soil, air, and water contamination in the ecosystem is a result of human activity, specifically resource extraction and the release of sewage and industrial gas into the biosphere. This situation has resulted in environmental deterioration, hunger, and poverty. According to the author, these issues are manageable if chemicals are employed to treat the water before it is used. Furthermore, a thorough understanding of information technology and how it may be applied to support societal growth by balancing resources on social, environmental, and economic fronts is required.

A manager is responsible for a variety of tasks, some of which might be time-consuming and tedious (Mboniyane and Ladzani 2011) [32]. Both the business's growth and employee performance are negatively slowed down by this. Information Technology (IT) must be integrated into the business by the manager to alleviate workload and stress related to meeting customer demand. Additionally, IT must be used to strengthen operational security against fraud, theft, and improper record-keeping, which will provide a solid foundation for the company. Therefore, managers must make IT investments and participate in training to offer SMEs a suitable shape where clients conduct business with ease, good patronage, and fast delivery (Mboniyane and Ladzani 2011) [32]. This will make their jobs easier.

Businesses of all kinds and sizes, according to Chimucheka (2013) [33], have come to recognize the significance of information technology in creating chances for entrepreneurs through increased sales and profitability. Even though IT software maintenance can be costly, the results in the business organization are outstanding. Managers must undergo a variety of IT-related education and training to gain an understanding of how IT can support their business operations. To produce the most recent data needed to manage their business operations efficiently, they must also update their computer inputs. This will allow managers to enter new markets with ease and provide customers with high-quality services that will ensure the survival of their company.

The application of information technology was acknowledged by Utami and Lantu (2014) [34] as one of Porter's five-force tools necessary to connect with customers, prosper in the business competitive environment, and boost productivity. One of the things impeding sustained, productive development in business, according to the author, is a lack of IT understanding.

iii) Ozone Depletion

The results of the many actions that people do as humans are many adversities (Seery, Holman, and Silver 2010) [35]. Dangerous actions, which involve releasing pollutants into the atmosphere destroy the ozone layer, which therefore contributes to global warming. Crucially, the ozone layer serves to shield the surface of the planet from the sun's UV radiation, which can be dangerous to human health as well as that of animals and microorganisms (Castenholz and Garcia-Pichel 2012) [36]. The ozone layer is a molecular substance that is present in the stratosphere above the earth's surface; its appearance cannot be linked to a specific colour. When chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) are present in the stratos-

phere, they cause the ozone layer to thin. This occurs when solar radiation is reflected off the earth's surface and causes the chlorine atoms to break apart, shattering the protective layers.

The depletion of the ozone layer began to be studied by scientists in the 1970s. G. M. B. Dobson, an atmosphere researcher, initially proposed this. Among these researchers are Sivasakthivel and Reddy (2011) [37], who discussed how our choices, especially our actions and behaviours, have a direct impact on the places we live in. As a result of human action, the authors claim, UV radiation spreads and damages the ozone layer by releasing halons and chlorofluorocarbons into the earth's atmosphere. Diseases including non-melanoma, skin cancer, cataracts, slow germination in plant produce, and harm to the early growing stages of aquatic items like fish, prawns, crabs, and frogs as well as other marine species have all been linked to this effect. According to Sivasakthivel and Reddy (2011) [37], the reduction of the ozone layer is harmful to all life on Earth.

In an attempt by humanity to live a sustainable life, Hossain and Rao (2014) [38] claim that human attitudes have a major role in the environmental threats faced. Air pollution, radioactivity, nuclear waste, and pollution of land, water, and oil have all contributed to the release of dangerous gases into the atmosphere, including carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, and chlorofluorocarbons, all of which have an adverse effect on human health. The ozone layer is destroyed by this condition, which degrades it to the point that ultraviolet light can no longer shield it. As a result, people on Earth suffer from illnesses like cancer, lung sickness, malaria, and even diseases of plants and crops, while water and marine life are destroyed. Hygienic conditions should be established to prevent the release of dangerous particles into the atmosphere and to control pollution to protect the health of all living things on Earth from disease. Hossain and Rao (2014) [38] contend that to maintain pollution management for the globe and prevent environmental abuse, citizens and the government must work together to increase public awareness through the media. This is being done to prevent diseases from spreading to people, plants, and animals in the future.

According to Ogunsola (2017) [39], man-made airborne emissions of methyl bromide, sulphur, nitrogen oxide, CFCs, refrigerants, and insect repellent are among the pollutant components that cause the ozone layer to be destroyed. Due to this behaviour, which has harmed the ecosystem, man is now subject to adverse weather conditions such as severe winds, droughts, and heavy rains. Man is therefore susceptible to a wide range of illnesses, including cataracts, weak immune systems, lung and throat infections, and pandemic cancer. In addition, rain that falls with acidity depletes the soil layer of nutrients that plants require for germination. Aquatic species go extinct through death. The main contributors to ozone depletion are discovered to be gases from power plants, smokestacks, and automobiles. According to Ogunsola (2017) [39], the use of lime (CaCO_3) and limestone (CaO , Ca(OH)_2) as sulphur discharge neutralizers to enhance water quality is advised to lessen the issue of acid rain and ozone depletion. The government needs to start institutional programmes that will dispel

public ignorance about the importance of protecting the environment and natural resources. These programmes should include seminars and workshops on establishing sustainable economic development and how to contain and eventually eradicate the issues related to ozone depletion. Getting a car for convenience is a positive thing, but to cut down on the amount of smoke that cars emit, public transit should be promoted (Ogunsola 2017) [39]. Notwithstanding this, alternative modes of transportation (such as walking, bicycling, and using animals for transportation) ought to be promoted.

iv) Tropical Deforestation

According to Abere and Opara (2012) [22], tropical deforestation happens when trees are removed entirely or in part from forest resources and vegetation to make way for human projections. There are two categories in which the causes of deforestation fall. Human activity, which is typified by trade and exportation, makes up the first magnitude. Mostly, this would be the timber trade. This magnitude also includes farming, which involves burning bushes to make room for mechanized farming techniques. This also includes irrigation. This second magnitude is attributed to natural reasons, such as fungal or bacterial infections in trees, and herbaceous plants; vermin; meteorological conditions, like wind and temperature; and soil erosion-related depletion of nutrients. This poses a threat not just to plant ecosystems but also to animal migration patterns and potentially even to the extinction of entire plant and animal species. The media must inform the public about the risks of deforestation while simultaneously promoting afforestation. Governments also need to pass legislation to preserve and safeguard forest vegetation (Abere and Opara 2012) [22].

Tidwell (2016) [40] notes that humanity has always relied on the services provided by ecosystems to support its existence, particularly for the acquisition of fresh water, the generation of fuel, and lumber. Human actions like tree-cutting and natural reasons like weather patterns have made forest reserves much more vulnerable to dangers for the sake of promoting economic growth. Globalisation, poverty, urbanisation, overcrowding, and institutional corruption in government are some of the many causes causing these worries. Many plants, animals, and microorganisms have been destroyed as a result of these conditions, which have severely reduced biodiversity. Government collaboration is encouraged to plan for the economic growth of road networks, dam construction, urban development, waste management procedures, and agricultural development through the application of an ecosystem approach (Tidwell 2016) [40].

According to Vlasov (2021) [41], human endeavours to create a habitable environment for living lead to costly errors that negatively impact the environment and ecosystem. Forever destroying forests is the act of making way for various uses such as construction, road construction, mining, farming, manufacturing (such as the making of paper and furniture from palm oil), and commercial enterprises. However according to (Vlasov 2021) [41], as a result of clear-cutting and bush burning, which are methods of forest clearance, man constantly jeopardises the environment by causing the extinction of certain species and ani-

mals. In addition, this tendency has led to water loss into the atmosphere and surface erosion. Alternatively, lowering the standard of existence for organisms inside the ecosystem.

v) Business Opportunity

The aptitude of administrators, business owners, or underlings to recognise, seize, and capitalise on possibilities to benefit the community while simultaneously pursuing profit actualization is referred to as a business opportunity (Holcombe 2003) [42]. There are two primary dimensions that the author categorises opportunities into. First, managers and operators create opportunities by bringing new ideas to the table, making them the forerunners in the field. Second, opportunity can be realised anywhere, in any way, and any form. This is because a large number of people can take advantage of available information and inexpensive labour. Some factors that influence business opportunities, nevertheless, are as follows:

- a) Disequilibrium market forces, such as consumer preferences or weather conditions like drought.
- b) Variables that increase the range of production capacity; and
- c) The entrepreneurial endeavours of the past, which work as a model for upcoming managers or entrepreneurs.

To identify a real opportunity and improve performance, managers and entrepreneurs need to possess a broad breadth of knowledge (Holcombe 2003) [42]. This will enable them to become the finest service providers in their industry. According to Chimucheka (2013) [33], various platforms fall under the umbrella of taking advantage of business possibilities in the environment. These platforms include market intelligence, strategic leadership, clarity of purpose, and strategic planning.

Market intelligence: SMME managers must be able to use their knowledge and skills to manage dangers and hurdles and keep their business afloat in the face of rivals. Part of the required knowledge and skills in this regard include accounting, and IT to operate according to the purpose for which the organization is established. Managers must possess good oral and written communication abilities to plan, organize, advertise, and perform other management activities. This is because information is the key to revealing a company's productivity.

Strategic leadership: This refers to a manager's ability to maintain focus by applying a particular mindset while creating plans and goals that are feasible and then using those goals as a basis for opinions and decisions. The capacity to solve problems is a prerequisite for a manager's charismatic dexterity. Not every operational task can be completed by management. Because of this, the manager must assign some tasks to subordinates, who then report to him. A manager must set an example for excellent character in terms of financial resources, people resources, time consciousness, and timeliness if discipline is to be ingrained in the company.

Managers are directed by a clear purpose statement on the expectations and approach to fulfilling the company's vision and mission. In situations where a

subordinate is tasked with delegation, the manager must make sure that employees understand what has to be done and how to execute it to achieve the intended outcome and to prevent misunderstandings. Underperformance or corporate failure may result from the manager's incapacity to use intelligence to spot chances. Thus, the author suggests training, seminars, and educational programmes to help current and aspiring entrepreneurs come up with big ideas that would help them recognize and work towards taking advantage of possibilities in their settings (Chimucheka 2013) [33].

Human wants according to Ramukumba (2014) [43], are limitless in the world in which we live. This has given rise to an opportunity where problem solvers might step in and help fulfil man's never-ending search to satisfy his varied wants and needs. Because resources are distributed unevenly, entrepreneurs must recognise opportunities and make plans on how to best meet and hold the attention of their target audience. To secure corporate survival and competition in the business world, the author claims that a manager or entrepreneur must successfully integrate management activities with intelligence to distribute scarce resources using contemporary business approaches.

Business opportunity, according to Etuk, Etuk, and Baghebo (2014) [44], is dependent on one's capacity to satisfy customer wants in a given context while utilising competence as a tool for change to create opportunities for business success. The key to a successful business is an entrepreneur's or manager's capacity to grow intellectually and acquire the information, expertise, and experience necessary to integrate creative ideas into operations that meet the wants of clients. To attain and capture markets for corporate growth and expansion, entrepreneurs must have the capacity to employ financial resources as a fallback for their intellectual abilities. However, a misguided belief that financial resources are a tool for managing corporate affairs might endanger a company's potential and ensure its demise, particularly in markets with fierce competition. According to Etuk, Etuk, and Baghebo (2014) [44], a deficiency in skills and competence is a major barrier that keeps an organisation from taking on new challenges. The lack of basic amenities like energy, dependable transportation, and security to protect the business's intellectual property are some of the reasons that are preventing small and medium-sized businesses from thriving, they continue.

Chimucheka and Mandipaka (2015) [45] concur that political unrest has put the lives of numerous company owners in danger. Certain SMME items are manufactured by registered large companies, leaving little to no profit for the smaller businesses. Furthermore, the operator's goal in entering the business is to meet their immediate demands due to the low level of entrepreneurial spirit that SMME managers have linked to the enterprise. Furthermore, managers gifted with intellectual resources wander to other nations or continents where they can find support and unrestricted opportunities to showcase their abilities when they receive little to no help for the viability of their businesses. At this time, entrepreneurs who are rich overseas with hopes of returning to their coun-

try to improve it experience difficulty generating positive results owing to the tension in the environment. Chimucheka and Mandipaka (2015) [45] concluded that governments and individuals needed to establish enabling settings where managers, operators, or entrepreneurs could showcase their talents and intellectual resources to start new opportunities and ensure the economy developed sustainably.

The comments from the scholars above highlight how an opportunist entrepreneur can leverage experience, knowledge, and skills to identify gaps in any given setting. Entrepreneurs can achieve business objective congruence regardless of whether they invented the opportunity or not. This is because successful entrepreneurs take the initiative to create change that maximizes profits while meeting the demands of the public (Ajibade and Khayundi 2017) [46]. As a productivity agent, the entrepreneur must adhere to certain standards, including strategic leadership, market information, and goal clarity. The items listed are meant to keep the management from going outside of the established parameters, which could impede the company's objectives and successes.

5. Method

This is an exploratory study that collects and analyses data using quantitative methodology. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) [47] note that exploratory research is applied to a study when the researcher aims to gain insight, learn new ideas and enhance the knowledge of a phenomenon. To contextualize the barriers to small business sustainability in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, this study used an exploratory research design. KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa's Durban served as the study site for this. Because Durban is South Africa's third-largest city and a major commercial hub, it was taken into consideration for this study (Nene 2019) [48]. Small enterprises that fit into the SMME category were the target demographic. 229 responses were gathered from the original 250 distributed questionnaires. Due to respondents' hectic schedules, 21 irretrievably missing questions resulted from their unavailability to complete the survey. Hence, 229 made up the study's sample size. From these responses, the evaluation's findings were taken. For the purpose of this study, managers and business owners were chosen using a convenience sample technique. The operational issues faced by entrepreneurs, their impact, and how SMME operators can address these challenges were all investigated by the researcher through the use of a questionnaire (Zorhabi 2013) [49]. Content validity was examined in this study, which involved reviewing the questionnaire to ensure that the goals and subject matter were covered. This test was used to determine the quantitative validity of the study. A pilot test was utilized to accomplish this. The relevance, inherent value, representativeness, and logic of the variables that were deemed to be of interest were taken into account when measuring them. It may be argued that the questionnaire's content validity was good since analytical input from subject-matter experts and consultants guaranteed that it would receive enough coverage. Since contributor data was gathered economically, the questionnaire

proved useful. The data that was gathered was recorded and assessed using version 24 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). In a similar vein, descriptive and inferential statistics were produced using all pertinent quantitative methodical tools. T-tests, cross-tabulations, percentages, frequencies, and analyses of variance (ANOVA) are types of these. In addition, measures of dispersion and central tendency were used to give the data a wider range of analysis.

6. Results and Conclusions

Results:

Here, we present and discuss the findings based on an analysis of information obtained from 229 SMMEs about their awareness of environmental sustainability.

i) Gender

The result from the chart above shows that women (51%) ventured into entrepreneurial activities more than male entrepreneurs. (See **Figure 1**)

ii) Financial Knowledge

97.4% (63.8% + 33.6%) of business owners stated that they had a thorough understanding of finances, which helps them run their companies and secure capital from suitable organizations, intermediaries, or family members. (See **Figure 2**) However, it was found that entrepreneurs were not philanthropic, which Jili, Masuku and Selepe (2017) [3] explained as a result of their lack of financial strength for the company processes, their wasteful behaviours, their avoidance of risk, and their inadequate business IQ. However, managers' adept handling of their finances has allowed them to maintain current records, from which judgements for future projections can be made. According to the opposing position of Mokoena (2017) [50], SMMEs as a vehicle of economic development have not yet contributed to an environment that is favourable as entrepreneurs and their underlings are unable to effectively manage the financial strength of the organization. This will help business owners watch their business's liquidity more carefully and teach them how to exercise self-control, which prioritizes addressing urgent necessities above temporary impulses that clash.

iii) Identification of Business Opportunity

In addition to taking advantage of competitors' subpar service, 88.2% (24.9% + 63.3%) of respondents' responses demonstrated that managers could take advantage of events that occur for their benefit. (See **Figure 3**) Examples of such exploits include using population growth as a means of business development, continuously raising the price of goods and services to generate income, placing a business where they believe there is a concentration of customers, and selecting the most effective media for business promotion. According to Starcek and Trunk (2013) [51], managers must possess the ability to make educated judgements that facilitate financial wealth planning, especially when it comes to financial goods and services. Starcek and Trunk (2013) [51] said that doing this will help business owners properly keep an eye on their company's liquidity

while fostering the virtue of self-control to balance temporary impulses and give priority to urgent necessities. When an organization is founded in a place that provides simple access for current and potential clients, staff members, and suppliers, company growth can be realized (Willard 2012) [52]. To increase their audience and obtain thorough commercial coverage of their items, managers need also become acquainted with social media platforms. However, at this stage, a manager or an entrepreneur must exercise caution because incorrect observations of ideas, information, and expertise may be detrimental to the establishment, growth, maturity, and long-term viability of their business.

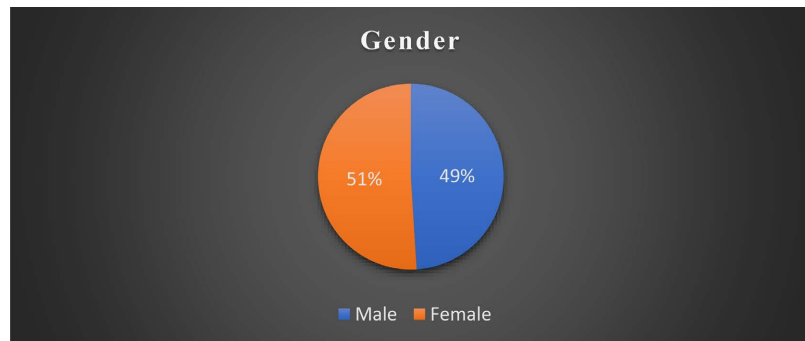


Figure 1. Respondents' Gender spread.

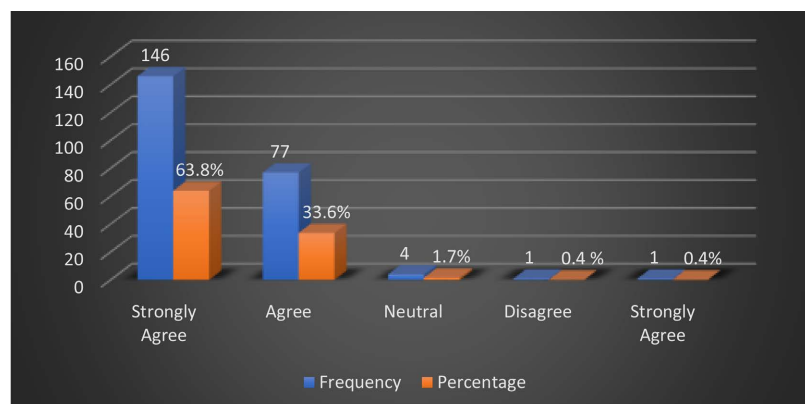


Figure 2. Financial knowledge.

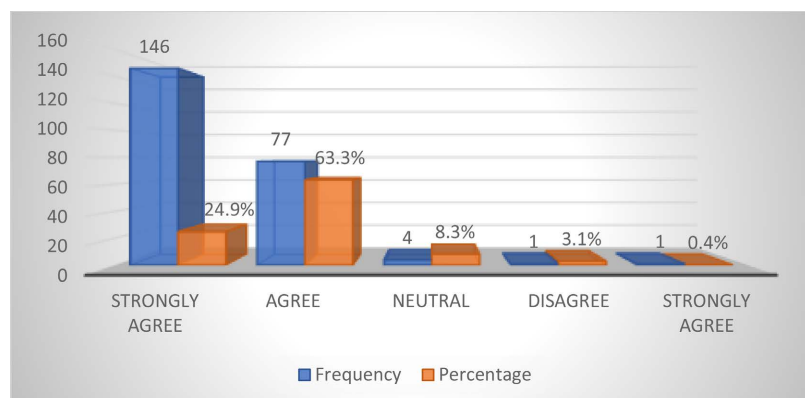


Figure 3. Identification of business opportunity.

iv) Increase in the Price of Goods and Services.

According to the data presented above, 78.2% (24.5% + 53.7%) (See **Figure 4**) of respondents agreed that rising prices for goods and services have increased their financial wealth. Bernard, Kritzing, and Kruger (2011) [53] caution business owners on raising prices because the abrupt increase in goods and services could have a negative effect on their operations. Additionally, rival companies in the sector help entrepreneurs maximize profits and evaluate their strategic goals by offering a range of suggestions that could stimulate innovation for the long-term viability of their business (Gibert, Rodriguez-Silva, and Annicchiarico (2014) [54].

v) Computer Literacy

As many as 88.2% (55.7% + 32.5%) of the respondents affirmed that computer systems have boosted their work efficiency. (See **Figure 5**) According to respondents, computer literacy has reduced workloads, increased creativity, helped with maintaining work files, histories, and accounts, and allowed them to use IT to connect with both current and potential customers while also protecting them

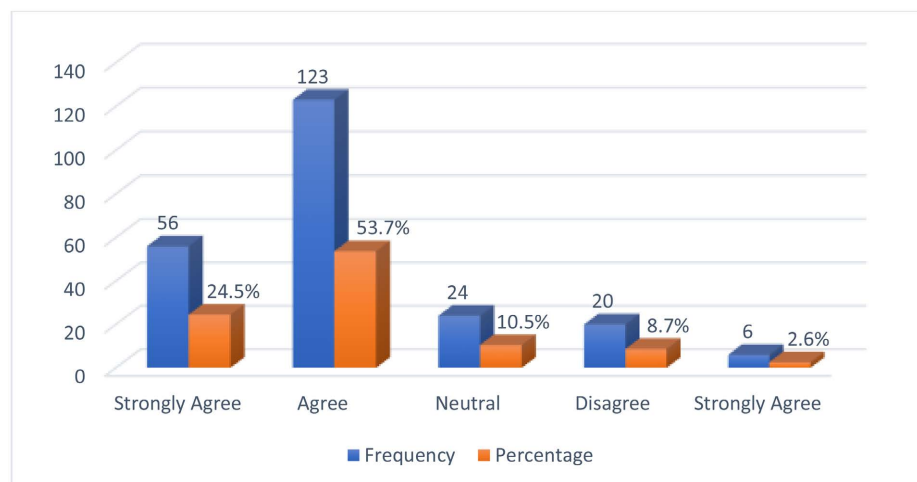


Figure 4. Increase in the price of goods and services.

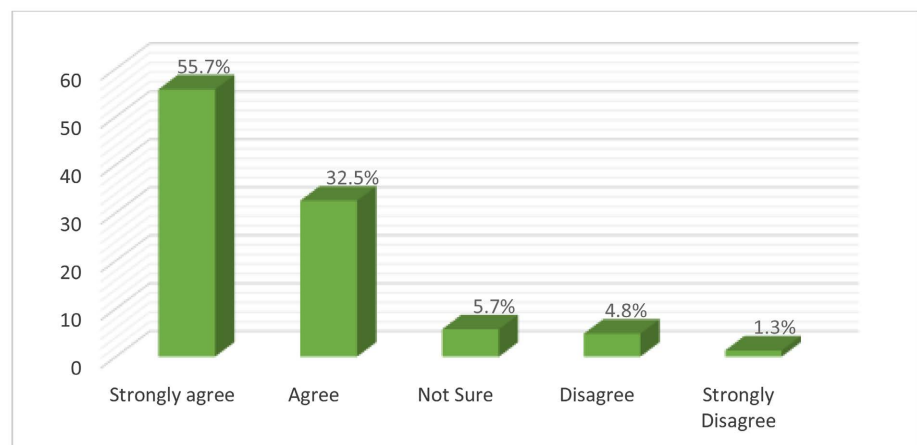


Figure 5. Computer literacy.

from fraud incidents (Wickramaratne, Kiminami and Yagi 2014) [55]. Wang, Lin and Spencer (2019) [56] acknowledged that managers and entrepreneurs may find it expensive to operate a computer system, the authors recommended investing in IT as a means of increasing working capacity or volume. According to Li and Wang (2019) [57], small business owners and entrepreneurs must digitize their work information and document for easy retrieval when needed.

vi) Environmental Changes

The results of the investigation indicated that the majority of respondents, 78.9% (33.3% + 45.6%), believed they could identify environmental changes that would negatively impact their company's operations. (Figure 6) This bolsters the belief held by Liedong, Aghanya and Rajwani (2020) [58] that SMME managers need to be familiar with their surroundings to understand how elements like the nation's political climate, economic climate, and technical advancements impact their company. According to Morawiec and Sołtysik-Piorunkiewicz (2021) [59], this knowledge is vital to support manager's and entrepreneur's decision-making regarding how to deal with changing environmental obstacles if they want to succeed in their business and preserve the environment in which they operate.

vii) Poverty Alleviation

A considerable percentage of the participants 50.2% (7.4% + 42.8%) in the survey about the attitudes of managers and entrepreneurs towards mitigating poverty recognized poverty as the principal element that triggers additional causes for the negative environmental disparities that society experiences. (Figure 7) Additionally, it was discovered via the accumulation of data that businesses hire people from their local areas to lessen poverty. According to Winborg and Hägg (2023) [60] suggestions, reducing poverty in the current context necessitates the collaboration of non-governmental and governmental organizations to free individuals from this problem and provide them with the information necessary to become independent.

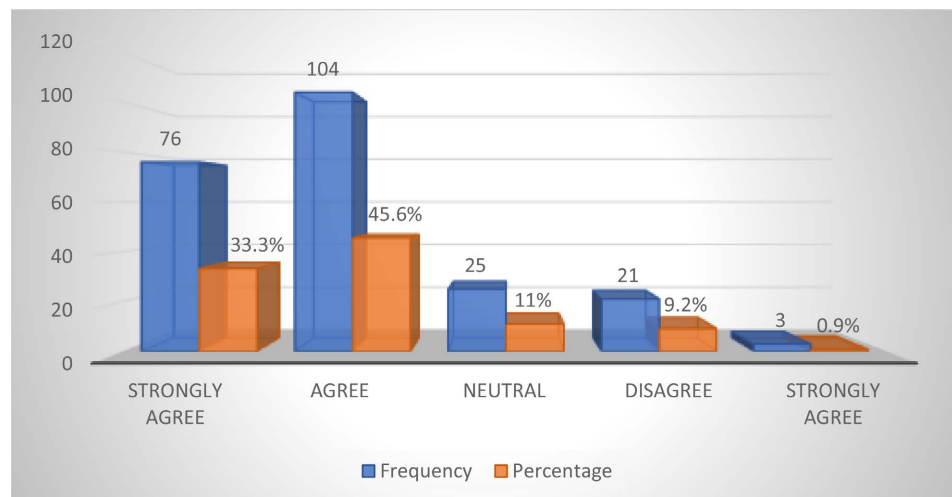


Figure 6. Environmental changes.

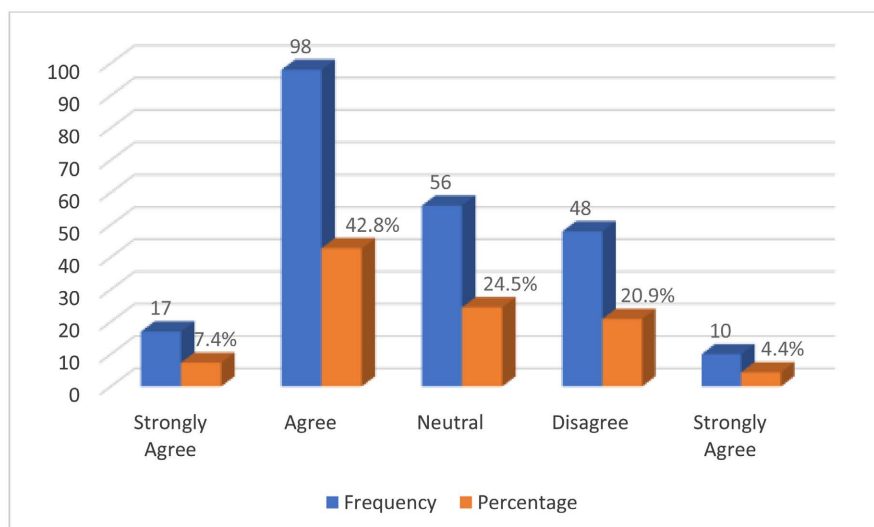


Figure 7. Poverty alleviation.

Conclusion:

Based on the findings of the study, it may be inferred that:

1) The current ratio of female to male entrepreneurs signifies the realization of gender equality. The findings of Tshikovhi and Shambare (2015) [61], who asserted that male entrepreneurs have dominated the entrepreneurship scene for several decades, are consistent with this. They also note that women have recently been drawn to SMME firms due to factors including poverty, hunger, and illiteracy.

2) Young people are drawn to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs) because they believe these businesses offer a more effective way to address challenges like unemployment, misconduct, corruption, and other sly tactics. These findings support those reported by Cloete (2015) [62], who found that unemployed persons typically young adults, women, and people with disabilities become entrepreneurs to increase their chances of survival.

3) By purchasing locally produced goods, SMMEs have been able to foster strong relationships with the community in which they operate. Zwane and Nyide (2017) [63] suggested that people, organizations, and businesses work together to finance, support, and aid in the presentation of infrastructure that can guarantee a conducive atmosphere for advancement and sustainable growth.

4) Edokpolor and Egbri (2017) [64] identified a lack of academic resources as one of the reasons for failing SMME operations. Education is important for entrepreneurs because it strengthens their persuasive ideas about the knowledge and skills required to oversee their business events.

5) Managers can recognize problems in their company environment, such as inflation and government-instituted business regulations that negatively impact their operations. Payne and Raiborn (2018) [65], however, pointed out that modifications to the tax code, particularly about products and services, as well as government-provided rent, have significantly discouraged business owners from

operating as service providers.

6) The use of IT has improved the effectiveness of SMME managers. To turn a profit, they can store a lot of business papers, get in touch with a lot of clients, participate in discussions and conferences, fortify company securities, and generally cut expenses like operational, administrative, and other charges that are closely tied to finances. This is consistent with the findings of Nadkarni and Prügl (2021) [66], who stated that management needs to make IT investments and training plans to give SMMEs a framework in which customers may transact business with ease, good patronage, and fast delivery. These actions can facilitate their work.

7) To reduce the number of diseases and infections brought on by pollution of the air, water, and land, SMME management takes good care of their surroundings by properly disposing of garbage. These findings are consistent with those of Appannagari (2017) [67], who detailed how “the adoption of environment hygiene which involves the joint effort of individual and organizational sectors” is one strategy to ensure a good life. Consider appropriate industrial sewage disposal, particularly for manufacturing companies where waste is removed.

8) By providing jobs to individuals, especially the underprivileged, entrepreneurs are currently helping to raise people’s standards of living. According to Munemo (2022) [68], the perception of SMME commitment to the country’s economy has positively benefited economic growth and development through their role in creating jobs, acting as tools for utilizing talent, and fostering the growth of entrepreneurial skills, among other things.

9) One of the challenges facing entrepreneurs is identifying business opportunities. Greater care, attention, and sacrifices of time, money, and energy are required for the process of opportunity identification to be successful for a company institution (Rosak-Szyrocka, Żywiołek, and Shahbaz 2023) [69].

7. Recommendations

The study’s conclusions led to the formulation of the following suggestions and potential lines of inquiry for further investigation. Entrepreneurs should have a foundational education that can support their competency in all facets of business, including knowledge, skills, attitude, and behavioural character. The behavioural element gives an impression of a person’s behaviour based on an experience; they should also have evaluation ability, values, and even professional competence that generates commercial prospects (Wilson 2018) [70].

According to Nassoura and Hassan (2021) [71], an entrepreneur’s emphasis should go beyond established limits. They contend that recognizing and taking advantage of business possibilities is one of the crucial factors to take into account for task framework and accomplishments, in domains like economic, social, cultural, and technical that others have missed.

Beyond the capacity for logical thought, educational knowledge helps managers and owners of businesses make critical decisions about staff appraisal, risk

assessment, problem identification and resolution, product advertisement, delegation of duties, forecasting, and goal setting. The lack of a company budgeting strategy has been shown to impair an organization's ability to carry out its policies. When this occurs, the firm may face obstacles in achieving its goals of strategic development, structural development, and financial growth. (Ziervogel 2019; Udokporo, Anosike and Lim 2021) [72] [73]. Future research could examine the state of SA SMMEs concerning strategic and structural development, as well as enabling resources.

Since SMMEs are one of the main instruments used by governments around the world to combat poverty, the South African government needs to take action through financial and non-financial institutions to educate prevailing and hidden entrepreneurs about managerial skills and how to run their functional businesses. By removing the barriers that stand in the way of fair resource distribution and the uneven economic growth that many residents endure, the goal is to lessen the burden that jobless citizens place on the government (Rhodes 2018) [74].

The business will benefit more from being near the resources it needs. As a result, production costs are lowered, and the supply of essential input materials is kept uninterrupted (Chawla and Goyal 2022) [75]. Therefore, to assess the effectiveness of current policies and their potential to support the nation's township SMME sector, future research should concentrate on sustainable resource use for SMMEs in townships around the nation in various provinces.

In conclusion, the government must disseminate legislation that bolsters SMME endeavours and removes certain regulatory obstacles that may pose a threat to the company ventures of entrepreneurs. Customs duties, levies, taxes, fines, and trade deregulation are a few examples of these. This will enable SMME activity to increase and function well both locally and globally. Future research investigations ought to make an effort to determine the relevant monitoring measures and how they are being implemented. When all of these requirements are met, problems that impair the skills of managers and entrepreneurs will be curbed, if not eliminated, and SMMEs will be in a position to promote sustainable development in the communities they operate.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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