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Assessing the Quality of Local Government Training on Small Medium Enterprises(SMEs) in the Implementation of Local Economic Development initiatives (LED) in Ghana

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ABSTRACT: Emerging economies are increasingly pressurised to implement local economic development (LED) initiatives as an intervention strategy for sustainability. Prior studies have underscored the significant achievement of first-world countries after embracing LED initiatives such as rapid job creation, poverty reduction, and money generation. This study presents and analyses the quality of MMDAs training on SMEs in implementing local economic development (LED) initiatives in Ghana's Ga West and Kpando Municipalities. This study adopted a case study research design using a quantitative approach to assess the quality of local government training programmes for SMEs implementing LED in the Ga West and the Kpando Municipalities. Three hundred and thirty-one (331) SMEs were used for the study. The study found that most SMEs have knowledge of business-related training programmes available at the Municipalities and have also benefited from these training programmes. The available training programmes included capacity building, Record/Bookkeeping, Safety/Health and Environmental management training, among others. However, some of these training programmes did not meet the SMEs' training needs, while others did not know this. Finally, the paper provided recommendations to improve how training policies.

KEYWORDS: Local Economic Development (LED), Metropolitan Municipal District Assemblies (MMDAs), Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Training programs.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, implementing Local Economic Development (LED) initiatives has gained importance, as it has become a popular socioeconomic development strategy, especially in emerging economies. LED can be defined as the localised process of economic development in which local governments collaborate with various stakeholders (Simba, Nyandroro, Munyoro & Chimhade, 2015; Pieterse, 2006) within a particular geographic region, generating economic development and ultimately improving the quality of life for all inhabitants of that region (Meyer 2014; Trousadale 2000). LED is an essential and valuable government strategy to promote socioeconomic developments within a locality (Simba et al., 2015). Thus, the focus of LED initiaves is on identifying economic processes for building economic capacity to shape local communities' economic development and quality of life.

The participation of governments in local economic development has recently raised a lot of attention and discussion in many developing countries where Ghana is not an exception. Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa, Senegal, and Uganda, to mention but a few, sub-national levels of government are participating in the business of economic development that occurs at the local level (Olowu, 1988; Ofei-Aboagye, 2009).

In Ghana, the drive in the direction of local government and decentralisation with movements towards more robust district and local action in development is highly concerned with its development order of business. Ghana has been pursuing the policy of decentralisation and local governments since 1987. These local governments are responsible for promoting local-level development, including LED. To this end, LED in Ghana is about government and local government working together with other partners to create job opportunities, generate income, provide infrastructure, and reduce poverty (Agbevade, 2018). However, the implementation of LED has not been without challenges, such as a lack of resources. Akudugu (2018) note that Local Government Authorities (Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs)) are responsible for implementing LED strategies in Ghana. To him, LED should be a bottom-up approach facilitated by the joint action of multiple stakeholders. The scholar further notes that this

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strategy has been successfully implemented by international bodies such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and GIZ, a German-based organisation. These agencies see the strategy as a novel, especially for promoting economic development in developing communities.

As cited by (Mensah et al., 2013), the crucial key point of LED is that it is intended to create jobs, encourage and support small medium enterprises (SMEs), improve economic growth and increase creative opportunities, and use business as a means to end poverty. Investing in initiatives that empower local SME businesses is the best way to ensure job creation. Moreover, by supporting them, the economic growth agenda can advance. Rogerson (2015) reiterates that specific LED strategies to mobilise local economic potential include innovative interventions to strengthen local SMEs, their capacity, and local institutions.

Several LED-related studies (Agbevade, 2018; Akudugu, 2018; Akudugu & Laube,2013; Mensah et al., 2013; Mensah et al., 2013; Oduro-Ofori, 2011; Sarfoh, 2020; Sarpong et al., 2020) have been conducted focusing on Ghana. Most of these LED-based studies examined the causes of implementation challenges and how to address them to find sustainable solutions. However, given the relevant studies on LED deployment in Ghana, there seems to be a consensus among scholars that LED deployment is effective when implemented by local government authorities.

Although LED implementation faces some challenges, it continues to be implemented by local government authorities, but the quality of local government training for SMEs in LED implementation in Ghana is unsurpassed. This paper explores the belief that the LED initiative's training programs can be essential in empowering local SMEs by improving skills, promoting economic development and creating employment opportunities. Overall, the paper adds to the literature on LED implementation by linking the development of entrepreneurial skills through LED training programs and their ramification for upskilling and empowering local SMEs in Ghana.

THEORITICAL PREMISE

Complexity of Joint Action Implementation Theory

Implementation problems arise when desired results are not achieved among the intended beneficiaries. Related to this study, we are interested in assessing how local government's quality training for SMEs on LED implementation has helped improve their skills through job creation.

In policy formulation and implementation involving many stakeholders, diverse interests lead to the failure of policy implementation. However, policy implementation processes involving many stakeholders with common areas of interest are more likely to achieve the intended goals of the policy (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984).

Using Parisotto's definition of LED, he defined LED as a local, participatory development process in a specific area, promoting partnership agreements between local private and public stakeholders and developing a common development strategy, enabling the joint design and implementation, thereby stimulating the use of local resources and the creation of competitive advantage (Parrisotto, 2007). Therefore, a successful LED implementation can be described as involving multiple stakeholders with a common goal.

The study found that the Ghanaian ecosystem is a multi-participant environment. This paper, therefore, builds on the concept of Jeffery L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky's Complexity of Joint Action Implementation Theory. The theory focuses on the complexities that arise when many different stakeholders are involved in formulating, implementing and evaluating common interests (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984).

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

This study is a case study research design using a quantitative data to assess the quality of local government's training programmes for SMEs in implementing LED in the Ga West and the Kpando Municipalities in Ghana. Owners/ Entrepreneurs of SMEs were the respondents for the study. Three hundred and thirty-one (331) SMEs were used for the study. The study used surveys and questionnaires to collect data from entrepreneurs/SMEs. The Quantitative data obtained from participants were analysed using SPSS version 26. The preliminary inference test was a chi-square association test designed to measure demographic variables.

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RESULTS

Demographic data

The demographic data analysis results from the survey are presented in frequencies and percentages in the table below.

Table 1: Demographic data

Variable/Question	Response	N	%
Type of Business	Family-owned Business	22	6.65
	Partnership	23	6.96
	Private limited company	8	2.42
	Sole Trader	278	83.99
	Total	**331**	**100.0**
Nature of the enterprise	Export	5	1.51
	Farming	35	10.57
	Manufacturing	120	36.25
	Real Estate	6	1.81
	Retail trading	4	1.21
	Services	161	48.64
	Total	**331**	**100.0**
For how long has your company been in operation?	Less than 1 year	10	3.02
	Between 1 and 5 years	91	27.49
	Between 6 and 10 years	101	30.51
	Between 11 and 15 years	84	25.38
	Over 15 years	45	13.60
	Total	**331**	**100.0**
How many people are employed by your enterprise?	1 to 25	53	16.01
	26 to 50	169	51.06
	51 to 75	97	29.31
	Over 75	12	3.63
	Total	**331**	**100.0**
What is the qualification of your management team?	None	46	13.90
	Primary/JSS	178	53.78
	Secondary School	98	29.61
	Tertiary	9	2.72
	Total	**331**	**100.0**
What is the average monthly turnover of your business?	Less than GHS15000	226	68.28
	GHS15000.00 - GHS25000	96	29.00
	GHS25000 - GHS35000	9	2.72
	Total	**331**	**100.0**

The results presented in table 1 indicate that 22 SMEs, or 6.65% were family-owned businesses, another 23 (6.95%) were partnerships, 8 (2.42%) were private limited companies, and 278 or 83.99% were sole traders. Sole traders, therefore, formed the majority of the sample. In terms of nature of enterprises, 5 (1.51%) were in the export sector, 35 (10.57%) were in farming, another 120 (36.25%) were manufacturers, 6 (1.81%) were in the real estate business while 4 (1.21%) were retail traders, and the remaining 161 (48.64%) were in the services sector (excluding the real estate sector). Exporters were businesses whose primary activity was

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buying and exporting commodities. The sample was dominated by service industry companies that made up slightly over half of all the respondents.

In terms of years in operation, 10 (3.02%) had operated for less than a year, 91 (27.49%) for 1 to 5 years, 101 (30.51%) for 6 to 10 years and 84 (25.38%) for 11 to 15 years. Also, 45 (13.6%) SMEs had operated for over 15 years. The most significant number of SMEs had operated for between 6 to 10 years, closely followed by those that had operated for 1 to 5 m years.

Table 1 also presents results on the number of employees employed by SMEs. 53 SMEs (16.01%) employed 1 to 25 people, 169 (51.06%) employed 26 to 50 people and 97 (29.31%) employed between 51 to 75 people. The remaining 12 (3.63%) SMEs had employed over 75 people. Thus, most SMEs employ between 25 to 50 people. Regarding the highest management team qualification, the results showed that 178 (53.78%) SMEs had managers with Primary/JSS education while 98 (29.61%) had a management team with secondary education. Only 9 (2.72%) of the SMEs had managers with tertiary education. The remaining 46 (13.90%) SMEs had management teams with no qualifications. Thus, over half the SMEs were managed by a manager with primary/JHS education as their highest academic credential. Generally, the data indicates low skills and education among SME managers. Of the 331 SMEs, 226 (68.28%) had an average monthly turnover of less than GHS15000 and 96 (29.28%) earned between GHS15000.00 - GHS25000. The remaining 9 (2.72%) had an average monthly turnover ranging from GHS25000 to GHS35000.

In summary, the sample is dominated by sole trader SMEs mainly operating in the services and manufacturing sectors and led by managers with low formal and tertiary education levels.

Knowledge of and benefits from local government SME initiatives

Table 2 shows results obtained when SMEs were asked whether they had any knowledge of any intentions by local government to help SMEs with business-related training and whether their businesses have ever benefited from such.

Table 2: Knowledge of and benefits from local government SME initiatives

Statement/Question	Response	Frequency	Valid Percent
Do you know of any intentions by the local government to help SMEs with business-related training?	No	45	13.60
	Yes	286	86.40
	Total	**331**	**100,0**
Has your business benefited from any of the initiatives by the local government?	No	26	9.09
	Yes	260	90.91
	Total	**286**	**100,0**

Of 331 SMEs, 286 (86.40%) knew about the local government's intention to help SMEs with business-related training, while 45 (13.60%) did not. Furthermore, out of the SMEs that knew about the local government's intention to help SMEs, 260 (90.92%) had benefitted from such initiatives, while 26 (9.09%) had not. Therefore, most of the surveyed SMEs were aware of the local government initiatives and benefitted from at least one such initiative.

Training benefits from the LED training programmes

The 308 SMEs that had been provided with training opportunities through the local government's initiatives were further requested to identify these courses. Figure 1 below shows the sample's breakdown by training programmes received. Respondents were allowed to select more than one response; hence the totals do not add to 100%.

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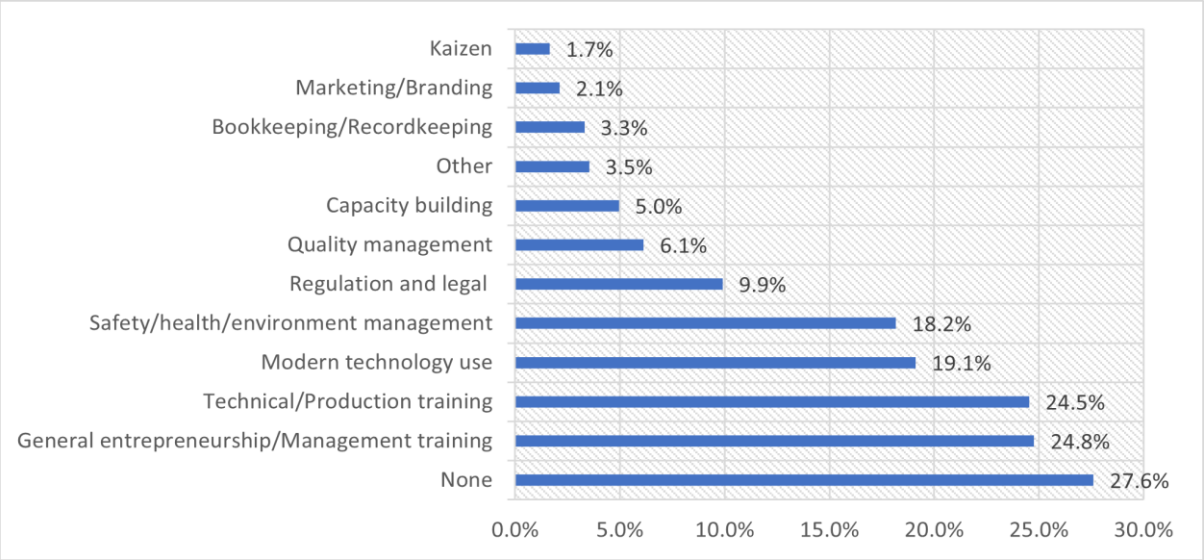

Figure 1: Programmes benefiited by SMEs at the local Municipality

Table 3: Which Programme has your business benefited from by the local Municipality?

	Benefitted (N)	Not benefitted	% Benefitted
None	116	308	27,6%
General entrepreneurship/Management training	105	319	24,8%
Technical/Production training	104	320	24,5%
Modern technology use	81	343	19,1%
Safety/health/environment management	77	347	18,2%
Regulation and legal	42	382	9,9%
Quality management	26	398	6,1%
Capacity building	21	403	5,0%
Other	15	409	3,5%
Bookkeeping/Recordkeeping	14	410	3,3%
Marketing/Branding	9	415	2,1%
Kaizen	7	417	1,7%

A total of 105 (24.8%) SMEs had benefitted from General entrepreneurship/Management training, 104 (24.5%) from technical/production training, 81 (19.1%) from training on the modern use of technology and 77 (18.2%) from safety, health and environmental courses. On the other hand, less than 10% benefited from Regulation and legal training (42 or 9.9%), Quality Management (26 or 6.1%), Capacity building (21 or 5%), Bookkeeping/Recordkeeping (14 or 3.3%), Marketing/Branding (9 or2.1%) and Kaizen courses (less than 2%). Thus. The most attended programmes under the local government's training initiatives were General entrepreneurship/Management training, 104 (24.5%) from technical/production training. Nonetheless, these were provided to a minority (less than 33.3%) of the surveyed SMEs, indicating a generally low uptake or availability of the available courses.

Capacities created in SMEs by the training efforts

A further question also collected data on how the programmes benefitted the recipient SMEs. The responses were not mutually exclusive, and the respondents were free to select more than one response. The results thereof are summarised in figure 3 below:

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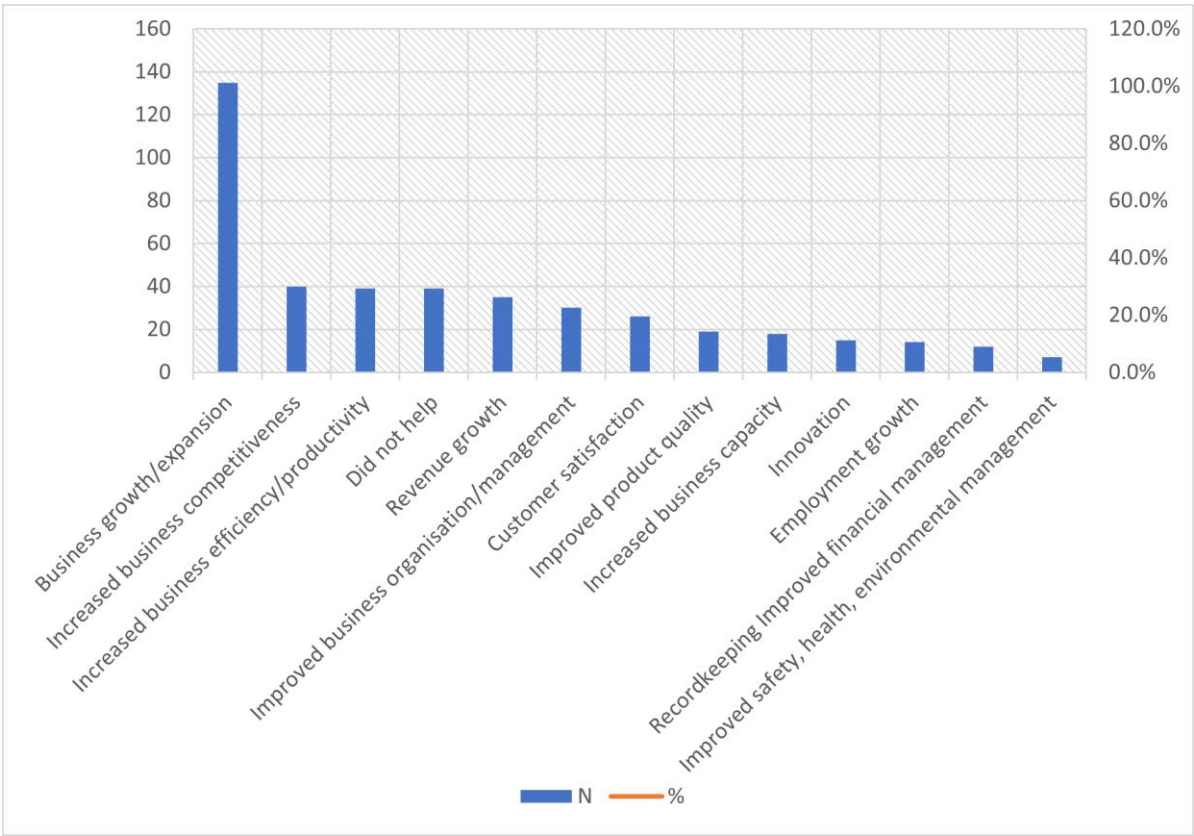

Figure 2: How did the Programme help you improve things around your business?

Table 4: How did the Programme help you improve things around your business?

Benefit	N	%
Business growth/expansion	135	43,8%
Increased business competitiveness	40	13,0%
Increased business efficiency/productivity	39	12,7%
Did not help	39	12,7%
Revenue growth	35	11,4%
Improved business organisation/management	30	9,7%
Customer satisfaction	26	8,4%
Improved product quality	19	6,2%
Increased business capacity	18	5,8%
Innovation	15	4,9%
Employment growth	14	4,5%
Recordkeeping Improved financial management	12	3,9%
Improved safety, health, and environmental management	7	2,3%

The most realised benefit was *business growth/expansion* realised by 135 (43, 8%) SMEs, followed by *Increased business competitiveness* by 40 (13%) and *increased business efficiency/productivity* by 39 (12.7%). Also, 39 (12.7%) SMEs believed that the programmes did not help at all, while 35 (11.4%) reported realising an increase in revenue after attending the programmes. In

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the survey, 30 (9.7%) of the SMEs also realised *improved business organisation/management, 26 (8.4%)* Customer satisfaction, 19 (6.2%) Improved product quality, 18 (5.8%) Increased business capacity and 15 (4.9%) reported becoming more innovative after the programmes. A total of 14 (4.5%) reported that they were able to employ more people as a result of the programmes, while 12 (3.9%) benefitted through improved Recordkeeping, Improved financial management and lastly, 7 (2.3%) through improved safety, health, and environmental management.

The results above show benefits associated with attending the training programmes provided by the local Municipality. However, these benefits were generally realised by minimal percentages of those who attended. In all the instances, less than half of all the attendees benefitted from any particular advantage treated through the training efforts. This highlights the fragmented nature of the training programmes, and at the same time, it also suggests that not all training beneficiaries will realise the intended SME development benefits.

Offered programmes versus training needs

The SMEs were asked to opine whether the Programme offered by the local Municipality serves their training needs. Figure 4 below shows their responses.

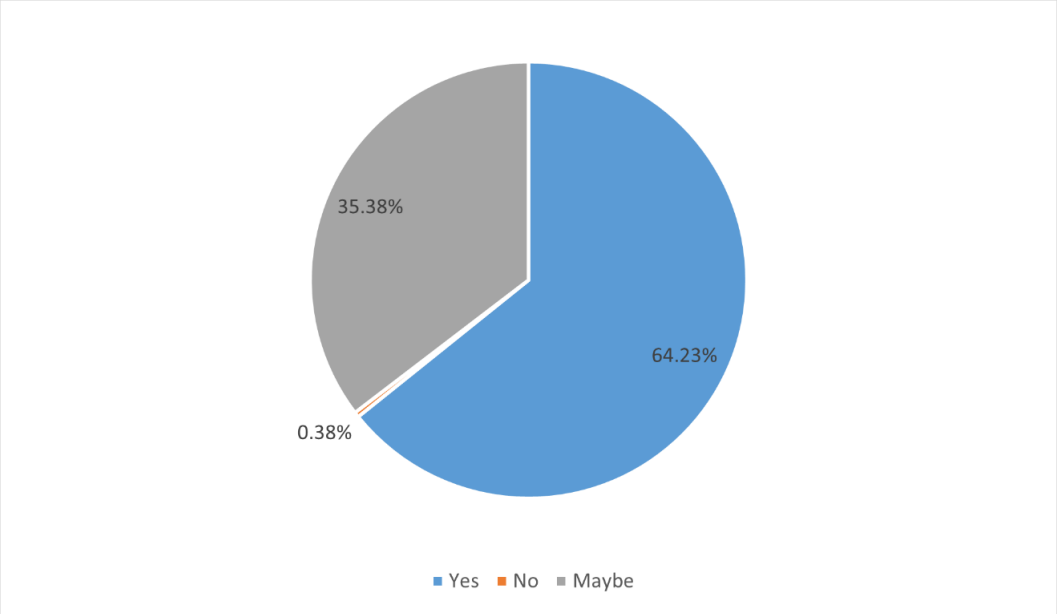

Figure 3 : Did the Programme offered by the local Municipality serve your training needs?

Out of the 260 SMEs, 167 (64.23%) were sure that the programmes offered by the local Municipality serve their training needs, while 92 (35.38%) were unsure whether they had or had not served their needs. Only 1 SME said that the training programmes did not help.

DISCUSSION

The first objective of this study was to ascertain the knowledge of and available MMDAs training programmes to SMEs in Ghana. The study shows that many SMEs knew what LED was and the government's intentions to assist SMEs. However, a study by Sarpong, Sarfoh and Anaafo (2020) asserts that a lack of LED knowledge exists among SMEs and local authorities. Local authorities failed to inform SMEs about LED as they did not have the requisite knowledge resulting in poor LED-aware entrepreneurship (Sarpong et al., 2020). However, judging from the responses, this is not a significant problem among the surveyed SMEs.

This study revealed that SMEs had been provided training opportunities through LED. Sarpong et al. (2020) discuss various skill sets that effective Ghanaian LED human capital capacity building must entail. These were vocational, technical, managerial, and entrepreneurial skills – albeit not mutually exclusive. In this study, the first five skills developed were

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entrepreneurial/managerial skills (General entrepreneurship/Management training), followed by technical/vocational skills (Technical/Production training and Modern technology use). The study's findings are generally in line with the skill sets meant to create competent entrepreneurs as per Sarpong et al.'s recommendations. Abayase, Andoh-Nartey and Amponsah (2021) also agree that skills development is needed to integrate technical, vocational and management components. However, the above list does not explicitly highlight personal growth skills development (albeit they could be under general entrepreneurship). A study by Ackah, Sammo and Hammond (2019) highlights the significance of these skills in developing Ghana, further noting that their absence in most entrepreneurs drastically disadvantaged their effectiveness as business owners/managers.

However, this study did not focus on the optimum integration levels for different skill sets. Sarpong et al. (2020) highlight the lack of skilling among entrepreneurs as a factor that reduced LED success, citing that ant skills development initiatives did not reach some entrepreneurs. This is highlighted in the findings where 27.6% of the SMEs indicated that no LED skills development initiatives had ever been availed to them. In a study conducted in the Atebubu-Amantin District in Ghana, Mensah, Bawole and Ahenkan (2013) comment that LED skills development capacities in district assemblies were sometimes weakened by the shortages of skilled trainers who could customise training to meet local needs. This resulted in two problems – both highlighted in the findings. The first was that some entrepreneurs received no training. The second was that some entrepreneurs received the training they considered inappropriate or irrelevant to their needs. This is reflected in the 35.38% who believed that while they got trained, their training did not have any positive benefits in response to the question - *Did the Programme offered by the local Municipality serve your training needs?*

The study collected data on how the provided programmes benefitted the recipient SMEs by assessing the quality of local government training for SMEs. Several studies have investigated the benefits and effectiveness of various entrepreneurial skills development programmes in Ghana, albeit a few have been carried out within an LED context. For example, a study titled "Entrepreneurial Skills as a Motivation in Empowering Women in Rural Communities in Ghana" by Ackah, Sammo and Hammond (2019) indicated that training programmes in rural communities failed to contribute to empowerment and employment creation as envisaged. In this study, this reality is represented by less than 6% of entrepreneurs who believed that their skilling was contributing to employment creation.

Some studies, however, resonate with the benefits of entrepreneurship training discussed by the surveyed entrepreneurs. The view that entrepreneurship education and training positively impacted business growth and expansion, business competitiveness and efficiency/productivity resonate with the assertions by Grecu and Denes (2017). Trained entrepreneurs had an enhanced capacity to grow and succeed in business compared to those without training.

This study reveals that though some entrepreneurs found benefits in skills development programmes, the reported positive outcomes were reflected in a small number of businesses. For example, only 13% of the entrepreneurs believed that the training programmes had increased the business opportunities available. The results suggest that many entrepreneurs had access to training but somehow missed the benefits thereof. Studies that discuss the effectiveness of entrepreneurship training. As highlighted earlier, Mensah, Bawole and Ahenkan (2013) cited the problem of trainer capacity and poor training customisation. Other scholars, however, believe that training alone was insufficient to bring about desired benefits like increased competitiveness and growth (Ackah, Sammo, & Hammond, 2019). Ackah, Sammo and Hammond (2019) pointed to the adverse effect of external factors like the poor economic environment as contributing to how healthy skills produce the desired outcomes. This comment is critical because most owners/managers interviewed classified the SME operating environment as fair rather than exceptional. The findings can also be read in conjunction with responses that despite getting training, many SMEs did not receive any other forms of development support like finance.

CONCLUSION

Local Economic Development implantation is primarily a strategy to promote economic growth at the local level by addressing constraints and improving the overall business environment to encourage entrepreneurial behaviour and investments. This paper has examined the quality of training offered by MMDAs to SMEs in implementing LED in the Ga West and Kpando Municipalities. The study revealed several training programmes offered by the MMDAs to SMEs. These training programmes are necessary as LED implementation is crucial for local economies and can be an effective tool in accelerating progress towards poverty reduction and achieving MDGs locally. Therefore, the paper recommends that, any training program towards implementing LED

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initiatives should be geared towards SMEs' training needs. Thus, local governments should be empowered to determine small business policy in their communities, and focus on specific training needs and demands of entrepreneurs which are recommended noting the gap between provided training versus desired training.

Both theoritical and practical implications can be derived from this research paper. For the theoretical implication, our paper support the notion of understanding more about the roles of stakeholders in the implementation of LED iniatives, especially at the local level, is critical to achieving the desired goals of improving living standards and eradicating poverty. The positive implications of multi-stakeholder involvement are central to the theory of joint complexity action implantation theory (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). The results of this paper confirms that, stakeholders engagement are essential aspects for successful LED initiative programs especially at the municipalities. Second, the results show the positive impact of LED as a strategy for empowering SMEs. Thus, the view that entrepreneurial training had a positive firm growth and competitiveness is consistent with Akudugu's (2013) claim in these results.

Practical implications are crucial for all stakeholders (both non-state and state actors), particularly at the local level. It is important for local government authorities to fully understand the positive impact on the correlation between human capita and local Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. Therefore, finding effective means of harnessing human capital and utilzing capacity development organizations and institutions to ensure economic vality and long-term economic properity is therefore the overriding resposisibility of MMDAs. The study highlights the benefits SMEs have gained from LED training programs, but some of these trainings did not meet their specific needs. Therefore, the acquisition of the precise skills required is lacking. Hence, this should be an important area for stakeholders to consider.

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