

# The Influence of Marketing Skills Training on Small and Medium Enterprises Export Performance in Tanzania

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## Abstract

*The Government of Tanzania through different institutions has introduced policies and strategies to uplift Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) export performance. Together with a number of strategies developed, the contribution of SMEs to export is still disappointing. Since the literatures indicates that for export firms to perform better in the dynamic global environment, the need to develop market driven strategies is inevitable. Thus, this study focuses on influence of marketing skills training on SME's export performance. A sample of 60 SMEs Owners/ Managers located in Dar es Salaam was used in this study. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypotheses. The results from the study indicate that there is significant difference in SMEs export performance on the basis of marketing skills. It therefore, recommends stakeholders in this important sector to establish more interventions of building capacity to SMEs owners/managers on marketing attitudes in order to promote export performance.*

**Keywords:** Marketing skills, Small and Medium Enterprises, Training, Export performance

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## Introduction

The involvement of SMEs to a strong economy has been acknowledged for a long period of time (Anderson, 2012). SMEs account for 60-70% of employment and over 95% of businesses in OECD countries (OECD, 2000; de Kok *et al.*, 2011). Estimations done by the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicate that internationally, employment by SMEs increased from 79 million in the year 2003 to 156 million in 2016, furthermore, the SME sector contributes to more than one-third of total gross domestic product (GDP) in developing and emerging economies (ILO 2017). In another observation, Ayyagari *et al.* (2011) discover that SMEs contribute to employment by 51% in low income countries, 44% in lower-middle income countries and 38% in upper-middle income countries. Consequently, policy actors internationally have increased policy consideration towards SMEs as a fuel for

inclusive growth and development. Clearly the fundamental motivation in most studies is the appreciation that SMEs are significant catalyst of innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation (Katua, 2014; OECD, 2018).

Like in other Countries, SME sector in Tanzania play significant role in the economy in terms of their productivity, employment creation, and poverty reduction. The Tanzania Development Vision 2025 recognized the SME sector as one of the key contributors to the long-term development of the country (Kweka & Sooi, 2020). It is estimated that SMEs sector in Tanzania's comprise of more than 3 million enterprises which accounts to 27% of overall GDP (Sitorus, 2017). Despite their essential function in the economy, SMEs face a multitude of challenges that dampen their potential for growth in developing countries (Kweka & Sooi, 2020).

The development of Small and Medium

Enterprises (SMEs) worldwide is reliant upon a favorable business setting. A number of studies have been conducted to determine factors contributing to poor performance of SMEs in Tanzania. Nkwambi and Mboya (2019) indicated that, difficult in accessing finances, poor market accessibility, lack of entrepreneurial knowledge and bureaucracy contributes to SMEs poor performance. In another observation, the study done by Magembe (2019) revealed that, SMEs are constrained by fear for business failure, lack of collaterals, limited access to financial packages, and limited training. Also, Juma and Said (2018) they did a study on SME globalization in Tanzania context, the study findings revealed that, poor performance of SMEs were contributed by poor physical infrastructures, bureaucracy, inferior products, inadequate business training and skills, poor services, little access to information, marketing difficulties and limited admission to technological developments. On the other hand, lacks of marketing skills, inability to market themselves, lack of international experience and lack of expertise were indicated by Mbago (2013) as challenges for SMEs performance.

Globally, there is no standard definition of SMEs, nations and different organizations define SMEs in relation to their own technological and economic situation. However, the commonly used criteria in defining SMEs include the total investment, sales turnover and total number of employees (Ndesaulwa & Kikula, 2016). In Tanzanian context, SMEs are defined according to capital investment in machinery and number of employees. Therefore, a small enterprise contains of 5-49 employees with a capital base ranging from 5 million to 200 million Tanzanian shilling and a medium-scale enterprise which comprises of up to 100 employees with a capital base ranging from 200 million to 800 million shilling (SME policy, 2003).

Linking with SMEs is Exports; the literatures related with economic growth have indicated positive contribution of exports to economic development (Chingwaru & Jakata, 2015; Kahiya, 2015). It has normally been perceived as the primary step in entering overseas markets and it serves as a foundation for future global expansion (Mori & Munisi, 2012).

The history of world economic development shows that countries were capable to progress better economically after they took decision of exploiting external economic chances (Mpunga, 2016).

The 21st century is associated with globalization where boundaries between countries have been removed and firms now trade one another easily (Powell, 2015). Despite the reduction of trade barriers among countries, most of SMEs are not participating in global economic activities (London, 2010). Opening of countries boundaries requires firms to be competitive and apart from meeting international standards, producing low priced items, innovating, and exporting products, also develop strategies which incorporate understanding of the foreign markets (Fariza, 2012).

Tanzanian SMEs which participate in export business play a vibrant role in the national economy as they contribute to employment opportunities and provide a sustainable economic growth (Mpunga, 2016; Nkwambi & Mboya, 2019). According to ITC (2015; 2018), SMEs that are engaging in international trade become more competitive and the evidence suggests that SME exporters grow 4 % faster than non-exporters.

Efforts to increase Export Performance of SMEs have turned out to be prominent in the area of export-related research (Safari & Saleh, 2020). In Tanzania the government have implemented a number of policies and taken some initiatives to improve export performance. The efforts made involves the establishment of Board of External Trade in 1978, the creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and export processing zones (EPZs), that were targeting to foster competitiveness of Tanzanian products on global markets and in 2009 the Tanzania Trade Development Authority (TANTRADE) was statutorily created repealing Acts of the Board of Internal Trade (BIT) of 1973 and the BET of 1978. TANTRADE was established to oversee implementation of the National Trade Export Strategy and organize trainings for SMEs to build their capacity to benefit from internal and external markets (Mpunga, 2016). Other initiatives include launching of

economic Recovery Plan in 1986, Economic Empowerment Programme of 2006/07, through President fund known as Jakaya Kikwete (J.K) empowerment fund; in which 21 billion shillings were injected in the circulation and distributed throughout the regions of Tanzania (Mohamed & Mnguu, 2014), establishment of SMEs Export Credit Guarantee Scheme through Central Bank in 2003 (BOT, 2006), the creation of Small and Medium Enterprise Development Policy of 2003/2013, launching of the Tanzania Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness Centre in September 2016, Blue Print for Regulatory Reforms to improve Tanzania's Business Environment of 2018 which proposes measures to improve Business Enabling Environment, the Sustainable Industrial Development policy 1996-2020 (SIDP), and creation of National entrepreneurship development Fund (NEDF) which was set up to provide capacity building support for enterprises with specific initiatives including funding and training in business skills (KCIC, 2020). Moreover, Tanzania initiated a strategy for improving trade competitiveness (Tanzania Trade and Competitiveness Strategy – TTIS). The strategy that lay down three priorities, including integration of Tanzania into global production network, expansion of existing exports to new and dynamic markets, and lowering of the cost of doing business.

Despite reduction in trade barriers among countries and the existence of good government policies and a number of initiatives taken by the government, Tanzania exports growth has lagged behind the country's potential. The fluctuations in Tanzania's market share in the total global exports show that Tanzania has not succeeded to maintain its market share in the international export market (Mkenda & Rand, 2020).

Literatures have evidenced that successful export needs some essential skills, among of which practical skills are of great importance (Li, 2004; Ting *et al.*, 2010). Many businesses require advancing their staffs' capability towards positive export performance. This capacity building is equipped through skills-specific training and education (Bekteshi, 2019). Although a lot has been done about training and firm performance at local level but there is little

knowledge about training and firm performance at global level. It is in the light of this view, that this paper establishes the relationship between marketing skills training and SMEs export performance in Tanzania.

Education and Training has been cited to be one of the important elements for firm performance.

There are several approaches of explaining the training-performance relationship (Mubarik *et al.*, 2020). Human capital theory claims that individual workers have a set of skills and abilities which they can accumulate or improve through training and education (Becker, 1962). Numerous studies indicate that human capital is a source of competitive advantage (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2014; Baptista *et al.*, 2014). The general assumption is that the human capital of the founder improves firms' chances of survival (Bruederl *et al.*, 1992).

High level of education is valuable and fundamental factor in export markets and can influence better export performance because educations of managers have positive effect on total export sales revenue, profitability, growth and evaluation of export performance (Moghaddam, 2013). According to McCarthy *et al.*, (2010) intellectual market-based assets involve types of knowledge a firm possesses about its competitive environment which enable the firm to sense and forecast the future market trends.

Lack of market information and export knowledge of companies was observed in many nations to be an obstacle to firm performance (Valos & Baker, 1996; Hendrych, 1994; Gancel, 1995; and Reid, 1994). According to Piercy *et al.* (1998) there is straightforward linkage between exporting abilities and export rate. They further argued that competitive aptitudes in exporting are one of the principal factors affecting export performance. Beamish *et al.* (1986) in their call for Canadian exporters to plan for international business insisted that extensive business training has a positive relationship with export performance. In another observation, Welch and Wiedersheim-Paul (1980) recommended a more active pre-export preparation in form of training or education in order to generate information

about the potential complication and logistics about exporting. They further suggested that, giving a sector-specific education and well-targeted education to existing and intending exporters contributes to positive behavioral changes to the learners and could be a factor in determining whether a firm continues as an exporter or not. In the opinion of Ross and Whalen (1999), international business educators have been called for practical knowledge and international experimental education.

Organizational competence in terms of accumulated knowledge and bundles of skills exercised through organizational processes enable firms to coordinate activities and make use of their assets (Andrews, 2015). Therefore, to be competitive in foreign as well as local markets, company managers are required to be aware of the various practical marketing skills and their effects on company export performance (Majlesara *et al.*, 2014).

Therefore, on the basis of literature review, this study hypothesizes that:

H0: There is no significant difference in SMEs export performance on the basis of marketing skills training.

H1: There is significant difference in SMEs export performance on the basis of marketing skills training.

### **Materials and Methods**

The study adopted a quantitative research approach. The specific SME survey was done in the City of Dar es Salaam. The city was chosen with respect to large number of SMEs found in the area and its dominance in export business. In order to carry out SME survey, multi-stage sampling procedure was employed in which both non-probabilistic and probabilistic sampling techniques were used. Centers for entrepreneurship training, area of study and the institutions' building capacity for SMEs were chosen by using judgmental sampling technique. Random sampling technique was used in selection of SMEs which deal with export business and whose managers/ owners had received marketing skills training. The sample size of 60 respondents was used. Data collection in this study used primary sources in

which questionnaire was administered. Closed questions (choice of boxes and Likert scale) were given to respondents in order to facilitate effective collection of sought information. The respondents were asked for degree of agreement with a series of statements on an item measure. The LIKERT scale was introduced and deemed to determine the intensity with which respondents feel about asked questions. The collected data were analyzed by using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypotheses. Export performance in this study is measured by export sales.

### **Results and Interpretations**

#### ***SMEs export sales before and after Training***

SMEs exports in terms of sales before and after training were compared in order to establish the relationship between marketing skills training and export performance. The findings presented in figure 1 indicate a remarkable improvement on firms export performance after SMEs owners/managers exposure to marketing skills training. This implies that marketing skills training contributes to the firm's exporting ability and increases chances of more exportation.

#### ***SMEs Owners/ Managers Views on Outcomes of marketing skills Training***

Table 1 indicates the views of SMEs Owners/ Managers on outcomes of their exposure to marketing skills training. The findings indicate that, majority of respondents, overall, more than 80% had opinion that marketing skill they have gained in training had contributed to their export performance.

Referring to the findings, it is evidently clear that there is positive relationship between marketing skills training and export performance of SMEs. By receiving marketing skills training SMEs Owners/Managers were able to conduct effectively market research, manage overseas market information, expand business in foreign markets, adopt competitive relationship management, foster market entry and exit strategies, establish network with foreign business partners, and explore overseas business opportunities.

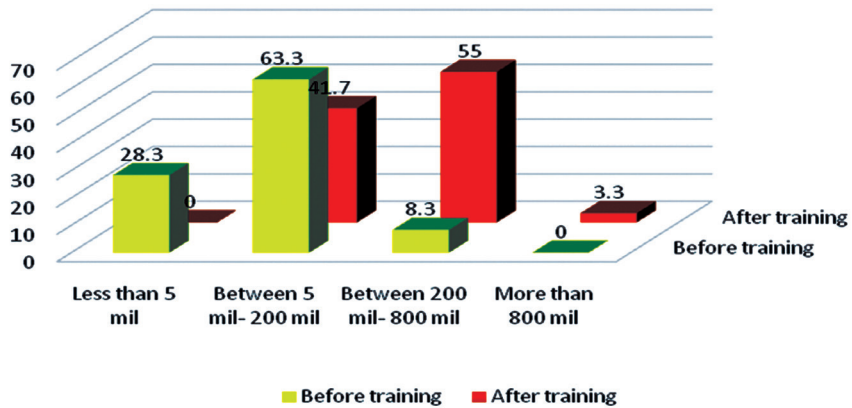


Figure 1: Export sales revenue before and after attending training

Table 1: Outcomes of Marketing Skills training

Descriptions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Became capable of conducting effectively market research	23 (38.3)*	33 (55)	3 (5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	60 (100)
Sound management of market demand	29 (48.3)	30 (50)	1 (1.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	60 (100)
Effective distribution chain management	20 (33.3)	34 (56.7)	6 (10)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	60 (100)
Adopted competitive relationship management	25 (41.7)	33 (55)	2 (3.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	60 (100)
Fostered market entry and exit strategies	21 (35)	35 (58.3)	4 (6.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	60 (100)
Capable of adopting effective marketing strategies integration	14 (23.3)	37 (61.7)	9 (15)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	60 (100)
Become able to identify foreign market opportunities	13 (21.7)	37 (61.7)	9 (15)	1 (1.7)	0 (0.0)	60 (100)

\*Numbers in brackets are percentages (%)

Source: Survey Data (2017)

**Testing Statistical Hypothesis**

H0: There is no significant difference in SMEs export performance on the basis of marketing skills training.

H1: There is significant difference in SMEs export performance on the basis of marketing skills training.

Levene’s test for homogeneity of variance was conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of homogeneity. Results of Levene’s test for homogeneity presented in Table 2 shows that Significance value (.569) was greater than .05; hence, there was no violation of the assumption of the homogeneity of variance.

**Table 2: Test of Homogeneity of Variances of Sales Revenue After training**

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.569	2	57	.569

The study conducted a one-way ANOVA to determine if there is any relationship between marketing skills training and SMEs export performance. The findings are presented in Table 3.

investigated on the impact of competitive advantage on SMEs performance in Nigeria. The study revealed that, a significant obstacle to performance growth of sustainable small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) throughout the

**Table 3: ANOVA Analysis of significant difference in SMEs export performance on the basis of marketing skills training**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.067	2	2.033	8.210	.001
Within Groups	14.117	57	.248		
<b>Total</b>	<b>18.183</b>	<b>59</b>			

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) result presented in Table 3 revealed that p-value (0.001) is less than the alpha level  $\alpha=0.05$ ,  $p(0.001)<0.05$ . This result indicates that the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is significant difference in SMEs export performance on the basis of marketing skills training

developing world is a lack of knowledge, skills, attitude on marketing skills and awareness to cope and direct the finances of their organization in a hardy, transparent, and professional way. This study is supported also by Juma and Said (2018) who conducted a study on SME Globalization in Tanzania context. The study cited inadequate business training and skills being one among factors for SMEs failure. In another observation these findings are in contrast with the study done by Njoroge and Gathungu (2013) in which a majority of the respondents (68%) do not attribute their ability to market their products to entrepreneurship training.

### Discussion of the Findings

The findings show that there is significant difference in SMEs export performance on the basis of marketing skills training. Marketing skills training contributes to the increase in SMEs' export performance. The study also found out that, the influence of marketing skills training on export performance of SMEs would include ability to conduct effectively market research, manage overseas market information, expand business in foreign markets, adopt competitive relationship management, foster market entry and exit strategies, establish network with foreign business partners, and explore overseas business opportunities.

The findings align with those of Beamish *et al.* (1986), Yahaya and Mutarubukwa (2015), Deng *et al.* (2003), Welch and Wiedersheim-Paul (1980), Piercy *et al.* (1998) and Bekteshi (2019) who observed that training is able to raise export intensity and average export sales of firms.

The findings also are in reflection of the findings of Eniola and Entebang (2014) who

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that marketing skills training has significant influence on SMEs export performance. There is significant difference in SMEs export performance on the basis of marketing skills training. The skills acquired by entrepreneurs contribute to their performance which enable them to have ability to conduct effectively market research, manage overseas market information, expand business in foreign markets, adopt competitive relationship management, foster market entry and exit strategies, establish network with foreign business partners, and explore overseas business opportunities.

Due to the positive relationship between marketing skills training and SMEs export

performance, stakeholders in this important sector to establish more interventions of building capacity to SMEs owners/managers on marketing attitudes in order to help them to be competitive in international business and promote overall export performance. In addition, the government should improve business environment by minimizing exportation costs and develop international networks for Local SMEs so as they can easily access international markets. Finally, the study looked on the influence marketing skills training on SMEs export performance and ignored other factors which might contribute to export performance; therefore, the study suggests that further studies should look on other factors which contribute to export performance.

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