



**INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE
GROWTH OF SMALL, MEDIUM AND MICRO ENTERPRISES
IN OVERSTRAND LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, WESTERN CAPE
PROVINCE**

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ACADEMIC INTEGRITY DECLARATION

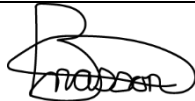
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ABSTRACT

Background: Small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) play a vital economic role in South Africa, yet high failure rates persist. Removing obstacles to growth is key. This study explored internal and external factors, plus government support perceptions, affecting SMMEs in Overstrand Municipality.

Significance: Understanding growth barriers can inform policies assisting South African SMME advancement, economic participation and unemployment reduction.

Methodology: An interpretivism, qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was employed to capture 12 owners' experiences. Purposive sampling ensured participants met National Small Business Act criteria for SMME classification. The thematic analysis examined perspectives on motivation, skills, infrastructure, finance access and government backing.

Results: Findings revealed constrained growth due to capability shortfalls around business expertise, exacerbated by infrastructure gaps and limited external funding. Despite national SMME promotion efforts, support was considered inadequate and mismatched from entrepreneur realities. Key internal obstacles were financial illiteracy and human capital deficits, only partially mitigated via training. Externally, infrastructure deficiencies regarding utilities, premises and transport fundamentally impeded optimal development. Market reach was also curtailed by locational disadvantages.

Conclusions: Targeted skills programs demonstrate formalisation benefits, indicating that adult education and vocational training investments can empower small business owners. However, external barriers around infrastructure and finance must be confronted through upgrades, commercial hubs and alternative funding models.

Recommendations: Proposed interventions include expanding entrepreneurship courses, constructing affordable shared services infrastructure, easing access to grants, creating a digital assistance portal and requiring regular public-private dialogues to enhance policy coordination and responsiveness. Additional suggestions comprise market access assistance via funded expo participation and paid internships.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASGISA	Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa
BEE	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
BER	Bureau for Economic Research
CIDB	Construction Industry Development Board
COVID-19	Coronavirus
DSBD	Department of Small Business Development
DTI	Department of Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
GEM	Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
LED	Local Economic Development
NYDA	National Youth Development Agency
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OLM	Overstrand Local Municipality
SARS	South African Revenue Service
SBA	Small Business Administration
SBP	Small Business Institute
SEDA	Small Enterprise Development Agency
SEFA	Small Enterprise Finance Agency
SMME	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise
UNISA	University of South Africa
WCPT	Western Cape Provincial Treasury

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

This chapter sets out the aims of this research report; it provides context and identifies the research problem and associated objectives. Furthermore, it briefly discusses the significance of the study and the research methods utilised. A high-level overview of the literature review is also presented, followed by a succinct discussion of the methodological approach. To conclude, this chapter outlines the structure of the research paper to serve as a map for the remainder of the study.

1.2. Background

Small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs) are considered critical to economies globally, especially in developing nations like South Africa (Chimucheka, 2015). Most governments characterise SMMEs as businesses with up to 249 employees (OECD, 2023). In South Africa, the National Small Business Act 102 of 1996 offers the legal definition of an SMME as an independent business entity, together with any branches or subsidiaries, including cooperative ventures, managed by one or more owners and operating in any industry or subgroup. Furthermore, the Act classifies small firms by size, specifying they have annual turnover under R51 million or 0-200 staff, varying by industry.

SMMEs create employment for local residents, provide families with livelihoods, contribute to sustainable economic growth and equitable income distribution in addition to igniting local economic development (SEDA, 2022). The growth of SMMEs is therefore crucial in addressing the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment in South Africa (Chimucheka, 2015; Zhou & Gumbo, 2021). The growth of SMMEs and job creation are intertwined. Neneh and Vanzyl (2014) emphasise that the growth of SMMEs is the primary driver of employment creation, which is essential for economic development.

The Small Enterprise Development Agency (2022) indicated that about 2.4 million SMMEs were operating in the South African economy, accounting for over 9.7 million jobs (employing between 50 and 60 per cent of South Africa's workforce) in 2022. SEDA further reported that SMMEs contributed approximately 39.5 per cent of all business turnover in the

country (SEDA, 2022). While the GDP contributions from South Africa's SMMEs lag behind those of other more developed countries (39% compared to 57% in the European Union), the results are indicative of the important role that SMMEs play and can play in the South African economy (Rajagopaul, Magwentshu & Kalidas, 2020).

On a national, provincial and municipal/local level, the South African government has made significant efforts to support the development of SMMEs. Noteworthy programmes aimed towards the growth of SMMEs in South Africa include the founding of SEDA, Khula, Ntsika, the National Development Fund, the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA), and Umsombovu Youth Fund (Udimal & Biyase, 2021). However, a low start-up rate and a high level of business discontinuance characterise the South African SMME ecosystem, which does not help address the country's triple challenges referred to above. According to Chimucheka (2015), more than 70% of SMMEs fail within three years of their establishment. This is a direct consequence of the challenges these businesses face, which include, amongst others, access to markets, finance, appropriate infrastructure, and business development support (Neneh & Vanzyl, 2014; Chimucheka, 2015).

There is a need for a robust intervention to restructure and stimulate the local economy, with entrepreneurship and the growth of SMMEs being the underlying drivers to turn around the economic fortunes of South African economies. Growth is "written" as the primary determinant of success in a company's culture (Chimucheka, 2015). Growth promises expansion, increased profitability, new business, an increase in the number of employees, and the ability to draw in more highly developed individuals and/or the generation of increased resources.

Key concepts: Business Growth; Government Support; Internal and External Factors; SMMEs

1.3. Problem Statement

Despite substantial government attention, the SMME sector in South Africa continues to encounter obstacles, resulting in business failure or the stagnation of many nascent businesses (Maduku & Kaseeram, 2021).

Researchers in the field of entrepreneurship concur that challenges faced by SMMEs include a lack of training and education, limited access to financial resources, inaccessibility

to formal markets and appropriate technology, lack of support structures, and lack of access to other resources like human capital (Islam et al., 2021; Udimal & Biyase, 2021).

It has been reported that a significant percentage of SMMEs do not survive beyond their initial two years due to various challenges that hinder their growth potential (Nyathi, 2021). Recent research by the University of Western Cape revealed that South Africa has the highest SMME failure rate globally, with 70-80% of these enterprises failing within five years of their establishment. Those who manage to stay afloat typically do not grow much, as they remain unregistered micro-level enterprises (Nyathi, 2021).

Significant research has been done on the internal and external factors affecting SMME growth in South Africa, especially Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. However, limited research has been conducted for SMMEs in the Western Cape. In the third quarter of 2020, the Western Cape was home to over 268 000 SMMEs, the third largest population of SMMEs after Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal (SEDA, 2022).

In order to enhance the growth of SMMEs in the Western Cape province, it is important to investigate the factors that influence their development. This will help design and implement policies and programs that can effectively support SMMEs. Support providers need to understand the challenges faced by SMMEs, as this will enable them to offer appropriate assistance to business owners.

1.4. Research Question

The study will aim to provide an answer to the following research question:

- What are the main internal and external factors affecting the growth of SMMEs in the Overstrand Local Municipality, a local municipality in the Western Cape?

1.5. Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to identify the main factors impacting the growth of SMMEs in the Overstrand Local Municipality. To accomplish this objective, the following sub-objectives have been formulated:

- To determine the perception of SMMEs about the internal factors affecting business growth;

- To determine the perception of SMMEs about the external factors affecting business growth;
- To assess the perception of SMMEs about government support in enhancing SMME business growth.

1.6. Abbreviated Literature Review

Chapter Two includes a literature review that examines the existing literature on the variables utilised in this study. This section provides a concise literature review to introduce the variables that will be used in the study.

1.6.1. About Overstrand Local Municipality

Overstrand Local Municipality is situated in the Western Cape. The Overstrand municipal area has the second-largest economy in the Overberg District despite having the smallest geographic spread of any municipal area in the district, covering 1 675km² (WCPT, 2022). Hermanus is the primary commercial hub, with other towns being Gansbaai, Hawston, Kleinmond and Stanford (OLM, 2022; WCPT, 2022). The municipal area has 230 kilometres of coastline, making it a popular tourist attraction for whale watching and shark cage diving. It also boasts fynbos, wineries, abalone farms, birding regions, and mountain ranges (WCPT, 2022).

In terms of current pricing, the Overstrand economy was expected to be worth R 7.3 billion in 2020 and R 8.0 billion in 2021. In 2020, 33 096 people in the municipal area were employed (WCPT, 2022).

In 2021, it was estimated that this declined by 1 475 employees. Relative to its total employment in 2020, the Overstrand municipal area saw a job loss of 14.7%. These jobs were primarily associated with the tourism industry and trade sector. As a result of the large decline in employment, the unemployment rate was predicted to rise from 18.3% in 2020 to 23.1% in 2021 (WCPT, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a large growth in SMMEs listed on the Central Supplier Database for the Overstrand municipal region, as SMMEs that required assistance from the government during the pandemic had to register on the municipal database, increasing from 2 134 in 2020 to 2 799 in 2022 (WCPT, 2022). It was highlighted that the government's

support for SMMEs went a long way in helping these businesses enhance their product offerings and nudging the economy in the correct direction (OLM, 2022).

1.6.2. Internal factors affecting SMMEs business growth

Udimal and Biyase (2021) identify the primary internal environment factors affecting SMME growth as business resources and the managerial qualities of the owner. In most cases, business owners can control internal factors affecting business growth.

Appropriate human resources and managerial skills are crucial for any business to grow. (Udimal & Biyase, 2021). The difficulty SMMEs have managing their organisational, managerial, and human resource needs was also mentioned by Ismail Albalushi and Naqshbandi (2022) as internal factors affecting SMME growth. Wiid and Cant (2021) claim that a significant portion of business failures are due to inadequate managerial abilities. Udimal and Biyase (2021) argue that business owners with the necessary managerial training, education, and experience can successfully manage SMMEs as they can lessen the impact of binding constraints on their businesses' growth. According to Baporikar, Nambira, and Gomxos (2016), a greater degree of entrepreneurial education positively impacts productivity, promoting business growth.

A business's internal and external environment affects its capacity to find and keep qualified human resources (Udimal & Biyase, 2021). Internally, the manager's ability to manage human resources through recruitment and selection and to create a conducive working environment affects business growth. Finding appropriate employees enables businesses to grow and succeed (Baporikar et al., 2016).

In addition to human resources, businesses also need to manage their finances. One of the major factors contributing to the failure of SMMEs is improperly managed cash flow and financing (Chimucheka, 2013). Agwa-Ejon and Mbohwa's (2015) research found that businesses with record-keeping and financial management issues are likelier to have financial troubles.

Additionally, a study has shown that business owners' motivation and attitude, reflected in their strategic decisions and operation methods, significantly impact small businesses' success (Sarwoko & Frisdiantara, 2016). If a business owner has no desire to manage and operate a business, the owner is less likely to put in effort to sustain and grow the business.

The most common internal factors affecting the growth of SMMEs are motivation, level of education and knowledge and skills of the owner. Human and financial management and market access were also identified as internal factors affecting business growth.

1.6.3. External factors affecting SMMEs business growth

Depending on how it is governed, the external environment can impede or encourage a business's growth (Udimal & Biyase, 2021). Location, competition, access to finance, infrastructure and government laws and legislation have been identified as the most common external factors impacting the growth of businesses.

According to Khoase et al. (2020), governments implement regulations to create a conducive environment for entrepreneurship and business growth. However, it has been noted that government laws and regulations can sometimes be considered a barrier to new businesses entering the economy and to the growth of established businesses (Khoase et al., 2020). The growth of SMMEs may be constrained by issues like rigid labour relations legislation, minimum wage regulations, and employment equity since they restrict businesses' flexibility in hiring and firing human resources (Udimal & Biyase, 2021).

According to Wiid and Cant (2021), one prominent challenge SMMEs face is limited access to finance or funding. Udimal and Biyase (2021) also identified access to finance as a significant obstacle to business growth, especially in developing nations. Due to the high administrative costs and risky nature of small businesses, financial institutions are less likely to lend to SMMEs, thereby further limiting their access to finance (Udimal & Biyase, 2021).

However, it should be highlighted that failure is imminent regardless of funding if an SMME has little to no access to markets, as a business's success derives from sales of goods or services (Mutoko, 2014). One of the essential aspects endangering the survival of SMMEs is their inability to access markets (BER, 2016). Competition with established industries may be to blame for certain SMMEs' inability to access markets (Chimucheka, 2013).

SMME growth is hampered by fierce market competition (Ismail Albalushi and Naqshbandi, 2022). Maduku and Kaseeram (2021) also identified high competition as one of the major problems facing small businesses in South Africa. Some small firms shut down due to poor sales, primarily due to their inability to compete. Sarwoko and Frisdiantara (2016) noted that SMMEs can easily fail due to competition. Consequently, enhanced capacity for marketing

and advertising may allow SMMEs to be resilient to competitive threats and raise their chances of success (Maduku & Kaseeram, 2021). Businesses need access to finance in order to increase advertising and marketing.

According to the BER (2016), a company's location can also affect how quickly it grows. In general, the concept of location is divided into urban and rural areas, and both types of locations have been recognised for their advantages and limitations (Fadahunsi, 2012). The location indirectly affects the business's ability to access markets and finance. According to BER (2016) research, small companies in distant areas are prevented from forming collectives to increase their bargaining power. As a result, they struggle to influence government institutions to better meet their needs (BER, 2016).

The BER (2016) indicates that limited access to physical infrastructure poses a major barrier to business growth and substantially increases operating expenses for SMMEs. This finding is echoed by Islam et al. (2021), who cite poor infrastructure as an obstacle for small business expansion. Providing SMMEs with easy access to transportation, utilities, and affordable land can facilitate their growth (BER, 2016). Infrastructure shortcomings disproportionately hinder rural SMMEs. Olarewaju and Msomi (2021), along with Wiid and Cant (2021) note that the original design of townships did not account for commercial activity, resulting in current spatial constraints that impede SMMEs.

1.6.4. Government support

Wiid and Cant (2021) conducted a study to assess the market conditions and business environment for SMMEs across Gauteng. The authors concluded that the most critical factor in ensuring the success of SMMEs is governmental support and assistance (Wiid & Cant, 2021). Most respondents, however, strongly disagreed that the government supports SMMEs (Wiid and Cant, 2021). According to Wiid and Cant (2021), SMMEs, particularly those in townships, have traditionally been perceived as receiving very little support from the government. Most SMME managers and owners feel that the government does not provide them with enough support (Chimucheka, 2013).

1.6.5. SMMEs business growth

SMME growth has been cited as a major factor in every nation's wealth, employment, and economic development (Neneh & Vanzyl, 2014). Governments need small business

expansion because rising SMMEs contribute significantly to economic growth (Zhou and Gumbo, 2021).

Small business growth is frequently associated with increases in revenue, total assets, and staff numbers, all of which are crucial for maintaining an SMME's operations (Zhou and Gumbo, 2021). Neneh and Vanzyl (2014) also identified employee growth, asset expansion, and revenue growth as the components of SMME growth. Researchers and practitioners generally concur that standard metrics for measuring business growth include sales, profit, employees, and total assets (Zhou and Gumbo, 2021).

1.6.6. Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a model that outlines the fundamental concepts, variables, relationships, and assumptions that underlie a specific research study or theoretical framework. It offers a theoretical basis for comprehending and examining a particular phenomenon or issue. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) state that the conceptual framework functions as a guiding tool for researchers, outlining the theoretical constructs and their interconnections during the investigation process. Based on the literature, the following conceptual framework was developed:

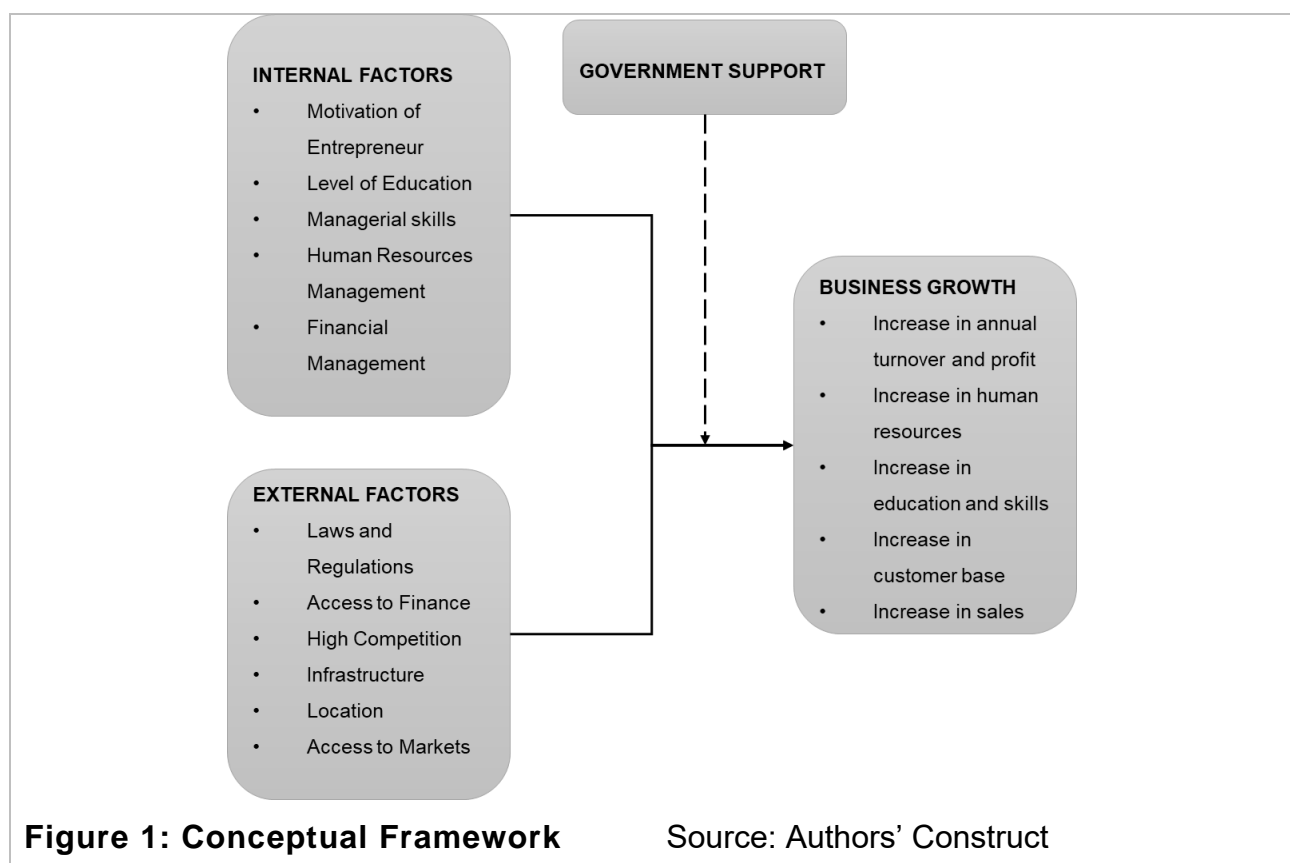


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Authors' Construct

The conceptual framework outlines the key internal and external factors that influence the growth of SMMEs. The conceptual framework guided the development of the methodology of the study.

1.7. Research Methodology

An interpretive paradigm was chosen to understand the phenomenon of the research. One of the key reasons for choosing interpretivism was its suitability for exploring and understanding complex social phenomena in detail. According to Creswell (2013), interpretive research was particularly effective at providing in-depth insights into people's experiences, meanings, and interpretations. The study captured nuanced perspectives and rich contextual information related to SMMEs and their growth factors by employing qualitative methods such as interviews.

A qualitative research approach was particularly suitable for investigating subjective and nuanced topics such as the perceptions of SMME owners and the factors that affect business growth. A non-probability sampling approach was selected for this research study. Based on this study's research topic and objectives, purposive sampling was the most suitable non-probability sampling method.

Data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The researcher chose semi-structured interviews as a cost-effective and time-efficient method for gathering data from SMME owners (Keller & Conradin, 2020). Semi-structured interviews facilitated the collection of open-ended data, enabling the researcher to delve into the research participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs (Maree, 2016). Saunders et al. (2012) suggested that a sample size of 5 to 25 is appropriate for conducting semi-structured interviews. As a result, a sample size of 10-15 was initially chosen, with the potential for expansion if theoretical saturation was not reached.

The method of data analysis chosen for this study was thematic analysis, which is widely employed for qualitative data analysis and was considered particularly appropriate for addressing the research question(s) at hand.

1.8. Ethical Consideration

The University of South Africa (UNISA) required ethical clearance before commencing any research study. The study was therefore conducted in accordance with UNISA's Research Ethics Policy. In this context, an ethical clearance certificate was obtained from UNISA before starting with data collection.

This study's key ethical issue was maintaining the anonymity of the SMMEs interviewed. According to Collins and Hussey (2014), autonomy is the promise made to participants that their names would not appear in the study. By assuring that the data supplied would not be traceable and shared outside of the research, confidentiality indicates that the participants' dignity would be protected (Collins & Hussey, 2014). The researcher protected participants' anonymity and confidentiality by withholding their names from the research report. All data collected was aggregated before reporting.

Furthermore, getting informed consent from the Overstrand Local Municipality and the SMMEs participating in the study was important. The researcher asked permission from the Municipal Manager as the authorised person of the Overstrand Local Municipality before commencing the study. An approval letter from the Municipal Manager was submitted to UNISA to obtain the necessary ethical clearance.

Informed consent was also obtained from each SMME. The main objective of informed consent was to provide the participants with the information they needed to decide whether or not they wished to participate in the research study. The researcher explained the study's purpose, advantages, and benefits to the SMMEs and allowed them to decide if they wanted to participate. Participation in the research study was strictly voluntary. There was no coercion of SMMEs.

1.9. Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction of the Study

- This chapter outlined and introduced the present research study. The chapter included the problem statement, research objectives, research question, ethical considerations, an overview of the research methodology, and an abbreviated literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

- Chapter two provides an analysis of the relevant literature pertaining to the present research study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

- This chapter discusses the research design and methodology, including the data collection and analysis process. The chapter also includes the sample size of the study and provides sufficient information regarding the reliability and validity of the chosen methodology.

Chapter 4: Results and Findings

- Chapter four discusses the data collected and analysed as part of the research study. This chapter provides details on the results and findings of the research, aiming to answer the research questions.

Chapter 5: Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

- The final chapter of the mini-dissertation includes a conclusion, recommendations, and limitations of the research study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The literature review aims to provide a comprehensive academic understanding of the internal and external factors that influence the growth of Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs). This section examines previous research on entrepreneurial motivation, managerial skills, financial management, access to markets, legal and regulatory environments, access to finance, competition, infrastructure, location, and government support.

2.2. Defining SMMEs

There is no universally accepted definition of SMMEs. Definitions vary from country to country and sometimes even between industries. SMMEs are generally defined based on the number of employees, total revenue, and total assets (Kumar, 2017). According to Rogerson (2013), SMMEs are businesses with asset values up to R 10 million (land and working capital excluded), employing between 10 and 300 people. However, Marivate (2014) uses a broader definition for SMMEs, stating they have asset values ranging from R2 500 to R20 million, again excluding land and working capital costs. Globally, most governments define SMMEs as enterprises that employ up to 249 persons (OECD, 2023).

In South Africa, SEDA's (2023) definition of SMMEs specifies that they are businesses with growth potential, managed by one or more individuals, with annual turnover not exceeding R 150 000. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI, 2017) further specifies that SMMEs are enterprises with an asset value of less than R 25 million, excluding land and working capital costs.

The National Small Business (Enterprise) Act of 1996 provides a legal definition of SMMEs in South Africa. According to this Act, SMMEs are independent businesses or cooperatives, which may include their branches or subsidiaries. The Act further classifies SMMEs based on their size, defining them as those with an annual turnover of up to R 51 million or those employing between 0 and 200 people, depending on the industry. This study will adopt the SMME definition established in the National Small Business Act.

2.3. Contribution of SMMEs to the South African Economy

SMMEs contribute significantly to economic growth, the reduction of unemployment, and poverty alleviation. SMMEs also promote innovation and competition, which leads to a more dynamic and diverse economy. Furthermore, SMMEs often positively impact local communities by providing goods and services that meet specific needs. The Integrated Strategy on the Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Small Enterprises adopted in 2005 and the National Development Plan 2030 highlight the importance of SMME promotion and view entrepreneurship as a key employment driver (Kemp et al., 2015).

The report by the SEDA (2022) indicated that about 2.4 million SMMEs were operating in the South African economy, accounting for over 9.7 million jobs (employing between 50 and 60 per cent of South Africa's workforce) at the time. SEDA further reported that SMMEs contributed approximately 39.5 per cent of all business turnover in the country (SEDA, 2022).

SMMEs account for a substantial portion of business and employment internationally. The World Bank reports that SMMEs comprise approximately 90% of all businesses and over 50% of jobs globally. When examining formal SMMEs in emerging economies, they contribute up to 40% of GDP. However, these contributions are much higher when considering informal SMMEs that are not officially registered businesses. According to the OECD (2023), the growth rate of SMMEs in South Africa has been slower than the country's economic growth rate between 2010 and 2020. However, despite this, the contribution made by these enterprises to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased significantly from 18% in 2010 to 40% in 2020. This highlights the significant role that SMMEs play in the South African economy and their potential for further growth and development. The World Bank predicts that by the year 2030, around 600 million job positions will be required to meet the needs of the growing global workforce. It is essential for South Africa to keep supporting and investing in SMMEs to generate job opportunities and contribute to the nation's economic growth. This can be achieved by implementing policies that encourage entrepreneurship, provide access to finance, and facilitate skill development.

SMMEs also play a vital role in reducing income inequality, particularly in developing countries. According to Chimucheka (2013), SMMEs can effectively combine societal

resources to generate goods and services for the communities in which they are situated. They function as a mechanism for facilitating economic transformation by leveraging individuals' knowledge and skills without requiring extensive training, significant financial resources, or advanced technological infrastructure. According to Habtamu, Aregawi, and Nigusu (2013), the aforementioned facts render the sector a more desirable option for business entry, unemployment reduction, income generation, and poverty alleviation. Existing literature indicates that poverty is significantly higher in developing than in developed countries. For instance, in 2021, in South Africa, 38.8% of the population lived in poverty at the national lower-level poverty lines, and 51.2% lived at the national upper-level poverty lines (Quantec, 2023). This is in contrast to developed countries like the United States, where the poverty rate was 11.6% in 2021 (Statista, 2023). The South African government has recognised SMMEs as key to reducing poverty (Kemp et al., 2015). Due to the labour-intensive industrial nature of the SMME sector, these businesses can create more job opportunities than bigger enterprises.

Furthermore, SMMEs often operate in rural and peri-urban areas where unemployment rates are typically higher, providing job opportunities for individuals who may not have access to formal employment in urban areas. This is particularly important in developing countries, where informal settlements and high unemployment rates often accompany urbanisation. SMMEs can also contribute to developing local economies by sourcing materials and services from local suppliers and creating a demand for their products and services. This can lead to a multiplier effect, where the money spent by the SMMEs circulates within the local economy, creating further economic opportunities.

It has been observed that as many as five out of seven SMMEs in South Africa fail within the first year of operations (Olawajaju & Msomi, 2021). Olawajaju and Msomi (2021) noted that SMMEs in developing countries have remained static instead of expanding and effectively contributing to economic growth compared to those in developed countries. This can be attributed to various internal and external factors, including lack of access to funding, poor management skills, and limited market opportunities. According to Kelly et al. (2022), the growth and expansion of SMMEs can be promoted by favourable business environments. In addition, government support services, including financial support and training programs, have been shown to increase the survival and growth rates of SMMEs (Kelly et al., 2022).

2.4. Business Growth

Business growth refers to the expansion and development of a business through time and encompasses a variety of performance measures. In the context of SMMEs, business growth entails qualitative and quantitative improvements in several facets of the enterprise, such as its market presence, operational capabilities, and strategic positioning (Zhou & Gumbo, 2021). It is a multifaceted concept that goes beyond just how well a business does financially.

The growth of SMMEs can be viewed through the perspective of many stages, each of which presents its challenges and opportunities. The Small Business Administration (SBA) model provides a good framework for describing the different stages of business growth:

1. **Existence:** Initially, SMMEs focus on surviving and building a customer base (Gupta, Guha, & Krishnaswami, 2013). The main goal is to get customers and make enough money to cover costs (Zhou & Gumbo, 2021).
2. **Survival:** At this point, SMMEs have mitigated their initial obstacles and demonstrated the feasibility of the business (Gupta et al., 2013). The emphasis moves to creating consistent profitability, enhancing operational efficiency, and financial management (Zhou and Gumbo, 2021).
3. **Success:** SMMEs have reached the stage of success when they have established a steady market presence and earned a competitive advantage (Gupta et al., 2013). Expanding market share, increasing profitability, and developing a solid client base are the primary focus of ongoing efforts (Chimucheka, 2013).
4. **Expansion:** During this stage, SMMEs undergo considerable growth through the introduction of new goods or services, expansion into new markets, and scaling up operations (Gupta et al., 2013). Properly administrating funds and resources, establishing strategic partnerships, and executing efficient management procedures are crucial (Zhou & Gumbo, 2021).
5. **Maturity:** Once a business has a well-established market position and steady operations, the business is said to have reached maturity (Gupta et al., 2013). The focus moves to maintaining profitability, being innovative, and responding effectively to shifting market conditions (Chimucheka, 2013).

The progression through these stages is not always linear for SMMEs, and each stage's duration and characteristics may vary depending on the industry, market conditions, and

internal variables (Chimucheka, 2015). South African SMMEs often function in the survival or early stages of growth. Research conducted by Chimucheka (2015) on SMMEs in Nkonkobe Municipality, South Africa, indicated that most enterprises were still in their survival stage. Zhou and Gumbo (2021) researched manufacturing SMMEs in KwaZulu-Natal Province and discovered that most enterprises studied were in the existence or survival phase, reiterating the findings of Chimucheka (2015).

The significance of SMMEs in developing countries such as South Africa cannot be overemphasised. SMMEs significantly contribute to wealth, job creation, and economic growth (Neneh & Vanzyl, 2014). Researchers and policymakers have emphasised the relevance of SMME growth in alleviating poverty and fostering inclusive economic development (Chimucheka, 2013). SMME growth is essential for developing businesses and creating sustainable livelihoods.

2.4.1. Measurements of growth

According to Zhou and Gumbo (2021), SMME growth is frequently associated with improvements in revenue, assets, customer base, sales, workforce size and the owner's knowledge and skills. Business growth assessment can be conducted using financial and non-financial metrics.

Financial metrics, such as annual turnover and profit, are fundamental business growth indicators. Studies have indicated that improved yearly revenue and profitability are linked with business growth and enhanced efficacy. According to Zhou and Gumbo (2021), annual turnover denotes the total revenue generated by a business during a particular period and indicates its financial performance. The concept of profitability pertains to the capacity of a business to produce a surplus of revenue after the deduction of expenses (Neneh & Vanzyl, 2014).

Another growth measure includes sales growth. It reflects the expansion of the business's market presence and customer demand. Zhou and Gumbo (2021) posit that heightened sales volumes can be attributed to effective marketing strategies, prioritising customer satisfaction, and more innovative product and service offerings. Another vital indicator for business growth is the customer base of a business. According to Chimucheka (2013), customer attraction and retention indicate a business's ability to penetrate the market and

foster customer loyalty. An increase in customers can lead to an increase in sales, ultimately leading to a rise in revenue and profits.

The capabilities of the business can also determine SMME growth. A company's organisational capabilities provide insight into the business's capacity to support further growth. Standard capability metrics include employee headcount, development of management systems and controls, establishment of formal processes, and expanded operational capacity. Several authors highlighted capability growth through increased hiring and the establishment of control systems (Bushe, 2019; Wiid & Cant, 2021). According to Zhou and Gumbo (2021), the increase in the number of employees suggests the potential of the enterprise to fulfil increased production or service demands and create employment opportunities. The metric of employment growth holds significant importance in assessing the role of SMMEs in mitigating unemployment and alleviating poverty.

The metrics mentioned above collectively illuminate the performance and sustainability of small businesses. Numerous scholars have thoroughly examined these metrics, which are critical for assessing the growth trajectories of small enterprises, particularly in the context of SMMEs in South Africa (Bushe, 2019; Wiid & Cant, 2021).

2.5. Internal Factors Affecting SMME Growth

Internal factors are elements within a business that impact its operations and outcomes. As stated by Udimal and Biyase (2021), internal factors affecting business growth are often within the control of business owners. The authors classify elements of the internal environment as business resources and the management capabilities of the owner (Udimal & Biyase, 2021). The below subsections examine key internal factors affecting SMME growth, including the entrepreneur's motivation, education level, management skills, financial capabilities, and human resource management.

2.5.1. Entrepreneur Motivation

Entrepreneurial motivation refers to the drivers or reasons that lead individuals to create new ventures (Carsrud & Brännback, 2011). Research studies have highlighted the significance of entrepreneurial motivation in driving business growth. Ncube and Zondo (2018) found that strong intrinsic motivation positively influences entrepreneurial success. Researchers often categorise motivation as either opportunity or necessity (Ephrem et al.,

2021). Opportunity motivation refers to those inspired by perceived opportunities for profit, self-fulfilment, or independence. Necessity motivation means those pushed into entrepreneurship by external forces like unemployment, low income, or job dissatisfaction. (Ephrem et al., 2021).

SMME growth depends on many complex factors beyond the entrepreneur's initial motivations (Ismail et al., 2018). However, motivations and underlying traits seem to play a significant role. Opportunity motivations tend to be positively associated with growth. Those pulled into entrepreneurship by perceived opportunities and rewards seem willing to take risks and invest effort, contributing to growth (Bayon et al., 2016). Studies in Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania, and Uganda found that opportunity-motivated SMMEs had higher sales, profits, and business scale (Brixiová & Kangoye, 2016; Eijdenberg et al., 2015). Such opportunity-seekers seem more aspirational, strategic and growth-oriented.

In contrast, necessity-driven entrepreneurs focus more on subsisting, limiting re-investment and growth ambitions (Valliere, 2013). With survival priorities, necessity-driven entrepreneurs often struggle to strategically grow their ventures (Kautonen & Palmroos, 2010). Evidence from Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Tunisia shows that necessity-based SMMEs lag behind opportunity-driven ones on jobs, productivity, innovation and revenues (Eijdenberg et al., 2015; Gindling & Newhouse, 2014).

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) South Africa report for 2022 found that the primary motivation for individuals starting businesses in South Africa was to earn a living (necessity-driven motivation) because of employment scarcity. Research by Fatoki and Okeboye (2010) indicates that many individuals choose entrepreneurship to escape unemployment or underemployment and create income-generating activities.

Entrepreneurial motivation also evolves as businesses develop, influencing later growth. Entrepreneurs may start of necessity but later discover new opportunities, or early passions may diminish (Ephrem et al., 2021). Tsenki (2021) found that combinations of necessity and opportunity motives (push and pull factors) foster resilience.

2.5.2. Level of Education and Managerial Skills

Several studies have highlighted a positive correlation between the education level of SMME owners and the growth of their businesses. Peters and Brijlal (2011) conducted surveys, interviews, and quantitative analysis to determine whether there is a link between education

level, increased labour force, and turnover growth of SMMEs in KwaZulu-Natal province. Their hypothesis testing confirmed a statistically significant and positive correlation, establishing that SMMEs run by more educated owners exhibited higher growth rates/

Similarly, Ayandibu and Houghton (2017) emphasise that specialised entrepreneurship and business management education help equip SMME owners with the skills to grow their companies. Their survey of 53 SMMEs in Pietermaritzburg found that over half had not completed high school, indicating a lack of formal training to address internal business challenges. The authors recommend teaching entrepreneurship and business modules starting at the high school level to foster success. Fatoki (2014) found that education facilitates the absorption of new technologies and managerial innovations, enabling business expansion and faster growth.

Beyond basic education, managerial skills specifically have proven essential for SMME growth. Management skills refer to the ability and capacity of individuals to run a business. These skills include strategy, planning, marketing, finance, project management, and human relations (Erasmus, Strydom & Rudansky-Klopper, 2016). The importance of managerial skills for SMME growth has been widely recognised. These skills aid in making good decisions and being an effective communicator and problem-solver. The more favourable an individual is endowed with these skills, the greater the changes are for the success and growth of a business (Erasmus et al., 2016).

Udimal et al. (2021) used econometric analysis to study binding constraints on township SMMEs in Gauteng province. Managerial weaknesses were a key challenge, especially in financial and operations management. Targeted skills training could strengthen capabilities for opportunity identification, decision-making, financial controls, and managing growth.

Wiid and Cant (2021) claim that a significant portion of business failures are due to inadequate managerial abilities. The authors highlight serious skills shortages among township SMME owners in their survey of 498 enterprises in Gauteng (Wiid & Cant, 2021). Nearly half identified staff skills and management competence as obstacles, recommending that government and support agencies prioritise management coaching and workshops. Better equipping owners/managers is viewed as essential for business expansion.

Udimal and Biyase (2021) argue that business owners with the necessary managerial training, education, and experience can successfully manage SMMEs because they can

lessen the impact of binding constraints on their businesses' growth. Researchers concluded that the lack of managerial skills and expertise of SMME managers and owners could result in poor decision-making and ineffective business management, hindering business growth (Mboniyane & Ladzani, 2011).

The studies unanimously indicate that the education level and managerial skills of SMME owners influence the growth potential of their enterprises. Focused education policies and support programs to enhance knowledge and competencies would enable more competitive, resilient, and high-performing SMMEs.

2.5.3. Financial Management

Both theoretical and empirical research indicate that financial management competencies increase SMME competitiveness, efficiency, and sustainability over time (Olawajaju & Msomi, 2021; Wolmarans & Meintjes, 2015). Multiple studies underscore the lack of financial management competencies among SMME owners as a critical barrier to business growth (Udimal et al., 2021). Financial management refers to the planning, directing, monitoring, organising and controlling of financial resources to achieve organisational goals (Wolmarans & Meintjes, 2015). Essential financial duties include cash flow management, financial accounting, capital budgeting, inventory control, and strategic planning. Olawajaju and Msomi (2021) describe financial management as managers' awareness, budgeting and accounting skills to control financial markets, make well-informed decisions and minimise the mismanagement of financial matters. Okyere et al. (2018) found that 94% of respondents agreed that financial management is important for growth.

Multiple studies highlighted the importance of basic bookkeeping practices like utilising cash books, sales journals, and general ledgers to record transactions (Okyere et al., 2018; Fosu et al., 2020; Wolmarans & Meintjes, 2015). Agwa-Ejon and Mbohwa's (2015) research found that businesses with record-keeping and financial management issues are likelier to have financial troubles. SMMEs need funds, also known as capital, to acquire assets, resources and services (Erasmus, Strydom and Rudansky-Klopper, 2016). However, funds are also needed to run the operations of the SMME. Research conducted by Bismark et al. (2018) found that about 80% of SMMEs are stifled because of poor financial management. The study further revealed that SMMEs lack knowledge about proper bookkeeping and accounting practices (Bismark et al., 2018).

Financial management practices are generally considered crucial for long-term SMME competitiveness and growth (Wolmarans & Meintjes, 2015; Fosu et al., 2020; Olarewaju & Msomi, 2021). Moreover, better financial management increases SMME access to external finance. Several studies highlighted difficulties among SMMEs accessing external finance due to strict lending criteria, lack of collateral, and unfavourable interest rates as barriers to SMME growth (Schmidt et al., 2017; Fosu et al., 2020). Kirsten et al. (2017) determined that the perceived financial management competence of South African SMMEs positively influenced their ability to obtain debt financing. Those with greater perceived competence secured loans more easily. Conversely, poor financial management skills raise risk and impede funding (Fatoki & Smit, 2011). Thus, building financial acumen can aid capital acquisition and business growth. Financial management skills are required to raise funding by demonstrating sound financial planning and control. However, skills gaps exist.

Various studies emphasise the need for targeted training and development initiatives to address skill deficits among SMME owners (Okyere et al., 2018; Msomi & Olarewaju, 2021). Integration into formal tertiary curriculums, as well as short course interventions, would help strengthen strategic financial competencies earlier on.

Effective financial management can aid SMMEs in allocating resources more effectively and efficiently and improve their creditworthiness, enhancing their chances of accessing finances (Olarewaju & Msomi, 2021). Effective financial management can also aid in meeting the business's financial obligations and avoiding financial distress. Ultimately, effective financial management practices can improve the growth potential of SMMEs. Olarewaju and Msomi (2021) noted that SMMEs with financial awareness and financial management skills could face the demands of shifts in business markets, strengthening the proximity and accessibility of the business in accessing finance.

2.5.4. Human Resources Management

Human resource management (HRM) can be defined as the process of finding, selecting, onboarding, and overseeing employees in business (Erasmus et al., 2016). A business cannot exist without qualified and skilled personnel (Cascio, 2016). According to Cascio (2016), human resource management includes five activities: staffing, retention, development, adjustment and managing change. Managing human resources can make essential differences in productivity, quality of work life and profit, affecting organisational outcomes (Cascio, 2016). Human resource management is necessary to optimise

employees' productivity or usefulness to meet organisational goals and work more effectively.

Compared to large firms, SMMEs face greater constraints in implementing formal HRM systems and practices. Common challenges cited include difficulty attracting talent, inadequate training, poor talent management, high turnover, and reliance on informal HR approaches (Cardon & Stevens, 2004; Harney & Nolan, 2014). Surveys reveal that micro and small enterprises often have no formal HRM, while medium-sized firms exhibit some elements (Psychogios et al., 2016). Magadea and Pillay (2008) found that few SMMEs conducted performance management, training needs analysis or career development. Reasons include limited resources, expertise, and owner-manager attitudes (Messersmith & Guthrie, 2010).

Despite variability in HRM adoption, research widely recognises the value of integrating HR into a strategy for SMME competitiveness. Conceptual models propose that HRM impacts performance via intermediate outcomes like enhanced human capital, employee behaviours, reduced turnover, and positive organisational climate (Cardon & Stevens, 2004; Messersmith & Guthrie, 2010). Empirical evidence also demonstrates HRM's impact on tangible SMME results. Formal practices like compensation, training, and planning positively affect performance (Mulolli, Islami & Skenderi., 2015; Sheehan, 2014)

A business's internal and external environments affect its capacity to find and keep qualified human resources (Udimal & Biyase, 2021). According to Udimal and Biyase (2021), human resources are essential for the growth of SMMEs. An owner's ability to manage human resources through recruitment and selection and create a conducive environment affects business growth. Skilled and qualified employees can respond to customer queries promptly and are also able to adapt to changing environments (Udimal & Biyase, 2021). Finding the appropriate employee enables a business to grow and successfully mature (Baporikar et al., 2016).

2.6. External Factors Affecting SMME Growth

The external environment refers to problems that emerge from outside a business that can affect its sustainability and growth (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017; Kelly et al., 2022). External environment factors include laws and regulations, access to finance, competition,

infrastructure, market access, and business location. Businesses have limited control over external factors (Mbonyane & Ladzani, 2011).

2.6.1. Access to Finance

Access to finance is critical for entrepreneurs to establish, run, and sustain a business. However, many entrepreneurs face significant challenges in accessing this resource, which can hinder their ability to reach their full potential and contribute to economic growth. According to Udimal and Biyase (2021), access to finance is an essential barrier to business growth, particularly in developing countries. Several studies have shown that a lack of access to finance significantly limits the growth of SMMEs (Rungani, 2022; Zulu et al., 2023). Olarewaju and Msomi (2021) confirmed this and noted that poor financing was responsible for the declining growth and high failure rate of SMMEs in South Africa.

Empirical evidence highlights that access to finance significantly impacts the profitability, productivity, size, and long-term sustenance of SMME operations (Abisuga-Oyekunle & Muchie, 2020; Berisha & Pula, 2015). An injection of capital and credit at the early stage helps SMMEs invest in technology, skills training, and inventory management systems to enhance efficiency, scale up faster and achieve competitiveness. SMMEs with access to adequate and affordable finance have better chances to expand market reach, develop new products, undertake innovations and have higher survival rates during economic downturns compared to constrained SMMEs (Khoase et al., 2020; Nkwabi & Mboya, 2019).

According to Bowmaker-Falconer and Meyer (2022), 21.8% of South African SMMEs blamed access to finance issues for their failure in 2021. Various studies concluded that SMMEs have difficulty accessing finance because of poor business plans, a lack of security, and a limited track record (Mbonyane & Ladzani, 2011; Kelly et al., 2022). Kelly et al. (2022) discovered that banks rarely provide funds to SMMEs as requested. This is primarily because small businesses lack the collateral needed to qualify for the requested amount. In addition, Mbonyane and Ladzani (2011) noted that financial institutions are hesitant to lend to SMMEs due to the lack of trust in these small enterprises. Financial institutions are less likely to lend to SMMEs due to the high administrative costs and the risky nature of small businesses (Udimal & Biyase, 2021).

Furthermore, BER (2016) pointed out that financial institutions see firms operated by women or minorities and situated in rural areas as even more high-risk borrowers, further restricting

their access to finance. Research by Fatoki and Garwe (2010) indicates that less than 3% of South African SMMEs can access any type of formal bank funding. Moreover, fewer than 30% of financing applications submitted by newly established SMMEs receive approval (Fatoki & Garwe, 2010). When SMMEs do secure funding, the interest rates may be prohibitively high at times, negatively impacting the business's profitability.

Insufficient access to startup capital and funds to grow compels many SMMEs to initiate suboptimal operations, while the inability to access growth finance prevents existing enterprises from investing, upgrading and gaining economies of scale (Xu, Yuan & Rong, 2022). Constrained SMMEs have limited buffers to withstand external shocks and often stagnate or shut down due to cash flow problems exacerbating unemployment and inequality (Hamdan & Cheaitou, 2017; Rahayu & Ilham, 2023).

SMMEs rely on internal finance from the personal savings of owners, friends and family more than external sources like bank loans (Owusu et al., 2021; Nanziri & Wamalwa, 2021). Data indicates that over 50% of SMMEs depend on personal savings for startup and working capital (Jordaan & Coetzee, 2021; Mkhize & David, 2021). Less than 11% of SMMEs access bank loans, while about 25% depend on government grants and support schemes (Refiloe et al., 2020). High collateral requirements, lack of documented credit history, inadequate business records, and perceived risk by financiers constrain SMMEs from accessing external finance from banks and investors (Chilembo, 2021; Gakpo, 2021).

The South African government has implemented several initiatives to improve access to finance for SMMEs through grants, loan guarantees, and subsidies to provide financial support to SMMEs (Moise et al., 2020; Ouma-Mugabe et al., 2021). However, only 8-10% of SMMEs have benefitted from government schemes, while over 50% are unaware of such assistance (Netshivhe, 2021; Kesejane, 2021). Complex application procedures, lack of transparency in selection criteria, and information gaps limit the uptake and effectiveness of state-backed schemes and funding programs for SMMEs. More must be done to create an effective enabling environment supporting SMME growth and development. Ayandibu and Houghton (2017) noted that when SMMEs receive funds from government interventions, they are hardly ever sufficient for the needs of the business.

Research indicates that addressing the finance needs of SMMEs can unlock substantial socio-economic benefits in developing countries like South Africa. More inclusive finance ecosystems that provide the full spectrum of capital – startup, working, investment, and

growth are imperative for expanding SMME operations (Boschmans & Pissareva, 2018; Dladla & Mutambara, 2022). Government schemes and private sector mechanisms aimed at making finance readily available, transparent and tailored for SMMEs at various stages of the business lifecycle can markedly increase their productivity, competitiveness and contribution to local economies (Gado et al., 2020; Hewitt & van Rensburg, 2020).

2.6.2. High Competition

Market competition refers to the rivalry between firms operating in the same industry and selling similar products or services (Erasmus et al., 2016). High competition affects the performance and growth of SMMEs (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017). Maduku and Kaseeram (2021) identified high competition as one of the major problems facing small businesses in South Africa. Competition intensifies when new firms enter the market or existing firms expand production. Fierce competition creates a challenging operating environment for firms as they struggle to maintain market share, increase sales, and improve profit margins (Mahembe, 2011).

Competition poses a significant threat to SMMEs as most lack the capabilities and resources to compete effectively against large, established firms (Cant & Wiid, 2013). Some small firms shut down due to poor sales, primarily due to their inability to compete. Sarwoko and Frisdiantara (2016) noted that SMMEs can easily fail due to competition. SMMEs often serve small niche markets and rely on a limited customer base. Increased competition from larger firms with greater capacity and lower costs can rapidly erode the SMME's market share (Zondo & Ncube, 2022). Furthermore, competitive pressures may discourage new SMME startups if the market seems crowded or unsustainable.

In South Africa, SMMEs have consistently identified competition as a major constraint to business growth and performance. A BER (2016) survey found that 34% of SMMEs regarded competition as a primary obstacle. Similarly, Cant and Wiid (2013) reported that 75% of SMMEs surveyed faced moderate to intense competition. The impact appears significant, with 48% of respondents stating that competition led to declining sales and profits.

A study by Farida and Setiawan (2022) highlights the importance of competitive market strategies and differentiation in gaining a competitive advantage. Understanding the competitive dynamics in the industry and effectively positioning SMMEs are crucial for their

sustained growth. The source of competition depends on the SMME sector, target market, infrastructure and location.

2.6.3. Infrastructure and Location

The growth of SMMEs can be significantly influenced by infrastructure availability and favourable location. Infrastructure refers to physical resources such as buildings, equipment, roads, water systems, communication networks, and electric grids that SMMEs require to conduct business activities and participate in the economy (Jacobs, 2019). According to Obokoh and Goldman (2016), infrastructure is often inadequate or missing entirely in many sub-Saharan African countries due to insufficient planning, funding shortages, and poor upkeep. Ayandibu and Houghton (2017) state that South African SMMEs are affected by deteriorating infrastructure. The provision of adequate infrastructure to businesses is the government's responsibility. However, government interventions have not successfully addressed the problem, especially in rural areas (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017). Poor infrastructure refers to bad roads, inadequate water supply, erratic electricity supply and lack of communication technology. Mboniyane and Ladzani (2011) noted that poor infrastructure hinders the growth of SMMEs because it can lead to delays in the productivity and operations of these businesses. SMMEs need adequate infrastructure to survive and grow (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017).

Cissokho and Seck (2013) identify electricity infrastructure as a critical component that impacts SMME growth. They found that inadequate power supply in Senegal resulted in recurring blackouts, negatively affecting SMMEs. Similarly, SMMEs in South Africa struggle with electricity demands exceeding capacity, leading to frequent power outages (Fatoki & Garwe, 2010). To cope with the interruptions, South African SMMEs have started supplying their own electricity via generators, reducing profitability and competitiveness due to added costs. Obokoh and Goldman (2016) explain that this self-provisioning of electricity redirects money that could otherwise be used to bolster small business wealth and survival odds.

Kelly et al. (2022) does not elaborate on the impact that the location of a business has on business growth. However, the researchers noted that a small business's location is a critical factor in its success or failure (Kelly et al., 2022). Mboniyane and Ladzani (2011) revealed that SMMEs sometimes select their businesses' locations without thoroughly analysing the location's suitability to the business's objective. The location of a business influences its accessibility and proximity to customers and suppliers, as well as the availability of adequate

infrastructure (Kelly et al., 2022). Mboniyane and Ladzani (2011) noted that businesses in areas with high traffic and good visibility are more likely to attract customers than businesses in remote or hard-to-find locations.

The location of a business also comes with the risk of crime. Bhorat et al. (2018) state that crime directly infringes on company property rights, reducing incentives for further investment. SMMEs in areas with high crime rates and poor infrastructure face challenges such as theft, vandalism, or difficulty accessing the necessary utilities needed to grow and expand (Mboniyane & Ladzani, 2011). Crime hampers SMMEs ability to draw in customers, hire and keep employees, and damages workplace morale and productivity (Oyelana & Fiseha, 2017). The geographical location of SMMEs influences factors such as market access and resource availability. Suppliers also avoid transporting goods to high-crime areas, stripping locational benefits for SMMEs operating in informal townships (Oyelana & Fiseha, 2017).

2.6.4. Access to markets

SMMEs are facing a significant challenge in terms of their survival due to their inability to access markets. According to BER (2016), access to markets is a crucial aspect for SMMEs as it determines their ability to reach out to domestic and international customers. It also plays a vital role in enabling SMMEs to expand their market reach beyond their immediate location. Accessing and penetrating markets is crucial for SMMEs to sustain their business operations and remain competitive.

Access to markets beyond the local level or immediate location is critical for SMME growth, allowing them to achieve higher productivity and economies of scale (Blose, 2018). Exposure to larger markets can boost sales volumes, enabling SMMEs to maximise the utilisation of resources and lower average costs (Rogerson, 2013). Market expansion also incentivises SMMEs to increase their productive capacities to meet the higher demand (Bowmaker-Falconer & Meyer, 2022). This catalyses innovation, efficiency and long-term business growth. By accessing larger markets, SMMEs can gain the competitive advantage necessary for business survival and growth (Cant & Wiid, 2013). Market access is thus a prerequisite for unlocking the potential of SMMEs to create jobs and contribute to economic growth in South Africa.

One significant barrier to market access for SMMEs is limited access to raw materials. Most SMMEs in South Africa lack the economies of scale and bargaining power to secure favourable contracts with suppliers of raw materials (Rogerson, 2013). This affects production efficiency and product quality. Another barrier is restrictive government laws and regulations, which make it difficult for SMMEs to enter new markets (Sitharam & Hogue, 2016). For instance, complex licensing requirements limit SMMEs from accessing public procurement opportunities.

High tariffs and duties also constrain SMMEs from exporting to foreign markets, and many SMMEs lack the skills and resources to export their products (Blose, 2018). The costs and procedures involved in exporting are prohibitive for small firms. Most SMMEs also face intense competition from large firms and cheap imported substitutes, restricting their local market access (Nyathi, 2021). SMMEs often lack the capacity to produce at competitive prices to rival bigger firms.

The South African government provides training and mentoring programmes to assist SMMEs in developing marketing capabilities, including how to conduct market research (DTI, 2015). The government also runs initiatives to help SMMEs access public procurement opportunities at the local government level (Rogerson, 2013). However, scholars argue that these initiatives need to be expanded, made more transparent and better tailored to SMME needs (Zondo & Ncube, 2022).

Understanding customer needs and market trends and building strong customer relationships are key factors in achieving market success. Combined government and private sector efforts are needed to create a supportive environment where SMMEs can thrive through better connectivity to local markets.

2.6.5. Laws and Regulations

Governments implement regulations aimed at fostering an environment conducive to entrepreneurship and business growth (Khoase et al., 2020). The legal and regulatory environment significantly influences SMME operations and growth. Research Rungani (2022) emphasises the importance of supportive legal frameworks and simplified administrative procedures for fostering SMME growth. Conversely, burdensome regulations and compliance requirements can hinder business growth (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017;

Khoase et al., 2020). These regulations include labour laws, tax regulations, licensing and permit requirements and BEE regulations.

According to a study conducted by Zulu et al. (2023), the regulatory environment and government mandates in South Africa have been found to create a challenging and non-competitive business climate for SMMEs. Ajibade and Khayundi (2017) found that navigating the complex legal and compliance rules poses major difficulties for many SMMEs. Several studies reveal that dealing with regulations and red tape diverts significant time, focus and resources away from productive business activities. For instance, a survey of South African SMMEs found that 78% viewed the regulatory environment as increasingly hostile to business growth, imposing severe challenges in areas like tax, municipal regulations, and labour laws (SBP, 2015). The minimum wage regulations dictate that businesses cannot employ staff for less than the legally required hourly wages. For SMMEs willing to hire more staff but not having adequate resources to adhere to the regulations, it negatively affects their business's growth (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017; Udimal & Biyase, 2021).

Compliance costs can be disproportionately burdensome for smaller enterprises with limited staff and capabilities. A survey of SMMEs in South Africa found that regulatory compliance costs as a percentage of turnover declined with firm size, from 5% for micro-enterprises to just 1.2% for small firms and 0.2% for medium firms (SBP, 2013). Studies in other developing countries corroborate that smaller SMMEs bear a higher relative burden from compliance obligations (Zondo & Ncube, 2022; Lignier et al., 2014). Entrepreneurs frequently struggle to comprehend the myriad of regulations and requirements, which can then lead to fines or other penalties for unknowing violations (Zulu et al., 2023). The onerous and opaque government rules stack the deck against smaller businesses, entrenching advantages for larger companies with more resources to ensure conformance.

High compliance costs coupled with weak rule of law and corruption have also been found to deter firms from entering the formal economy. Nieuwenhuizen (2019) found that many small enterprises opt to remain informal to reduce costs and increase income, avoiding taxes and legal regulations. This limits their growth potential and negatively impacts government revenue.

In contrast to the predominant focus on regulatory burdens, some studies highlight that the rule of law and appropriate regulation can benefit SMMEs when implemented effectively.

Research on Chinese entrepreneurs indicates that clear, stable legal frameworks and contract enforcement helped support SMME growth (Bhatt et al., 2017). A South African study also suggested that regulations, if well-designed, can produce positive market outcomes advantageous to smaller enterprises by, for instance, preserving competition or conveying product quality (Mallett, Wapshott & Vorley, 2019)

Moreover, international comparisons reveal that lower compliance burdens do not inevitably result from wholesale deregulation. An assessment of Canada, which has relatively low regulatory burdens on SMMEs compared to South Africa, found this was achieved not through extensive deregulation but through coordinating regulations between government levels, engaging SMMEs in policy development, and streamlining reporting processes (Seens, 2013). Such evidence highlights that with deliberate efforts to tailor and administer regulations in an "SMME-friendly" manner, governments can reduce red tape and promote small business growth.

2.7. Government Support

Government support initiatives are crucial in boosting the growth of SMMEs. To create targeted and effective interventions, it is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of government support and understand the needs of SMMEs. Governments worldwide have implemented various support programs to promote the development of SMMEs. In South Africa, some of the interventions established to support SMMEs include the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), Khula Ntsika, the National Development Fund, the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA), and Umsombovu Youth Fund (Udimal & Biyase, 2021).

Despite South Africa having a comprehensive framework for SMME support, government support for SMMEs does not fully meet expectations and needs (Kelly et al., 2022; Majadibodu, Ramasimu & Ladzani, 2023; Rungani, 2022). Rungani (2022) surveyed 350 SMMEs in the Eastern Cape province to evaluate the effectiveness of existing government support programs. The findings showed that while various agencies offer support to SMMEs, the assistance does not cover all functional areas of business. About 60% of respondents surveyed said public sector support does not meet all their needs, while 55% said the same about private sector support (Rungani, 2022). Furthermore, Rungani (2022) found that most SMMEs were not consulted in the design of support programs, and their expectations were

largely unmet. This signifies a mismatch between the needs of SMMEs versus the actual support provided.

Kelly et al. (2022) found that the lack of awareness and accessibility to government support interventions may contribute to the failure of SMMEs. Research conducted by Mboniyane and Ladzani (2011) also noted that a lack of awareness of government initiatives hinders SMME growth, concluding that the government does not actively support SMMEs in business registration and information sharing. It was recommended that government institutions increase efforts to share information related to support mechanisms with SMMEs (Mboniyane & Ladzani, 2011). There are apparent gaps in both awareness of programs and utilisation of these services. For instance, while 70% of SMMEs in the study by Kelly et al. (2022) knew about aid schemes, only half used them. Government support can aid the growth of SMMEs if implemented and appropriately utilised. A key recommendation of Kelly et al. (2022) was for government agencies to increase outreach and better tailor offerings to the needs of SMMEs.

The GEM SA 2021/2022 report provides information about the government's support for entrepreneurship development (Bowmaker-Falconer & Meyer, 2022). The report suggests a need to evaluate government-led entrepreneurial support at a national level, measuring the impact of support initiatives among stakeholders (Bowmaker-Falconer & Meyer, 2022). Access to relevant information, single agency contacts for support, and the level of competence of government representatives are key areas for improvement. The report also suggests a need to create greater awareness about government programmes in provinces outside of Gauteng, the Western Cape, and Kwa-Zulu Natal.

Despite South Africa's efforts, SMME government assistance continues to fall short of expectations and needs. Government support initiatives are indispensable in unlocking SMME growth potential contributing to economic development and employment outcomes. Financial assistance eases capital constraints, while skills training and regulatory reforms offset critical knowledge and operational barriers. However, red tape and lack of awareness compromise program effectiveness. Support initiatives thus require extensive promotion, careful contextualisation, regular impact evaluation and flexibility to address evolving SMME needs.

2.8. Conclusion

This literature review comprehensively explains the internal and external factors influencing SMME growth. It highlights the importance of entrepreneurial motivation, managerial skills, financial management, access to markets, the legal and regulatory environment, access to finance, competition, infrastructure, location, and government support. By synthesising existing research, this study aims to identify the gaps and contribute to understanding these factors in the context of the Overstrand Local Municipality.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

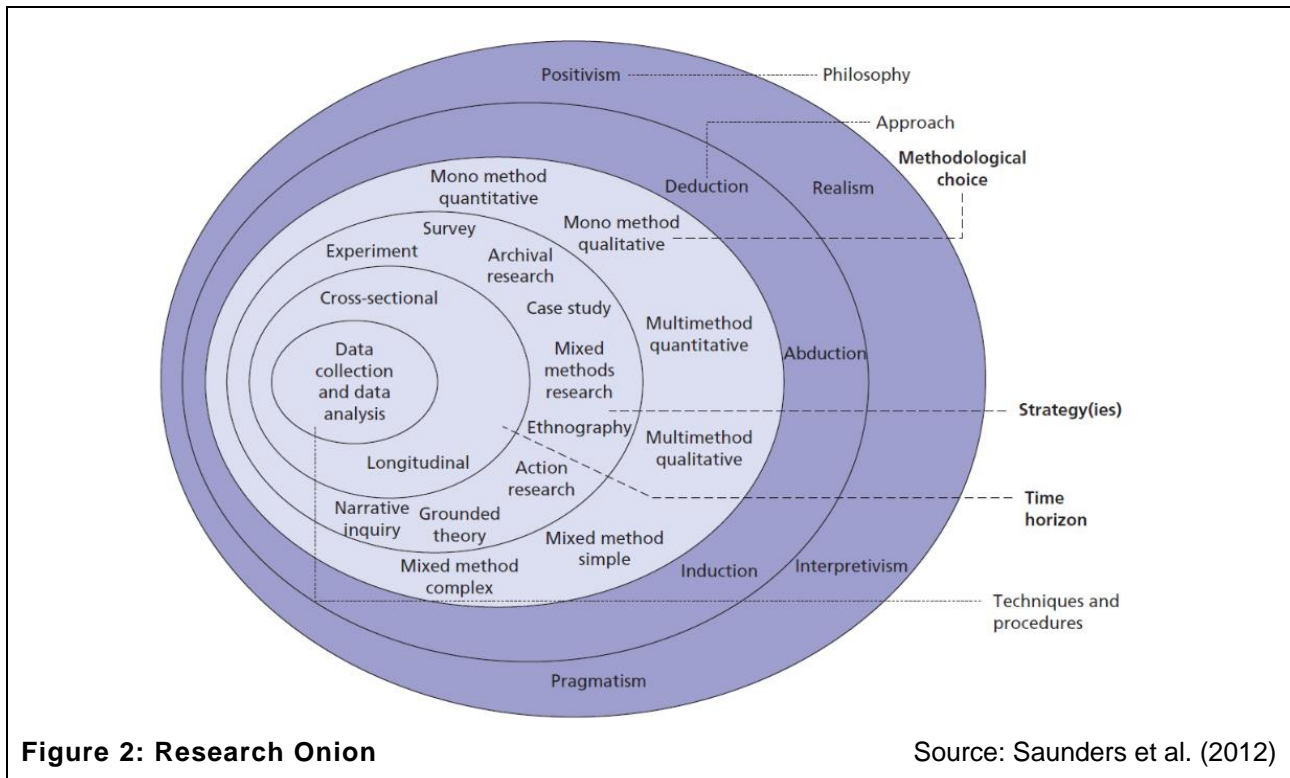
3.1. Introduction

Saunders et al. (2012) states that research is distinguished by its emphasis on discovering solutions, which necessitates the collecting and interpreting of data. A more inclusive definition of research describes it as a thorough, structured, objective, and analytical investigation of a specific topic conducted to identify solutions to that problem (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The research design provides the high-level framework that governs how a study is carried out (Sileyew, 2019). As explained by Leedy and Ormrod (2015), it establishes the basis for the research methods, data gathering, and data analysis. The research design entails the systematic organisation and examination of data tailored to the study objectives and aligned with the theoretical framework (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The implementation of a comprehensively designed research study enables scholars to derive accurate and reliable conclusions, thereby facilitating informed decision-making. The dependability and credibility of research findings are critically contingent on the research design.

The purpose of this study was to assess the perspectives of SMME owners in the Overstrand Local Municipality regarding the internal and external factors that affected business growth and government support in facilitating such growth. The results of this study aim to contribute to the advancement of the SMME sector by providing valuable insights for governmental and non-governmental organisations to develop initiatives to promote business growth.

3.2. Research Design

Many models exist to direct the research design process. The research design for this study was structured using the research onion framework defined by Saunders et al. (2012). This framework visualises the key components of research methodology in the form of research ontology, epistemology, methodology, strategy, time horizon, techniques and procedures.



3.2.1. Research Paradigms

Collis and Hussey (2014) state that a research paradigm encompasses the philosophical beliefs and perspectives that guide how a researcher examines social contexts. The opposing research paradigms of positivism and interpretivism are often used in social science research (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Collis and Hussey (2014) describe positivism as an objective, scientific approach where researchers aim to determine broad principles and causal relationships through empirical inquiry and quantitative techniques. On the other hand, interpretivism strongly focuses on comprehending people's arbitrary meanings and interpretations of their social reality (Collis & Hussey, 2014). It often uses qualitative techniques and examines and analyses human perceptions, experiences, and social situations (Salkind, 2012).

For this study, the research paradigm adopted was interpretivism. The objective of understanding how SMME owners in the Overstrand Local Municipality perceive internal and external environment factors impacting business growth and the effectiveness and impact of government support is well-aligned with interpretivism. By adopting an interpretivism approach, the study acknowledges that individuals construct their reality through subjective interpretations and social interactions.

One of the key reasons for choosing interpretivism is its suitability for exploring and understanding complex social phenomena in depth. According to Creswell (2013), interpretive research is particularly effective at providing in-depth insights into people's experiences, meanings, and interpretations. The study can capture nuanced perspectives and rich contextual information related to SMMEs and their growth factors by employing qualitative methods such as interviews.

By adopting interpretivism, the study aimed to capture the diverse and context-dependent perceptions of SMME owners, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the internal and external factors affecting business growth. It also allowed the exploration of the perspective of SMME owners on government support, shedding light on their experiences and opinions.

3.2.2. Research Approach

As stated by Saunders et al. (2012), the two main research methodologies are deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive research seeks to test a theoretical proposition through methods designed for that purpose. Conversely, inductive research aims to construct explanations or theories of a phenomenon from the examination of observational and empirical evidence (Saunders et al., 2012).

An inductive research approach was utilised in this study. This strategy enabled exploration of the phenomenon without being confined by existing theories and hypotheses. Inductive research facilitates the identification of themes, patterns, and theories that emerge organically from the data (Bryman, 2016).

The study's goals were in line with the inductive approach. It was appropriate for this study because it enabled a thorough examination of the elements influencing SMMEs in the context of the Overstrand Local Municipality. It enabled the researcher to record the various points of view and experiences of SMME owners, which helped advance understanding of the opportunities and challenges they faced. The study's inductive approach allowed for insightful findings and added to the body of knowledge on SMMEs and their growth factors.

3.2.3. Methodological Choice

Qualitative and quantitative research designs represent two predominant approaches in research design. As Creswell (2013) delineates, qualitative research constitutes an investigative methodology seeking to understand phenomena within their natural contexts, emphasising subjective experiences and interpretations. It involves gathering and analysing non-quantitative data, including interviews, observations, and documents, to identify recurring patterns, themes, and impactful insights (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research thoroughly examines human behaviour and decision-making across diverse contexts as they unfold (Salkind, 2012).

As Creswell (2013) defined, quantitative research emphasises measurement, numerical analysis, and statistical inference to investigate relationships, patterns, and generalisability. The process entails the acquisition of quantitative data through the administration of surveys, conducting experiments, or implementing structured observations.

Qualitative research is frequently employed to investigate complex phenomena that are not readily quantifiable, such as emotions, beliefs, and attitudes. This methodology facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences by researchers. Nevertheless, the study's limited sample size and subjective approach may compromise its generalisability. In contrast, quantitative research offers a higher degree of precision and objectivity in the data collected, enabling the findings to be extrapolated to a broader population. This tool frequently applies to various disciplines, including psychology, economics, and medicine.

When compared to the other methodologies, qualitative research has various advantages. Firstly, it enables an in-depth examination of complicated phenomena by giving rich and thorough insights into participants' perspectives, experiences, and social situations (Bryman, 2016). This approach is particularly suitable for investigating subjective and nuanced topics such as SMME owners' perceptions of the factors that affect business growth. Using a qualitative approach, the study captured the participants' unique voices and experiences.

Secondly, qualitative research offers greater adaptability and flexibility in data gathering, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2013). It enables the researcher to refine the study questions and modify the approach in response to developing themes and data insights

(Bryman, 2016). This is especially useful when studying relatively uncharted areas, as it permits fresh insights and theories to develop from the data. The research aimed to understand SMME owners' opinions and the factors driving business growth coinciding with the qualitative approach's flexibility and adaptability.

Third, qualitative research facilitates a deep understanding of context, uncovering the social, cultural, and historical factors that shape individuals' experiences and actions (Creswell, 2013). For this study, qualitative research aided in uncovering the unique challenges and opportunities specific to the local context. By considering the perceptions and experiences of SMME owners within their specific social and economic environment, the study provided contextually relevant insights for governmental and non-governmental initiatives (Bryman, 2016).

3.2.4. Research Purpose

The nature of the research can be clarified by analysing the research questions and objectives. Research sophistication increases according to its purpose (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Research is classified as exploratory, descriptive, and analytical. Exploratory research aims to describe phenomena as they exist. This method looks for patterns and ideas rather than testing a hypothesis (Saunders et al., 2012). Descriptive research aims to identify and gather information on the characteristics of a phenomenon (Babbie, 2016). According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), descriptive research offers an in-depth understanding of phenomena aiming to portray an accurate profile of people, situations, or events (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Analytical research follows descriptive research (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Saunders et al. (2012) describe analytical research as the study of a situation to explain and analyse the causal relationship between variables. The descriptive research mode was used since this study aimed to identify and gather insights into the factors influencing the growth of SMMEs in Overstrand.

3.2.5. Research Strategy

Since a qualitative research methodology was selected in alignment with the interpretivist paradigm, the following research strategies were considered for this study:

- 1) Case Study: As described by Collis and Hussey (2014), a case study is an intensive investigation of a particular case or occurrence in its actual setting, facilitating a complete

and in-depth comprehension within real-world contexts. Case studies are appropriate for examining intricate and distinctive cases and circumstances.

- 2) Focus Groups: Focus groups involve group discussions among participants to gather data on their perceptions, opinions, and experiences related to the research topic (Saunders et al., 2012). Focus groups are useful for generating a range of perspectives and facilitating group interactions.
- 3) Action Research: Action research is a participatory approach where researchers work collaboratively with participants to address real-life problems and bring about change (Babbie, 2016). It focuses on practical outcomes and involves planning, acting, observing, and reflecting cycles.
- 4) Ethnography: Ethnography involves immersing oneself in the cultural context and social setting of a group to understand their behaviours, beliefs, and practices (Saunders et al., 2012). It requires extended fieldwork and emphasises a detailed description of the social context.
- 5) Interviews: Interviews constitute one-on-one conversations between a researcher and participant aimed at gathering rich, detailed qualitative data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Contingent on the level of flexibility and depth necessitated, interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured in nature.

Interviews were chosen as the research strategy in this study. Interviews allowed an in-depth exploration of the perceptions and experiences of SMME owners. This research strategy provided an opportunity to gather rich and nuanced data by allowing participants to express their views, experiences, and perspectives in their own words.

Compared to other research strategies, interviews offer several advantages. First, interviews allow for a personalised and individualised approach, enabling participants to provide detailed and contextualised information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This aligned well with the research objective.

In addition, interviews encourage the development of rapport and trust between the researcher and the participant, establishing a setting where participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences and ideas openly. This can lead to the emergence of unexpected insights and nuances that may not be captured through other research strategies.

Furthermore, interviews provide flexibility in terms of question formulation and probing techniques, allowing the researcher to adapt and dive deeper into specific areas of interest.

In this study, the use of semi-structured interviews permitted a balance between predetermined questions and the ability for participants to elaborate and contribute new insights. In terms of time and resource restrictions, interviews were also more appropriate for this research project.

Conducting interviews enabled the researcher to collect comprehensive, nuanced data that captured the intricate complexity and depth of the research topic. This approach aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, which aims to understand social phenomena from the participants' standpoint and examine their subjective meanings and lived experiences.

3.2.6. Time Horizon

The study could have had either a longitudinal or cross-sectional time horizon. A longitudinal study is a research approach that examines variables or a group of subjects over an extended period (Collis & Hussey, 2014). A cross-sectional study is a single-instance investigation that provides a snapshot of a specific phenomenon at a given moment (Collis & Hussey, 2014). This is reiterated by Saunders et al. (2012), who define a cross-sectional study as an investigation of a specific phenomenon at a given time. This option is commonly chosen due to the time limitations typically associated with academic research projects. This is why a cross-sectional time horizon research study was chosen. Capturing a "snapshot" of the internal and external factors affecting the growth of SMMEs, as perceived by the subjects, can be achieved by using a cross-sectional study. This type of study is appropriate for fulfilling the study's objective.

3.2.7. Sample Design

Sampling is selecting elements from a population to participate in a study to achieve the research objectives. It involves identifying the population in terms of time, geographical boundaries, and elements (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). According to Saunders et al. (2012), three primary constraints influence sampling decisions. These include resource constraints, time constraints, and practicality.

3.2.7.1. Population

According to Collis and Hussey (2014), a population refers to a group of individuals or objects being studied for statistical analysis. The population thus encompasses all the

objects or individuals a researcher aims to investigate to determine certain characteristics. For this study, the target population comprised of SMMEs in the Overstrand. The Overstrand region includes multiple towns and coastal areas, resulting in a diverse and dynamic setting.

A sampling frame refers to a comprehensive list of all cases within the target population, serving as the basis for selecting a sample (Saunders et al., 2012). Obtaining a comprehensive sampling frame of SMMEs in the Overstrand area poses challenges due to the large number of SMMEs, considering the definition of an SMME. The informal and unregistered nature of many Overstrand SMMEs further complicates accurately enumerating the population.

3.2.7.2. Sampling Procedure

Selecting a representative subset of individuals or units from a larger population is what is meant by sampling in research. As per Babbie (2016), there are two types of sampling approaches - probability and non-probability. Probability sampling involves randomly selecting participants from a population, ensuring that each member has an equal and calculable chance of selection (Salkind, 2012; Babbie, 2016). This helps in generalising the findings to the whole population as the sample accurately mirrors the population's characteristics. Some examples of probability sampling techniques are simple random sampling, stratified sampling, and cluster sampling.

Non-probability sampling does not involve random participant selection and does not provide equal inclusion chances for all population members (Babbie, 2016). This approach is often utilised when accessing the full population or focusing on particular subgroups proves difficult. Non-probability sampling relies on the researcher's subjective judgment when selecting participants (Salkind, 2012). It facilitates in-depth exploration of individual cases and specific phenomena. Non-probability techniques are frequently employed in exploratory, qualitative studies aimed at developing a fundamental understanding of understudied populations rather than hypothesis testing with large samples.

A non-probability sampling approach was selected for this research study. Non-probability sampling encompasses various methods that can be employed:

1. Convenience Sampling: Convenience sampling is a method of participant selection based on the accessibility and proximity of individuals to the researcher (Babbie, 2016).

This method is commonly employed for convenience, but it can introduce biases due to the potential lack of representativeness of the sample in relation to the larger population. Convenience sampling is frequently used when there are constraints on time, resources, or access to the target population.

2. **Purposive Sampling:** Purposive sampling is a method of participant selection that involves choosing individuals based on specific criteria or characteristics relevant to the research study (Babbie, 2016). The researcher chooses individuals with the necessary knowledge or experience relevant to the research topic. Purposive sampling facilitates targeted and focused data collection, enabling participants to contribute valuable insights and information.
3. **Snowball Sampling:** Snowball sampling, also called chain referral sampling, is a method where initial participants are identified and subsequently asked to refer other potential participants who meet the study criteria (Saunders et al., 2012). This method is valuable for studying populations that are difficult to access or define. Snowball sampling utilises social networks and connections to increase the sample size.
4. **Quota Sampling:** Quota sampling is a method of participant selection that involves using predetermined quotas to ensure that the sample accurately represents specific characteristics or subgroups within the population (Babbie, 2016). The researcher establishes quotas based on relevant criteria, such as age, gender, occupation, or other variables of interest. Quota sampling allows for flexible participant selection while ensuring sample diversity.

Based on this study's research topic and objectives, purposive sampling was the most suitable non-probability sampling method. By employing purposive sampling, this study ensured that the sample consists of SMME owners with valuable insights into the internal and external factors affecting business growth.

Previous research studies have utilised purposive sampling when examining similar topics. Fatoki and Okeboye (2010) utilised purposive sampling to select participants with relevant experiences in the small business sector to study the challenges small businesses face in South Africa.

The research study will employ purposive sampling to select the sample based on the following criteria:

- SMMEs falling under the classification of the National Small Business Act, Act No. 102 of 1996;
- SMME owners residing in the Overstrand Local Municipality;
- Individuals of both genders, aged 18 years or older;
- SMMEs with a minimum operational period of one year.

These criteria delineate the specific attributes that individuals had to possess to be eligible for inclusion as participants in the study.

3.2.7.3. Sample size

As Salkind (2012) delineates, a sample constitutes a subgroup of individuals chosen from the study population by the researchers. Sample size determination is impacted by research aims, available resources, and credibility considerations (Creswell, 2013). Collis and Hussey (2014) contend that the need for a representative sample from the broader population is not imperative within the interpretivism paradigm. This is because the primary goal is to comprehend social phenomena comprehensively. Under such circumstances, the researcher may concentrate on studying a single participant. Saunders et al. (2012) suggest that a sample size of 5 to 25 is appropriate for conducting semi-structured interviews.

The qualitative research method used within the interpretivism paradigm, employing semi-structured interviews, was chosen for the study. As a result, a sample size of 10-15 was initially chosen, with the potential for expansion if theoretical saturation is not reached. Theoretical saturation occurs when theories or themes have been sufficiently developed, and additional sampling or data collection does not contribute important new information (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.2.8. Data Collection

Data can be obtained from primary or secondary sources. Primary data collection involves gathering firsthand information directly from individuals or sources through surveys, questionnaires, interviews, or observations (Babbie, 2016). This allows researchers to obtain specific data tailored to their research objectives. In contrast, secondary data encompass published sources such as previous research reports, journal articles, official records, and statistics (Saunders et al., 2012). The literature review for this study was

conducted using secondary data sources. The research questions were addressed through the collection of primary data.

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the qualitative data collection method for this study. This interview format was selected for its simplicity and effectiveness in eliciting data from the target population (Keller & Conradin, 2020). The semi-structured approach allowed the researcher to inquire about participants' perspectives and experiences related to the research questions. The researcher interviewed participants using a set of predetermined questions tied to the study's objectives while also having the flexibility to ask follow-up questions as needed. Semi-structured interviews were deemed an appropriate qualitative technique given this study's exploratory nature and interpretivism paradigm.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were considered a cost-effective and time-efficient method for gathering insights from SMME owners (Keller & Conradin, 2020). The semi-structured format facilitated open-ended data collection, enabling the researcher to probe participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs (Maree, 2016). Interviews were conducted face-to-face to allow the researcher to utilise visual cues and recognise social signs and body language. As Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014) note, semi-structured interviews can provide rich, reliable data by thoroughly covering topics of interest. This method allowed for gaining insight into the research issues, potentially enhancing the study's findings. The researcher took care to avoid excessive prompting that could unduly influence participant responses. At the same time, semi-structured interviews have limitations like dependence on participant accuracy, time demands, and emotional burdens (Keller & Conradin, 2020)—their capacity to provide unique insights justified the investment for this study. Proper interviewer training and practice can improve reliability by reducing inaccuracies (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Moreover, face-to-face engagement facilitates rapport building, creating an environment where participants can freely convey their experiences. Interviews were conducted at participants' business locations for their convenience.

3.2.9. Measuring Instrument

Semi-structured interviews can be considered a middle ground between structured and unstructured interviews, according to Collis and Hussey (2014). In this interview format, the interviewer actively develops a list of topics or aspects that must be covered during the conversation. While the specific questions may vary between interviews, the pertinent

elements are adequately addressed across respondents. An interview guide can be created to steer the interviewer. The guide comprises a comprehensive compilation of relevant factors tied to the overarching research theme, which the interviewer should address with all participants. Although identical questions are posed to interviewees, the interviewer has the latitude to tailor the phrasing based on respondents' diverse backgrounds.

For this study, an interview guide was utilised as the measurement instrument to direct data gathering from SMME owners. The guide focused on perspectives on factors impacting business growth and the role of government support. The researcher developed the interview guide with the study objectives and literature review findings in mind. The guide was organised into five sections, each serving a distinct purpose in addressing the research aims:

1. **Section A: Demographics:** This section collected information on SMME owners' gender, age, education and business attributes, providing participant and business profiles to contextualise subsequent responses.
2. **Section B: Internal Factors:** This section consists of open-ended questions that explore the SMME owners' perspectives on the internal factors identified in the literature review (such as entrepreneurial motivation, managerial skills, and financial management) and how these factors affect their business growth. The open-ended nature of the questions allows for rich qualitative data, capturing the nuances and personal experiences of the participants.
3. **Section C: External Environmental Factors:** Similar to Section B, this section includes open-ended questions to gauge the SMME owners' perspectives on the external factors (such as the legal and regulatory environment, competition, and infrastructure) affecting their business growth. The responses provide insights into the challenges and opportunities the external environment presents.
4. **Section D: Government Support:** This section included questions that elicited perspectives on available government support and its influence on growth. Participants' opinions informed recommendations for enhancing public assistance initiatives.
5. **Section E: Business Growth:** This section identified growth levels and internal/external factors viewed as most integral to facilitating or hindering expansion.

The semi-structured interview guide provided consistency while allowing adaptability across respondents. The format enabled the gathering of comprehensive, insightful data to address the study objectives.

3.2.10. Data Analysis

Data analysis involves extracting insights, identifying patterns, and discerning trends from data. Such a process is essential for understanding data comprehensively and making informed decisions. There are five commonly used methods of analysing qualitative data:

- 1) Thematic analysis is a commonly utilised approach to qualitative data analysis. It involves the identification and organisation of patterns, themes, and concepts within the data. (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The process generally follows a structured approach of coding, categorising, and analysing information to identify themes that encompass the primary concepts or trends observed within the data.
- 2) Content analysis systematically examines textual or visual data to pinpoint particular words, phrases, or themes (Collis & Hussey, 2014). It focuses on identifying and quantifying specific content elements within the data, providing a structured approach to analysing and interpreting qualitative data.
- 3) Grounded theory is an iterative and inductive method of data analysis that endeavours to create a theory or conceptual framework from the data (Collis & Hussey, 2014). It involves systematically coding and analysing data to generate concepts, categories, and relationships, allowing new theories or explanations to emerge.
- 4) Narrative analysis is a method used to gain a deeper understanding of qualitative data by examining personal accounts, stories, or narratives. This process involves deciphering and comprehending the unique experiences and perspectives conveyed through such narratives (Frost, 2011). It involves analysing the structure, content, and meaning of narratives to uncover underlying themes, plotlines, and characteristics, providing insight into individual experiences and perspectives.
- 5) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative methodology that delves into how individuals comprehend their experiences and the significance they attribute to them. This approach examines how people make sense of their encounters and the meaning they attach to them (Frost, 2011). It involves thoroughly examining individual cases or experiences to uncover the shared meanings, subjective interpretations, and psychological processes involved.

Thematic analysis was selected as the data analysis technique for this study, given its common use in qualitative research and suitability for addressing the research questions posed. Thematic analysis was conducted by adhering to the process described by Maguire and Delahunt (2017), which involves:

1. The first step was to become familiar with the data. This involved transcribing the interviews, reflecting on the notes made during the semi-structured interviews, and writing self-reflective notes. The transcripts were then analysed to find common themes and patterns. Researchers became immersed in the data, repeatedly reading and listening to the interviews to gain familiarity and identify initial impressions.
2. Coding the data was the next step in the process. In order to make the data accessible for analysis, it was necessary to allocate identifiers to each data extract based on the extract's meaning. Meaning categories were developed based on the literature, recurring patterns, and themes. Pertinent information was then assigned to a relevant category using a code.
3. The researcher then examined the codes and classified them into potential themes. Themes were meaning patterns that flowed throughout the data and represented significant concepts or ideas. To uncover themes and develop data links, this stage entailed condensing the lists of codes created in the preceding stage into a manageable list of codes.
4. Finally, the researcher conducted a process to refine themes and test propositions. Each generated theme was carefully tested to ensure that the codes within each theme were appropriate and that the themes were coherent and meaningful. The process involved consolidating similar themes, excluding underrepresented themes, and subdividing overarching themes into multiple sub-themes.

After processing and coding the data, the researcher wrote a coherent and compelling narrative that presented the themes substantiated by extracts from the data. The narrative provided an in-depth understanding of the research findings.

Thematic analysis has several advantages over other qualitative data analysis techniques. First, it offers a flexible and adaptable methodology for diverse research queries and data types (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). It enables the identification of meaningful and relevant patterns and themes pertinent to the research objectives. Secondly, thematic analysis enables a systematic and rigorous examination of qualitative data, allowing for a thorough

investigation of the data set. It provides a transparent and repeatable procedure, increasing the credibility and dependability of the findings. In addition, thematic analysis facilitates the interpretation of individual experiences and viewpoints, documenting the richness and depth of qualitative data.

3.3. Reliability and Validity

Data verification involves assessing, examining, and authorising data to ensure the accuracy and reliability of a study. A qualitative study's dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability are crucial in determining its validity and reliability, according to Saunders et al. (2012).

3.3.1. Credibility

Credibility refers to the similarity between the social construction of reality and the study's results. Credibility is essential for ensuring the reliability of the research. To enhance the credibility of the study, the following steps were taken:

- 1) The study utilised established methods based on reliable results from similar qualitative studies.
- 2) Participants were thoroughly informed of their voluntary participation and allowed to withdraw from the study at any point.
- 3) A literature review guided the study's design and structure.
- 4) The findings of this research were compared with the results of similar studies.

3.3.2. Transferability

According to Maree (2016), transferability denotes the extent to which research findings can be generalized or transferred to new situations and environments. The text promotes the avoidance of generalisations and encourages readers to establish connections between the study's findings and their own research or personal experiences. The researcher presented relevant background information to establish the study's related environment. Detailed descriptions of the investigated phenomenon were also provided to facilitate meaningful comparisons.

3.3.3. Dependability

According to Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014), dependability refers to the ability of a researcher to reproduce research results using participants and settings comparable to the original study. To ensure dependability, the researcher verified the data gathered from participants by linking it to theories and language that correlated with the research study. This enhanced the integration process in terms of accurate, unbiased, and high-quality findings.

3.3.4. Confirmability

The degree of objectivity in research findings is known as confirmability. It refers to the degree to which other people can vouch for, support, or validate the study results. Confirmability is attained when the outcomes of the study are grounded in the perspectives and experiences of the participants, and the data itself stands as evidence, independent of any potential bias or personal assumptions on the part of the researcher (Maree, 2016). Each interview was recorded audio. These recordings were transcribed, and direct quotations from the transcripts were used to ensure authenticity. The researcher also thoroughly explained the methodology utilised to ensure the validity and dependability of the research outcomes.

3.4. Ethical Consideration

Ethics refers to the moral standards and ideals that constitute the basis for appropriate behaviour (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Research ethics pertains to a widely acknowledged group of ethical principles that outline the anticipated standards of behaviour towards individuals involved in the research process (Saunders et al., 2012). Before conducting any research study, the University of South Africa (UNISA) mandates obtaining ethical clearance per their Research Ethics Policy. This includes acquiring an ethical clearance certificate from UNISA before data collection can begin. The following ethical principles were considered:

3.4.1. Informed Consent

Obtaining informed consent from participants is a crucial aspect of research, as it ensures that individuals are adequately informed about the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits associated with the study (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Participants were guaranteed

the right to engage in the study willingly and the freedom to leave the study at any time without repercussions.

It was important to get informed consent from the Overstrand Local Municipality and the SMMEs participating in the study. The researcher asked for permission from the Municipal Manager as the authorised person of Overstrand Local Municipality before the commencement of the study. An approval letter from the Municipal Manager was submitted to UNISA to obtain ethical clearance.

Informed consent was also sought from SMME owners interested in participating in the research. The main goal of obtaining informed consent was to provide participants with adequate details to make a voluntary, deliberate choice about taking part in a research study. The SMMEs were given an explanation of the study's goals, benefits, and advantages and were then given the opportunity to express their interest in participating. According to Collis and Hussey (2014), one of the most crucial ethical rules is that research participants should not be coerced into participating. Therefore, participation in the research study was strictly voluntary, and there was no coercion of SMMEs.

3.4.2. Confidentiality and Anonymity

Protecting the privacy and identity of participants by maintaining confidentiality and anonymity is of utmost importance (Saunders et al., 2012). Autonomy and confidentiality are two important concepts in research ethics, as outlined by Collins and Hussey (2014). Autonomy refers to the commitment made to study participants that their identities will remain anonymous, whereas confidentiality ensures that no information provided can be traced back to the participants.

The collected data was stored securely and was only accessible to individuals who had been authorised. Confidentiality and privacy of participants were preserved by excluding or anonymizing identifying details when presenting this study's results. This practice was essential to ensure the ethical conduct of research and to uphold the principles of confidentiality and privacy. By removing or anonymising identifying information, the research findings could be presented in a manner that respects the rights and privacy of the participants involved.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the research methods used in this study were outlined. The chosen research approach, data gathering, and data analysis procedures were thoroughly explored and justified. Later sections provided a detailed discussion of these crucial aspects of the research methodology. Finally, the chapter concluded with a careful examination and review of the ethical issues relevant to the study.

An interpretive paradigm was selected to understand the phenomenon under study. The research utilised a qualitative design, chosen to capture the firsthand experiences and perspectives of SMME owners. Data was gathered through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with at least five SMMEs within the Overstrand Local Municipality. Analysis and discussion of the empirical findings will be presented in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 presents the key findings from the qualitative research conducted to identify the main factors impacting the growth of SMMEs in the Overstrand Local Municipality. The purpose of this chapter is to objectively report the data collected from semi-structured interviews with 12 SMME owners and analyse the findings as they relate to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. The chapter is structured based on the three research objectives, which are (1) to determine the perception of SMMEs in the internal factors affecting business growth, (2) to determine the perception of SMMEs in the external factors affecting business growth, and (3) to assess the perception of SMMEs in government support in enhancing SMMEs business growth. Relevant interview excerpts are provided, along with the analysis of how the qualitative findings relate to the research question. Overall, this chapter provides an overview of the qualitative results, setting the foundation for the conclusions to be drawn and recommendations presented in Chapter 5.

4.2. Population and Sample Size

The researcher approached 15 SMMEs to participate in the study. However, 3 SMMEs were excluded from the final sample. One SMME did not meet the eligibility criteria of having been in operation for at least one year. Another SMME owner appeared intoxicated during the initial interview, and their business was subsequently found to be operating illegally on municipal land, leading to its closure. The third excluded participant, while reporting to have operated their business for 3 years and identifying as a business owner, was discovered to be an agent for a larger cosmetics company rather than the owner of an independent SMME. Thus, after excluding these 3 participants, the final sample consisted of 12 eligible SMMEs who participated in the full study.

4.3. Demographic information

The participants in this study of factors affecting SMME growth in the Overstrand Local Municipality were predominantly male (8 out of the 12 participants) with an average age of 29 years old, with ages ranging from 18 to 42 years old. All participants had at least a high

school education, with one having a diploma and two having certificates. Most operated in the formal sector (83%, or 10 of the 12 participants), while 17% were in the informal sector. The businesses spanned a variety of industries like clothing/textiles, IT, retail, cleaning services, internet cafes, and beauty. The businesses ranged from 1 to 11 years old. On average, the businesses had been operating for 6 years. Half had 0 employees while the maximum was 9 employees. All SMMEs reported an annual turnover of less than R500,000.

These demographics align with other research showing that the typical South African SMME owner is male, younger, with lower education levels, operating in retail/services, less than 6 years old, and very small in terms of employees and revenue (Fatoki, 2014; Cant & Wiid, 2013).

Table 4.1: Demographics of the participants who took part in the research study

Participant	Gender	Age	Education	Sector	Industry / Type of business	Business age	Number of Employees	Annual turnover
1	Male	32	High School and a security certificate	Formal	Clothing/textiles industry, with sneaker cleaning as a core service offering	3	3	Less than R500 000
2	Male	34	High School	Formal	Internet Cafe	11	9	Less than R500 000
3	Male	23	High School	Formal	Cleaning services – Bin cleaning	5	1	Less than R500 000
4	Male	26	High School	Formal	Fashion industry - Traditional African Pattern Hat/Sneaker Painting	3	0	Less than R500 000

Participant	Gender	Age	Education	Sector	Industry / Type of business	Business age	Number of Employees	Annual turnover
5	Female	29	Certificates	Formal	Beauty industry	3	1	Less than R500 000
6	Male	30	High School	Formal	Commercial cleaning services and Maintenance	7	1	Less than R500 000
7	Female	33	High School	Formal	Beauty industry	11	0	Less than R500 000
8	Male	36	High School	Informal	Upholstery	9	2	Less than R500 000
9	Female	21	High School	Formal	Apparel printing and business services	1	0	Less than R500 000
10	Female	18	High School	Informal	Wholesale and Retail	3	0	Less than R500 000
11	Male	27	High school	Formal	Clothing fabrication and design	8	0	Less than R500 000
12	Male	42	Diploma	Formal	Media and IT	11	7	Less than R500 000

Source: Authors' Construct

4.4. Internal factors affecting SMME growth

The subsequent section presents the findings and results from the semi-structured interviews to identify the internal factors impacting the growth of SMMEs.

4.4.1. Motivation

To understand the motivation of SMME owners in the Overstrand Local Municipality to start their businesses, participants described their reasons for starting a business. Their responses provide insight into the key drivers of small business creation in this context. Previous research has examined the motivations that drive individuals to start their own businesses. These motivations are often classified as either "push" factors, where necessity

drives one to entrepreneurship, or "pull" factors, where opportunities pull people toward starting a business (Akinyemi & Adejumo, 2017).

The study reveals a range of motivations among SMMEs, highlighting both push and pull factors, though pull factors were more prevalent overall. Necessity and financial motives were cited, often intertwined with passion. Participant 1 started his sneaker-cleaning business out of necessity during the COVID-19 lockdown after losing his job. He said, "I started my business during COVID-19, which was the lockdown. At that time, I was working for Business X on a casual basis. So what was happening during that lockdown is that we had to be temporarily laid off..." This exemplifies a push factor, where adverse circumstances pushed the participant into entrepreneurship out of a need for income. This aligns with evidence that necessity-based entrepreneurship is often a response to unemployment (Fatoki & Okeboye, 2010).

However, Participant 1 has come to love the business and enjoys the freedom, peace, and personal growth it provides. Initial hardship evolved into a passion. He said, "Yes, I think I've developed a love for it. At first, I didn't understand, but over time, you find peace and freedom in it." This suggests pull factors now motivate him to continue the business.

Similarly, Participant 2 started his printing business as a side activity but was pushed into growing it full-time after losing his job and eyesight. He said, "...I got shot - I lost my eyesight. So when I lost my eyesight, I had only one printer. I then bought a laptop from my brother. I began printing documents during the day..." His challenging situation pushed him to focus fully on his side business. Participant 6 also cites push factors, explaining he started his cleaning business with friends when they were bored and lacking money, saying, "You know, so sometimes when maybe we are in my space, I won't cook for you guys, you guys must contribute to get something, you know." He further said, "I felt like the project was something that could bring us together in terms of making money as a unit, as friends, you know." This social and financial necessity motivated his startup. However, once the business got started, Participant 6 got motivated by the benefits of having a company. For Participant 7, interest in beauty was coupled with needing "extra cash."

Conversely, other participants were pulled into entrepreneurship by passions, opportunities, and encouragement from others. Participant 3 started his dustbin cleaning business because he saw a need in the community. Participant 3 said his business "means I've got ideas and plans for the future." Participant 4 said, "I was always just tryna be an artist,

making paintings on canvas and whatnot. But to get my name out there, I started painting on my t-shirts." His passion for art pulled him toward starting an apparel business.

"Then one day this random woman, she was a foreigner, saw me wearing my painted up shirt. And she was like "You should turn this into a business!" I didn't even know her but she invested in me and helped me see how I could sell my art" (Participant 4).

Participant 5 similarly had a passion for beauty services and started informally after doing her own makeup. Participant 8 always wanted to be an entrepreneur and start a business. He said, "I always wanted to be one, but even though I didn't know how to start, I always wanted to have a business." Participant 9 also describes pulling factors, explaining she started her apparel printing business because she "had time on my hands" and a "passion for arts and poetry" after high school plans were disrupted. She also received encouragement from a friend to turn her graphic design hobby into a business. Participant 11 also started his clothing fabrication and design business because of passion and inspiration, saying: "I was inspired by my favourite musician by his sense of style. I fell in love with clothes and fashion." Participant 10 and 12 were motivated to start their business because of their mother and their upbringing.

"Since primary school, we've always done small businesses as our only income. So I started by helping my mom with her business. The motivation now is that I want my own business" (Participant 10).

"Inspiration from my mother she owned a business as well. Growing up close to her made me want to one day become a business owner" (Participant 12).

Regarding links to growth, research shows that necessity-motivated businesses, those starting a business as a result of push factors, often struggle to thrive compared to opportunity-motivated ones (Fatoki, 2014). However, the growth accounts of Participants 1, 2, and 7 indicate that passion and perseverance can overcome disadvantageous beginnings. Furthermore, Tsenki (2021) found combinations of necessity and opportunity motives (push and pull factors) foster resilience. As the findings demonstrate, motivations are multifaceted and situational and can transform through experience.

From the findings, it can be derived that SMMEs are driven by both necessary and opportunity or passion, which interact in dynamic ways. While passion-driven businesses have advantages, necessity-based ventures can also thrive, given time, commitment, and support.

4.4.2. Level of Education and Business Management Skills

The interview responses revealed that most participants had limited formal education beyond high school and minimal business management training prior to starting their business. Many emphasised learning critical skills like business management and record keeping through workshops and courses after startup.

Several participants emphasised how their limited formal education negatively affected their abilities to effectively run their businesses, especially early on. Participant 3 stated, "My current level of education is not high enough to reach that standard" in terms of growing the business to higher levels. Participant 6 lamented his lack of access to business education beyond high school, saying, "There are things in business I only learned through hands-on experience." He felt this knowledge gap held back his company's growth at times.

Multiple interviewees also highlighted their lack of business management skills and experience when starting. As Participant 2 shared, "I was running this business without really knowing how to properly run a business." Participant 7 acknowledged, "I had no training, nothing" related to managing a salon professionally. Participant 9 echoed this, saying, "I didn't have any prior business management education or experience before starting." Participant 11 shared that initially, "I was running this business without really knowing how to properly run a business."

However, several participants emphasised how training programs and workshops helped build their business acumen. Participant 2 credited programs by Programme X and Programme Y with teaching crucial skills like "how important it is to keep records and track expenses." He says this new financial knowledge "greatly aided the growth of my business." Participant 5 similarly stated that training through Programme X "helped improve financial management abilities." Participant 8 highlighted how early training aided success, stating that the business management, pricing, costing, and finance skills he learned through his initial sewing course were very beneficial in starting and running the business. This training was critical; he says it would have been challenging to continue without those skills.

Participant 12 pursued additional business courses to put "what I studied into practice" and continues attending talks to keep "feeding your mind." Participant 10 likewise sees schooling as gradually imparting useful "business things."

These experiences align with studies showing SMME founders often lack management training, and their growth is hampered by limited financial, operations and marketing skills (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017). Udimal and Biyase (2021) contend that business owners with managerial training, education, and experience can successfully manage SMMEs because they can mitigate the effects of binding constraints on business growth. Baporikar et al. (2016) suggest that more entrepreneurial education positively affects productivity, thereby fostering business growth.

Some participants expressed a desire for further education and training to enhance their management capacities. As Participant 1 shared, "I'm starting to think of courses" to expand knowledge. Participant 6 said, "Continuing education is so important in business," voicing regret at not pursuing more formal qualifications but feeling "inspired and motivated to learn."

The study revealed that lower education levels and lack of prior business management experience posed obstacles to effectively operating and growing SMMEs for multiple participants. Those able to participate in training programs gained crucial skills to professionalise and grow their SMMEs. This confirms the need for capacity building to empower entrepreneurs without strong educational backgrounds (Rogerson, 2008). Some participants demonstrated how targeted training programs helped build critical financial, marketing, compliance, and other skills to overcome early knowledge gaps. Continuing education and management capacity building were cited as important for ongoing growth. Participant 1 expressed: "You have to expand your knowledge - you have to be willing to learn new things. Because most people when they are going to buy a product in town, they always check the expiration date, but they don't check the expiration date of their own knowledge. In business, we have to learn everything. That's why here I had to learn about clothing and textiles, the products, but I also had to learn financial literacy - you have to find balance, you know, because everything happening in the business touches many areas - finances, operations, employees, etc. So I think the most important thing is knowledge." Participant 3 noted, "With more education, the business would prosper more as well."

The research confirms that entrepreneurial education and training can play a vital role in empowering small business owners to overcome initial knowledge gaps and binding

constraints to foster more robust, sustainable enterprises. As one participant astutely stated, business leaders must continually expand their knowledge across functional areas and check the expiration date on their own learning to drive innovation and stay relevant. This explicitly links to the studies by Baporikar et al. (2016) and Udimal and Biyase (2021) that contend management training and education enable entrepreneurs to successfully operate and grow their businesses by building capacity to navigate key challenges.

The experiences of these entrepreneurs highlight the need for increased investments in adult education, vocational training, and lifelong learning opportunities to unlock the full economic potential of the SMME sector.

4.4.3. Financial Management

Participants were asked about their financial management skills and capabilities and how it affects their business growth. The findings revealed that financial management knowledge and skills are critical for the growth and sustainability of SMMEs. As Participant 1 highlighted, "you have to learn everything...finances, operations, employees, etc. So I think the most important thing is knowledge." This aligns with research stating that financial literacy is imperative for small business owners to make sound decisions and plans (Olawajun & Msomi, 2021).

A key finding was that most participants lacked financial management competencies when starting their businesses. Participants highlighted their lack of skills in areas like bookkeeping, record keeping, budgeting, financial planning, and interpreting financial statements prior to receiving some form of training. Participant 5 admitted, "Financial management is an area where I think we in the township fail because I don't think we actually sit down and track how much came in, how much went out." Similarly, Participant 7 shared, "Before there was no tracking of income, expenses - it was just my money, I didn't know anything about business accounts." Participant 10 admitted that "not understanding more on how to manage your financials" has downsides, while Participant 12, the owner of a media company, shared that "financial management" problems had a "negative" effect, elaborating that "I had to learn the difficult way that it is important to separate my funds and businesses funds." This confirms studies revealing inadequate financial skills among SMME owners, indicating that businesses with record-keeping and financial management issues are likelier to have financial troubles (Agwa-Ejon & Mbohwa, 2015).

However, those who received financial training indicated immense benefits. Participant 2 explained, "After I went to these trainings I managed to save - I now have these 5 meters by 7-meter shack to run my business. At least I have more space now." Participant 7 also remarked, "It's a huge difference because I think it has grown financially since then, because before you don't track how much you make, save, spend - with no records you just use the money and don't know where it goes." Participant 8 stated, "That training helped me understand how it's done - that you buy material, add value through your work, and then price accordingly." This highlights that equipping SMMEs with financial knowledge can significantly impact their growth and sustainability.

Proper record-keeping was a key financial competency participants had acquired from training programs. As Participant 3 shared, "Yeah, absolutely. Because Programme X helped us with profiles where you can record all your finances and keep everything recorded." Participant 5 also affirmed, "Yes, I can", when asked about recording income and expenses. Participant 11 shared that initially, "I was running this business without really knowing how to properly run a business." However, some training interventions helped build critical capacities over time. Participant 11 explained that workshops taught crucial skills like "how important it is to keep records and track expenses," transforming his abilities.

However, compiling financial statements posed a challenge for some, like Participant 7, who admitted, "Oh, big words! What is that?" This indicates a need for further training in financial reporting.

Budgeting was another area of weakness, with Participants 3 and 5 both stating they do not compile budgets. Participant 4 also confessed, "It's also implementation that is the issue. Some of the stuff I know, it's just a matter of properly doing it." This highlights a gap between knowledge and application that constrains financial management.

The findings revealed financial illiteracy as a major impediment to SMME growth. However, equipping owners with financial skills has significant positive impacts. As Participant 6 shared, "The more the merrier, I accept, I accept every new challenge and learning." Ongoing training and mentorship in financial management are vital to nurture the growth of emerging enterprises.

4.4.4. Human Resource Management

A business also relies heavily on human capital and talent. While an entrepreneur may invest in the most advanced machinery and equipment, it is equally vital to recruit and retain skilled employees to operate this equipment. Deficiencies in human resources management can jeopardise the success of a small business. Effective human resource management requires the capability to onboard the appropriate talent at the opportune moment and with the requisite competencies. Alongside financial management, human resource management in staffing constitutes an imperative determinant of business growth (Bushe, 2019).

Several participants highlighted difficulty attracting and retaining skilled talent, a common SMME challenge noted in research (Hung, Cant & Wiid., 2016). Participant 1 said, "It's challenging. Because most people are not well-skilled, they have limitations, if I can put it that way. There are gaps, you know. For example, if I ask someone to do a task and then this person will say, this is how far I can go with what skills he or she has." He went on to say, "Maybe the level we require here, they don't have that. They have limitations." Participant 5 echoed this, saying she struggles to "find people with the right skills and attitude to work with me." Participant 3 also noted the reliance on finding an employee who approached him rather than being able to recruit skilled staff readily.

Participant 11, who runs a clothing fabrication and design business, directly declared that "not hiring" employees was hindering productivity and expansion plans, saying, "If I would hire at least one person, I think the business would be much more productive." Several other participants also expressed a desire for more employees to enable business growth but faced hurdles in recruiting. Participant 1 stated that more employees "would help me a lot" in expanding his business, but he lacked the space and funds to add staff. Financial constraints were cited as a key reason for this skills gap, with owners unable to offer attractive compensation. Participant 2, who runs an internet cafe, admitted, "I might not be able to pay their salary" to hire the specialised skills he needs. This was reiterated by participant 1. Similarly, Participants 2, 5, and 6 wanted to hire more people to meet demand but also faced financial and infrastructure constraints. Participant 9, who runs an apparel printing company, hoped to hire staff to reduce her overload managing all business functions alone but couldn't yet afford employees. These findings align with research showing skills

shortages and difficulty paying high salaries hinder SMME recruitment of qualified talent (Hung et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Participants 3, 7, and 8 wanted more skilled staff to work faster and attract customers to grow their businesses, but they struggled to find qualified candidates during recruitment. Participant 7 further highlighted that unskilled employees cause harm to her business, saying: "I once had somebody who was helpful before. The problem is finding people who know what they're doing - it's a huge loss for me when clients wanting their hair or nails done run off to someone else because I lack skilled staff."

With skills gaps in new hires, several participants highlighted the need for training employees on the job. Participant 2 stated, "Whatever they do, there is coming from me. And even if I could get someone skilled, I might not be able to pay their salary. But for me now, it's easy to recruit someone and teach them." While some noted satisfaction training less qualified staff, others found the quality lagged. Participant 8, who runs an upholstery business, explained he had to let go of experienced employees due to COVID-19 and moving to a different location and instead take on new "trainees I can pay less." However, he admitted their skills are not yet "at the level you want", which has been frustrating. Providing training and upskilling is seen as an important HRM function for SMME growth, yet it is frequently neglected due to financial constraints (Chimucheka, 2013).

The inability to attract and retain skilled staff due to limited resources confirms past findings on SMME recruitment difficulties (Hung et al., 2016). The authors mentioned that reliance on lower-skilled hires for cost savings also aligns with research on SMMEs compensating for talent gaps by offering training. However, the skills deficit was seen as inhibiting growth by many owners.

In line with previous studies, participants faced notable HR constraints related to skills shortages, recruitment, cost containment, and overload - issues commonly faced by SMMEs globally. Targeted support on talent acquisition and management could significantly enhance their capacity to leverage human capital for growth.

4.5. External factors affecting SMME growth

The subsequent section presents the findings and results from the semi-structured interviews to identify the external factors impacting the growth of SMMEs.

4.5.1. Access to Finance

Access to financing was overwhelmingly cited as one of the number one challenges facing SMME growth and development across the interviews, aligning with past studies. Participant 7 summed it up as "One major challenge is lack of funding to grow. If we had better access to financing, my salon would look more advanced", while Participant 2 shared how the rejection of his loan application "affected the business very badly". This resonates with Udimal and Biyase's (2021) study citing access to finance as a key barrier and Olarewaju and Msomi (2021), who found poor financing constrained South African SMME growth.

Most participants started enterprises using personal savings, with minimal external financing. Participant 5 stated, "With my own money". Participant 8 explained, "I started from my own personal funds". This confirms Mazanai and Fatoki's (2012) finding that South African SMMEs rely heavily on internal funds. Participant 10 also highlighted getting funds from "siblings and my mother". Family loans are thus an important funding source, as found by Cuñat and Melitz (2012) globally.

Participants who sought loans or grants from banks and government agencies faced difficulties due to limited records, collateral, and regulatory compliance. Participant 7 explained being "under debt review" prohibited accessing finance. Participant 11 shared, "not having financial records and lack of collateral." Participant 9 stated, "most of the time, when you apply for funding, they want your business to have reached a certain threshold or be in the industry for X amount of years." This aligns with findings from Udimal and Biyase (2021) that strict requirements constrain access to finance for SMMEs, especially for SMMEs operating in townships.

Without access to capital, participants have struggled to purchase equipment, stock, and other resources to grow their businesses. Participant 2 shared that after an unsuccessful application from one of the government agencies, "I got disappointed. Because I'm still struggling, even now, some of these new services, they need new laptops with new software...So that's the problem I'm facing right now." Participant 5 said they have faced challenges even when trying to access funds, stating, "You know you wait, you wait, you wait, and they will never get back to you."

For those participants who did access funding from government agencies, the additional capital allowed them to purchase vital equipment and branding material. Participant 1

highlighted the impact of funding, stating, "The funding that I received from SEDA helped me a lot because the one is the branding that you actually see that makes our shop even looks good. And then the other funding, which is in terms of finances, it helped me on adding the services."

Most of the participants interviewed were given the opportunity to participate in various programmes offering training and giving the participants an opportunity to secure some seed funding. These programmes were endorsed by the Overstand municipality. The funding and support received, however, came from the private institutions that ran these programmes. Participant 9 secured multiple seed funding from these programmes to get "the equipment, that equipment and stuff that I needed." Participant 5 stated the funding received "was just a step in the right way." Participant 6 got "funding for uniforms for materials", which "make the job easier and faster". Participant 7 used a grant to buy "stock", which "lasted so long I spent months not having to buy stock." This demonstrates, as Nassimbeni and Petersen (2015) found, that adequate capital allows acquiring assets and inventory to expand operations and productivity.

Despite most participants receiving some form of funding either from government agencies or private institutions, participants expressed that the funds were not enough for the needs of the business. Participants expressed that they need access to infrastructure and employees to grow their businesses truly. Participant 4 mentioned, "You want to rent out this space? The funding institutions don't look into paying rent, getting employees and paying them."

Limited access to financing has severely constrained participants' abilities to expand their businesses. Without the necessary capital, infrastructure, and human resources, many SMMEs remain stuck as micro-enterprises. Greater access to appropriately structured SMME financing and support around infrastructure and staffing could provide vital lifelines to growing township businesses. As Participant 9 surmised, "access to funding" is the "number one obstacle" but also the "number one for growth".

4.5.2. Infrastructure and Location

The interviews with SMME owners revealed significant challenges with infrastructure and location that hinder business growth. A major problem cited by multiple participants is the lack of adequate basic infrastructure like water, electricity, and trading spaces, especially in

the township area. Participant 7 shared, "There's no infrastructure. I have challenges as I don't get municipal electricity here, so I'm paying much more than at a proper salon." The participant mentioned that she needs to purchase electricity from her neighbours. She laid a cable from her neighbours to her salon to get electricity because the place she is renting does not include electricity. Participant 7 further said: "Sometimes when my landlord who controls the power is out, the electricity trips and I have to wait for them to come back and lose business."

The lack of suitable business premises and trading spaces was another key issue noted. As Participant 5 stated, "Infrastructure as in a trading space is the challenge. I'd be happy to build my own infrastructure if provided land." Participant 3 explained, "We suffer a lot because our workplace is outdoors with no covering, so we aren't protected from the weather." Participant 11 noted how the inability to expand structures limits growth. He stated: "Since it is in an informal settlement, some people get lost when trying to find me. I can't really do proper marketing. Another issue is that I can't expand the structure." Participant 5 described: "There aren't really designated spaces here from the municipality for small businesses. I had to fund all my own infrastructure. I'd love to have a bigger space to expand services, like adding a spa and space for facials." Participant 2 mentioned, "Having this small shack limits growth. If I had more space, I could expand." Participant 8 highlighted how "Infrastructure issues were the biggest challenge" in getting their business site approved.

In terms of location, while high foot traffic spots near the taxi ranks boost visibility and walk-in customers, crime poses a challenge. Participant 1 chose to locate "close to the taxi rank so people are coming by here to catch taxis already." Participant 7 gets walk-in traffic because her salon is on the roadside in front of a tavern. However, Participant 5 noted that crime in her area is "very high", which leads to theft of valuable equipment and makes some clients "uncomfortable coming here." As she shared, she cannot leave belongings in her business overnight due to the "high theft risk." Participant 7 also remarked that being highly visible leads to more exposure to crime. Participant 6 mentioned: "But even those who can afford, they feel it's not worth coming here because of the nature of the location. Like including people who feel they can be hijacked or robbed."

To increase visibility and accessibility, multiple participants expressed interest in expanding to more central urban locations like town centres and shopping malls but cited challenges like high rents and lack of municipal support. Participant 3 stated, "A challenge is being less

visible so people don't see us in this space," while Participant 9, operating solely online, noted the lack of a physical store, which "hinders growth because I lack exposure."

These findings align with research showing how poor infrastructure significantly constrains SMME operations in South Africa. Ayandibu and Houghton (2017) found that 51% of SMMEs surveyed considered infrastructure limitations as having a high or very high adverse impact on their operations. Olawale and Garwe (2010) also found that 62% of SMMEs cited infrastructural inadequacies as a major growth barrier. The desire for high visibility, foot traffic locations and concerns about crime and safety also reflect previous studies on how location impacts resource availability and customer access (Mbonyane & Ladzani, 2011). The interest in expanding beyond townships to urban centres mirrors arguments that connecting rural and urban enterprises allows reaching wider markets to foster growth (Ogujiuba et al., 2022). The results demonstrate that infrastructure deficiencies and spatial factors related to location play a major role in impeding the growth and success of SMMEs in the Overstrand municipality.

4.5.3. Access to Markets

The interview findings revealed several key insights into how access to market impacts SMME growth in Overstrand. SMMEs highlighted challenges but also mitigated factors in accessing different markets.

A common challenge cited was difficulty reaching customers outside of the immediate township location due to transport logistics and crime. The reasons cited link to challenges in terms of business location and infrastructure, as mentioned above. Participant 1 explained that while they have customers from other provinces, transport logistics pose a major obstacle:

"We will use couriers, you know, for transport. But the only thing that was affecting us was the time because when they are transporting their stuff, it will take maybe 5 to 9 days to receive them, and then also take another 5 to 9 days to send stuff back" (Participant 1).

Participant 1 noted that the long transit times negatively impact customer satisfaction and make it difficult to expand geographically. Participant 2 similarly noted attracting customers from surrounding towns thanks to word of mouth and online visibility. However, they

emphasised that transportation remains a hindrance, making local customers preferable. He mentioned fulfilling non-local orders remotely due to distance. Participant 3 explained that while they service higher-end restaurants in urban areas, transportation of waste bins remains a challenge:

"Transportation is really a challenge. Although we've got some other things to market and do other stuff, we still suffer with transportation" (Participant 3).

Participant 10 further highlighted transportation challenges in accessing stock to supply her customers.

"Okay, the first challenge that I had was a transportation for me to get the stuff that I sell because I buy them in Cape Town" (Participant 10).

Several participants highlighted how their location within high-crime areas deters potential customers who are wary of safety risks. Participant 5 agreed, stating that while getting lost is manageable, crime prevents many from visiting. Participant 7 chose their location for visibility but conceded being "more exposed to crime" as her business is located across the road from a liquor store. Participant 6 said: "The market is there, but the people in the location, they don't want to pay. So, the real market is other businesses outside this location...Some of them feel it's too dangerous to be around this area." Participant 5 also highlighted socio-economic factors, saying: "Here in location, those people do not have enough income" when describing challenges in business growth. These sentiments align with studies finding a location within disadvantaged, high-crime areas constrains market access and growth for small enterprises (Mbonyane & Ladzani, 2011).

Accessing commercial property also posed problems. Participant 3 cited expensive land pricing as a barrier to expansion. Participant 8 described spending months constructing on newly acquired land before authorities halted it for compliance issues. Though other similar structures existed, highlighting inconsistent regulation. Their new location enabled attracting more white customers versus their prior unsafe area. This emphasises how proactive infrastructure development enabling township enterprises to afford and legally use property could remove growth barriers.

Several entrepreneurs actively worked to overcome locality constraints through marketing strategies like referrals, social media, and innovation. Participant 9 leveraged digital

platforms for international sales, learning to handle shipping logistics. Participant 5 listed clientele from towns across the Overberg, which she attracts through updating her service offering to meet current trends. Participant 4 strategically targets hotels and tourist sites to showcase his crafts. Olawale and Garwe (2010) found products must align with customer needs and preferences in each market segment. Blose (2018) established market access requires both attracting customers and having the physical ability to serve them. Building an external customer base and intentionally tailoring products and services to those markets emerged as key strategies for mitigating location-imposed growth limits.

The research indicates township SMMEs face significant obstacles in accessing markets and customers outside of their immediate locality. Transport, safety concerns, land regulations, and product relevance were recurring hurdles. The findings reinforce conclusions from studies that geographical isolation and unfavourable local conditions impede market access and expansion (Mbonyane & Ladzani, 2011). Strategic location selection, customer-centric offerings and leveraging technology help overcome some limitations. However, addressing geographic business expansion barriers remains critical for unlocking SMME growth potential.

4.5.4. Competition

The competitive landscape seems to have varying impacts on the growth of the participating SMMEs. Some participants, like Participant 1, do not perceive significant competition in their niche markets and locations, allowing them to successfully retain customers and expand. As Participant 1 stated, "I don't have any real competition" in the chosen niche, enabling growth. Participant 2 feels established as the "biggest internet cafe" in his township, with competitors actually outsourcing work to him, so competition is not hindering his business. In Participant 2's words, "I think they are the ones competing with me." Participant 7 has a solid client base despite increasing competition, which pushes her to "work harder" and prevents "relaxing". As Participant 7 explained, competition "makes me stronger and work harder".

However, other participants face more intense competition, hindering their growth. Participant 6 laments the "tricky" competition with "copycats" that makes success difficult, with "only 1 in 5 succeeding". Participant 9 acknowledges the "highly competitive" online and broader markets but has grown by focusing on a niche youth market with a unique value proposition. As Participant 9 stated, "focusing on that niche as my value proposition has

helped grow the business within the highly competitive space." Participant 10 struggles to retain customers who leave when competitors offer new products she lacks. Participant 11 benefits from having little local competition and loyal customers. Participant 12 sees competition positively, forcing continual improvement, though some competitors have edged out work.

The results correspond with other studies indicating competition can negatively affect small businesses. In South Africa, SMMEs have regularly pointed to competition as a major hindrance to business expansion and success. A survey by the BER (2016) found that 34% of SMMEs regarded competition as a primary obstacle. Likewise, a study by Cant and Wiid (2013) found that 75% of surveyed SMMEs encountered moderate to high competition. The impact seems substantial, with 48% of participants reporting competition caused decreasing revenues and earnings for their business.

However, niche strategies and innovation can enable SMMEs to compete successfully (Islami, Mustafa & Topuzovska Latkovikj, 2020). Islami et al. (2020) also find competition encourages productivity and innovation. The experiences vary based on niche, resources, and innovation. However, competition appears to be a significant factor affecting SMME growth.

4.5.5. Laws and Regulations

Laws and regulations were not frequently cited as major obstacles to SMME growth among interview participants, although some did note challenges in terms of business registration, marketing, and expansion.

Participant 8 explained how "I hit problems with the municipality for 3 months", halting operations during construction. Participant 11 highlighted constraints on expansion: "In this current location I am in, we are not allowed to expand our structures due to municipal town planning and building by-laws. This structure is very small and therefore hinders my growth." Participant 12 also critiqued restrictions around marketing and promotion, stating rules make "Marketing in the township difficult...If one looks at your bigger cities, they are more flexible." Participant 12 argued, "The municipality does not allow us to grow the township economy through marketing our products in key locations. There is too much red tape." These findings align with Nyamwanza et al. (2016), who found government regulations to be a key challenge for Zimbabwean SMMEs.

Excessive municipal red tape was also highlighted in South African research by Cant and Wiid (2013), who found government regulations were an inhibiting factor for 60% of SMME owners surveyed. Participant 6 explained how construction sector opportunities are limited by Contractor Industry Development Board (CIDB) grading regulations. This shows the impact sector-specific regulations can have. Participant 9 explained how tax regulations requiring financial statements and audits overwhelm small startups, arguing "government should be less harsh on small startups." This aligns with Smulders and Stiglingh (2012), indicating relative tax compliance costs are regressive, with a disproportionate burden on smaller firms.

Business registration and formalisation were also discussed. Participant 7 registered to "show how responsible you are" when applying for funding. Participant 9 stated directly, "I didn't want to deal with SARS, etc. But what motivated me was that once registered, I would get opportunities for funding from government institutions that require registration.". Participant 5 reiterated that in order to access funds, government agencies require the business to be registered, saying: "Just because they want your business to be registered and you must have a business account, and you must have record keeping of your incoming and outgoing. And then you must be registered with SARS as well."

The ongoing responsibilities and red tape beyond just registration are burdensome for new small businesses. Participant 9 cautioned that compliance requirements are overwhelming.

"I think it's the documentation processes and not knowing how to navigate everything. Recently, SARS wanted me to submit returns, etc., and it's overwhelming as a new small business to have to get audited financials just to comply and not get deregistered. I feel the government should be less harsh on small startups - if you want a business to grow, you wouldn't want them to have all these costly processes just to get funding" (Participant 9).

Without funding requirements, both participants 7 and 9 said they were unlikely to have formally registered. This supports Nieuwenhuizen (2019), who found that SMMEs often remain informal to reduce costs and increase wealth.

In contrast, participant 4 saw more formalisation benefits, explaining registration assisted in "accessing certain programs and promoting myself." Participant 6 also chose to register his business "to be more professional." These varying perspectives reflect disagreement over

whether regulations constrain entrepreneurship or simply shape, without reducing, business activity (Mallett, Wapshott & Vorley, 2019).

For some SMMEs, compliance burdens and municipal regulations around expansion or marketing do hinder growth prospects. However, regulations were not frequently cited as the most pressing obstacle compared to access to finance, infrastructure, skills and competition. Business registration requirements reflect regulatory issues for SMMEs. However, perspectives differed on whether formalisation assists or hinders growth. To enable SMME development, reviewing municipal approvals processes and requirements would be valuable.

4.6. Government support

The interviews with SMME owners revealed mixed perceptions regarding government support initiatives and their impact on small business growth.

4.6.1. Awareness of Government Support

Most participants were aware of some government agencies, mostly NYDA, SEDA, and the municipality LED department. However, awareness seems limited to one or two agencies rather than the multitude that exist. As Participant 7 stated, "I know a few – SEDA, NYDA, LED", while Participant 5 only knew of SEDA and NYDA's existence but not their function, saying, "NYDA, but I don't know what they really do." Participant 10 knew none. This aligns with Netshivhe's (2021) finding that most support awareness is confined to better-known national institutions like SEDA and NYDA rather than provincial, district, or local agencies.

4.6.2. Perception of Government Support

Opinions differed on whether the government provides adequate backing for SMME advancement. Some acknowledged increased efforts, albeit narrowly targeted, stating, "Thanks to Covid, yes, they have been really trying to push" support (Participant 9). However, most participants unequivocally believe that the government is not doing enough for small business growth despite recognising some assistance programs. Reasons cited include lack of visibility, training, funding, infrastructure, and regulatory support. Participant 11 stated, "No, they do not. They must do more for us as businesses", while Participant 5 said the government "[does] not care about us." Participants 2 and 7 directly stated that the

government is doing "nothing" and "not at all" enough. As Participant 2 elaborated, "No, government is doing nothing to help us. If it was not for independent institutions that helped me, I wouldn't have been able to answer most of your questions." This matches studies by Sibiya, van der Westhuizen and Sibiya. (2023) and Kelly et al. (2022) show inadequate policy support for SMMEs despite national strategies prioritising their enablement. Participant 12 gave further criticism about ineffective targeting: "SMMEs are carrying the country, and we always hear of funds being budgeted for SMME growth, but we never see these funds at all."

4.6.3. Weaknesses of Government Support

Interviewees highlighted weaknesses undermining government backing for SMMEs. Participants pointed out lack of visibility, flexibility, speed, communication, and suitability as deficiencies in current government SMME initiatives, confirming the identification of Sibiya et al. (2023) of accessibility, suitability, and coordination issues. Participant 6 noted poor visibility and availability hamper accessibility, while Participant 7 emphasised the need for proactive follow-up "to work" with government agencies, stating, "You need to make phone calls to follow up. Definitely one of the problems." This aligns with Scheba and Turok's (2020) finding that much support for township SMMEs is passive rather than reactive. Furthermore, participants noted a deficient understanding of small business realities among officials. As Participant 12 declared, "The people working in these organisations know nothing about businesses, which makes it difficult for them to understand our issues." Participant 7 criticised lacklustre communication, stating, "I mean, I reached out, yes, I know I'm the one who needs help. But if I reach out and reach out again, the least you can do if something comes up to say, yeah, I should be the first person to know." Participants also highlighted the mismatch of support offered versus actual small business needs. As Participant 2 shared, "I think if we can have people assisting us annually on how to apply for funds and support, not loans, because it's difficult for us." Participant 12 explained, "the people working in these organisations know nothing about businesses, which makes it difficult for them to understand our issues." Nkala (2017) similarly found a gap between government objectives for SMME support and actual substantial assistance provision to entrepreneurs.

4.6.4. Desired Support

Requested government support centred on training, funding, infrastructure, and practical assistance like equipment provision, confirming studies by Ayandibu and Vezi-Magigaba (2021) and Khoase and Ndayizigamiye (2018) emphasising SMME needs for skills and financial enhancement. Participant 5 summarised the predominant view, saying, "Infrastructure first, then funding support too." Some, like Participants 9 and 11, requested infrastructure such as "trading sites" and "a business space." Others promoted skill-building, with Participant 7 advising emphatically, "I feel like I still need more training, training, training." Several called for easing access to markets, with one suggesting "support to go to expos" (Participant 9). Participant 12 wished for easier market access, saying the government could help "to be registered on databases."

However, the dominant request was for funding. Participants 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 9 specifically called for more financial support, easier funding application, and post-funding oversight. As Participant 1 shared, "First, finances. Second is training - I need more understanding of financial management. Those two go together because having funding without the knowledge to manage it well could be disastrous." Participant 12 also tied funding to holistic support, arguing that the government should "appoint support to the business once they have funded them" via specialists who "ensure they understand and they use the funds correctly." These suggestions align with Eresia-Eke and Raath's (2013) model, prioritising capacity building, mentorship, and oversight for impactful SMME assistance schemes. Proposed job creation initiatives also echo Zondo and Ncube's (2022) emphasis on demand growth through government procurement contracts for small businesses.

Overall, interview responses revealed SMME frustrations regarding multiple aspects of government backing. While some recognise expanding efforts, most consider support inadequate and disjointed from small business realities. To make state assistance more impactful, increased private-public dialogues, governance training, collaborative goal-setting, and progressive funding models could help bridge gaps.

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter reported on the findings and results of the research study. The results and findings were reported based on the three research objectives: to determine the perception

of SMMEs on internal factors, external factors, and government support affecting growth. The findings revealed that internal constraints like skills gaps and external barriers around finance, infrastructure, markets, and government backing limit SMME growth. Motivations ranged from necessity to passion, with resiliency demonstrated despite disadvantages. However, removing systemic obstacles is critical for SMMEs to thrive and meaningfully impact unemployment and inequality. While government efforts exist, increased practical support is needed around infrastructure, funding access, capacity building, and oversight.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the conclusions drawn from the research study and acknowledges its limitations. Additionally, it proposes recommendations to inform and guide policymakers, government institutions, and investors in the development of implementable policies and programmes that will better support the growth of SMMEs.

5.2. Conclusion

This research explored key internal and external factors impacting the growth of SMMEs in the Overstrand Local Municipality, as well as government support perceptions. The initial problem identified was that despite substantial government attention, South African SMMEs continue to face obstacles resulting in failure or stagnation for many.

The primary objective of this study was to identify the main factors impacting the growth of SMMEs in the Overstrand Local Municipality. To accomplish this objective, the following sub-objectives were formulated:

- To determine the perception of SMMEs in the internal factors affecting business growth
- To determine the perception of SMMEs in the external factors affecting business growth.
- To assess the perception of SMMEs in government support in enhancing SMMEs business growth.

The study conclusions align with the research question and objectives on the main internal and external growth factors for Overstrand SMMEs.

5.2.1. Conclusions drawn from the literature review

The literature review explored internal and external factors influencing the growth and development of SMMEs in South Africa. Several key findings emerge from the analysis.

Internally, the owner-manager's motivation, education level, management skills, and financial capabilities significantly impact SMME growth trajectories. Opportunity-driven entrepreneurs with higher human capital exhibit greater growth ambitions and superior performance. Developing core business management expertise in areas like marketing, financial planning, and human resource management is imperative for small business expansion.

Externally, access to finance stands out as the most pressing obstacle, with limited access to bank loans, equity, and alternative financing constraining SMME growth. High levels of market competition and problems accessing domestic and export markets also hamper small business sales and development. Deficiencies in infrastructure, like poor roads and unreliable electricity, undermine productivity. While regulations can support fair competition, complex bureaucratic red tape diverts focus from productive activities.

South Africa has a strong legislative framework for promoting SMMEs, but government support programmes have shown mixed results. The constraints around access to finance and markets, burdensome regulations, gaps in business capabilities, and an uncoordinated state support system continue to restrict the growth of high-potential SMMEs.

The literature review highlights priority areas for policy and practice. Enhancing access to financial resources, strengthening capabilities, streamlining regulations, coordinating government support, developing infrastructure, and opening market opportunities can help unlock the growth potential of South African SMMEs. With the right enabling environment, SMMEs can thrive and power inclusive economic growth.

The findings from the in-depth interviews conducted in this study strongly reinforce the conclusions from the literature review.

5.2.2. Conclusion drawn from the in-depth interviews

5.2.2.1. Business Growth

The 12 SMMEs interviewed described steady yet fluctuating growth patterns since starting their business. While specific metrics varied - such as annual turnover, profit, sales, and number of employees - the most common growth trend reported was gradual expansion from year to year, punctuated by high and low periods of economic activity. As Participant 6 described, "I've seen that before. The business has seasons - some months are quiet like

July, then it picks up around this time of year, so it fluctuates." Only one business cited an overall decline recently.

5.2.2.2. The perception of SMMEs in the internal factors affecting business growth

The most impactful internal enabler of business growth was the owner's skillset and motivation. Motivations ranged from necessity to passion-driven, but insufficient business and financial skills initially posed internal hurdles alongside human resource deficits.

The study revealed that most SMME owners had limited formal education and minimal business management training prior to starting their companies. Many emphasised learning critical operational, marketing, and financial skills only after startup through various workshops and courses. Several participants highlighted how their limited expertise and acumen negatively impacted their ability to effectively run their businesses initially.

However, those able to access focused training programs gained crucial capabilities to professionalise operations. Participants specifically emphasised how interventions helped build financial management proficiency through record keeping, budgeting, accounting, and reporting upskilling. As Participant 5 explained, "The Programme X training did help with that [financial management]. First, it was - if you can see my business right where it is now, I want to direct you to the shack that I was operating in, where business and living space were crammed together. After training, I managed to expand to a separate 5x7 meter structure." Participant 2 echoed, "Those trainings, they made a huge impact on my life." Similarly, Participant 9 emphasised, "It's really helped me delve more into the financial aspect of my business - evaluating growth and turnover. The accounting concepts and reporting I've learned so far have allowed me to re-evaluate and find ways to further grow."

The research confirms that lower entrepreneurial education and lack of specialised skills posed major internal obstacles to successfully operating and expanding SMMEs. Targeted support through adult education, vocational training, and lifelong entrepreneurial learning is vital to empower small business owners across contexts. The findings demonstrate the tangible benefits program participation conferred to partially bridge early knowledge gaps. Participants expressed needing further education across business functional areas to keep enhancing management capacities for growth.

5.2.2.3. The perception of SMMEs in the external factors affecting business growth

Externally, the starkest growth constraint cited was limited access to finance, with most participants heavily reliant on personal savings and unable to secure loans or grants due to strict requirements. Access to external funding was viewed as pivotal by multiple business owners. Participant 5 shared, "What I did with that funding was I bought stock.." Participant 1 agreed, "helped me on adding services...we actually have a laundry service from sneaker wash." Without adequate funding for equipment, stock, infrastructure and employees, many SMMEs remained extremely small-scale. Participant 11 stated, "Financial assistance would help my business be very far because I have the skills."

Relatedly, infrastructure inadequacies around utilities, trading premises and transportation severely affected productivity, expansion capacity, visibility and accessibility for multiple enterprises. Locational disadvantages in high-crime neighbourhoods also reduced customer demand despite high foot traffic. Participant 8 explained, "I moved locations which halted growth not being able to build here."

Crime and access issues tied to location in poorer communities also hindered growth. Market access obstacles beyond townships also posed barriers to sales growth that participants had only partially mitigated through online channels and niche targeting.

The findings confirm infrastructure deficiencies, restricted funding channels, and geographic isolation fundamentally limit township SMME growth prospects below optimal levels. Resolving these external bottlenecks through upgrading utility networks, providing commercial hubs, expanding online retail capabilities and easing access to finance is critical for unlocking growth.

5.2.2.4. The perception of SMMEs in government support in enhancing SMMEs business growth

The most common perspective expressed is that current government support for small enterprises is inadequate and has limited tangible impact. While most participants knew of some government SMME initiatives, predominantly by NYDA and SEDA, awareness remained limited. Perspectives on support sufficiency diverged, though most faulted mismatches between programming and actual small business needs. Calls centred on

increasing practical assistance through infrastructure, equipment provisions, and more accessible funding with oversight mechanisms rather than solely loans.

Critiques highlighted lagging visibility, presumed inadequacy, slow response rates, communications gaps and lack of public servant business acumen undermining government backing for SMMEs. Participant 7 asserted, "The government does nothing to help us at all." Participant 5 agreed, stating bluntly, "They do not care about us." Similarly, Participant 12 argued, "the people working in these organisations know nothing about businesses." The absence of genuine policy-practice collaboration in designing support programs was implicit yet profound.

Several business owners cited issues they felt curtailed the potential positive impact of government SMME initiatives. Participant 1 criticised the government for not understanding actual small business needs, stating, "They provide spaces, but I can see they were not meant for the actual businesses that we have here." Participant 8 felt excluded by regulations aimed at big businesses, noting, "I believe [bargaining councils] were created for bigger companies. Now they put small guys into things we don't understand." Participant 11 called for more small business infrastructure like market stalls to assist entrepreneurs. Participant 12 recommended that governments "support the businesses once they have funded them" through assistance like marketing and accounting to ensure proper fund usage.

In conclusion, this research on growth factors and government support perceptions for SMMEs in Overstrand, South Africa, confirms significant internal and external obstacles curtailing small business expansion. Internally, owners' insufficient expertise and acumen in areas like financial management initially hinder growth prospects, though targeted training interventions demonstrate tangible upskilling and formalisation benefits. Externally, restricted access to external finance, infrastructure inadequacies around utilities, premises and transport, and locational disadvantages fundamentally limit optimal development. Perspectives on current government SMME programming highlight shortcomings around relevance, visibility, communications and public servants' capacity to understand and address binding small business constraints. The findings underscore the need for greater collaboration with entrepreneurs in policy and program design, increased infrastructural support beyond funding, and appointment of officials with genuine private sector experience. Addressing these gaps at national, provincial and local government levels is imperative to

create an enabling environment where South African SMMEs can thrive and reach their full potential.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the research results, the following realistic recommendations are proposed:

- 1) Expand entrepreneurial education programs: The research revealed that many SMME owners had limited formal business training, posing hurdles to growth. Targeted skills courses conferred valuable capabilities in financial management for record-keeping, budgeting and reporting. To empower more SMME owners with critical expertise, governments should fund continuing education partners providing subsidised, accredited business skills programs through community centres.
- 2) Develop affordable business infrastructure hubs: Inadequate trading premises and utilities severely impacted operations, visibility and accessibility. Locating in high-crime neighbourhoods also reduced customer demand. Constructing secure, shared services hubs across townships enables startups to formally establish and expand. Well-designed facilities with stable power, warehousing and broadband provide an enabling ecosystem.
- 3) Introduce alternative SMME financing models: External capital shortages were frequently cited as severely limiting growth prospects, with heavy reliance on meagre personal savings. Traditional lending requirements often exclude early-stage ventures. Implementing alternative structures like matching grants, mentorship partnerships, and revenue-based financing can better support startups.
- 4) Create a digital support hub portal: Despite national strategies prioritising SMME advancement, awareness of existing initiatives remained low among entrepreneurs. A single portal to centralise program information, applications, and assistance requests can enhance accessibility, coordination and transparency.
- 5) Institutionalise public-private policy design dialogues: The mismatch between government programming and actual small business realities was seen to undermine relevancy. Regular dialogues where entrepreneurs directly consult on policy reforms can make interventions more practical and responsive. Evidence-based reforms tailored to grassroots experiences will enable impact.
- 6) Fund SMME expo participation and access to new markets: The research highlighted that geographic isolation and locational disadvantages impaired market access and sales growth for some township SMMEs. Facilitating access to national business expos

through application support and travel subsidies can enable entrepreneurs to showcase products, build linkages and expand reach. Widening the customer base grew revenues for tech-savvy participants leveraging online avenues, demonstrating potential.

- 7) Implement a paid SMME internship program: The inability to attract and retain skilled talent due to financial constraints affected productivity for some owners. Rolling out a paid internship initiative funded by the municipality places recent graduates or those seeking experience with local SMMEs. Beyond benefiting interns through skills building, small businesses gain human capital to take advantage of extra help executing business functions. Allowances enable the dedication of intern efforts to priority areas like digital marketing, inventory, or financial data management to foster growth.

These pragmatic recommendations address skills constraints, infrastructure gaps, restricted finance channels and fragmentation undermining government support efficacy. Targeted investments guided by regular inputs from entrepreneurs can help cultivate a thriving ecosystem for small businesses to unlock growth and employment gains. Furthermore, adding opportunities for market access through funded expo participation expands visibility and partnerships. Paid internships also strategically inject human resources to build enterprise capabilities. Tackling market reach barriers and skills shortages can drive productivity and revenues. Combining new access avenues with internal talent boosts and empowers growing SMMEs.

5.4. Limitations to the study

The study was conducted on a limited sample from a single local municipality in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, which restricts the generalisability of the findings beyond the research setting's specific geographic and demographic context. To produce reliable results that can be inferred from the broader population of South African municipalities and SMMEs, future studies should involve larger and more representative samples from multiple municipalities across South Africa. Moreover, the qualitative nature of the study prevents statistical generalisation, rendering the conclusions tentative and suggestive rather than definitive. Conducting quantitative studies that test the prevalence of the themes identified here in a broader cross-section of South African SMMEs would significantly contribute to the field. Also, the study focused solely on small enterprises, while medium enterprises at different growth stages likely face distinct challenges. Therefore, researchers should distinguish between small and medium firms across the business lifecycle to fully elucidate

the range of obstacles facing SMMEs and provide finely tuned recommendations. Targeted studies of specific business sectors would also enhance granularity and policy relevance. A comprehensive understanding of optimal support for South African SMME development will require a programmatic progression of scholarship incorporating multiple methods, samples, and segmentation strategies.

5.5. Summary of the Study

This exploratory qualitative study examined internal and external factors impacting SMME growth in Overstrand Local Municipality. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 SMME owners to understand motivations, capabilities, barriers, and perceptions of government support based on their lived experiences.

Key findings revealed that limited owner expertise, infrastructure gaps and restricted financing fundamentally constrain township enterprise growth. Despite national strategies backing SMME advancement, current programming was deemed inadequate and misaligned with entrepreneurial realities.

Proposed recommendations, therefore, centre on expanding entrepreneurial training partnerships, constructing shared business infrastructure hubs, easing access to alternative funding models, creating a digital support portal, and instituting public-private policy dialogues. Additional suggestions include market access assistance via subsidised expo participation and a paid internship program.

Enabling progress for South African SMMEs to reduce high failure rates requires coordinated efforts addressing internal skill limitations, external capital and infrastructure obstacles, and fragmented, ineffective state support. An inclusive approach informed by regular engagement with entrepreneurs themselves is imperative for interventions to meaningfully respond to on-the-ground obstacles.

With targeted, collaborative policies and programmes nurturing sustainable growth, small businesses can better drive employment and empowerment for disadvantaged groups. But for national strategies to translate into genuine impact, resonating with lived experiences is key.

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ANNEXURES

7.1. Interview Guide

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Section A: Demographics

A1. Gender

Female		Male	
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A2. How old are you?

A3. What is your highest educational attainment?

A4. Do you operate in the informal or formal business sector?

A5. In what industry does your business operate?

Agriculture	Wholesale	
Mining and Quarrying	Transport, storage & communications	
Manufacturing	Finance & business services	
Electricity, gas and water	Community, social & personal services	
Construction	Catering, accommodation & other trade	
Retail, motor trade & repair services	Other (Please specify)	

A6. How many employees do you have?

A7. How old is your business?

A8. What is the annual turnover of your business?

Less than R500 000	Less than R20 million	
Less than R1 million	Less than R40 million	
Less than R5 million	More than R40 million	
Less than R10 million		

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Section B: Internal Factors (IF)

Motivation

1. What was your motivation for starting the business?

Level of Education and Managerial Skills

2. Do you have any formal training in business management and how does your level of education aid in the growth of your business?

Human Resources Management

3. How has your human resources management impacted the growth of your business?

Financial Management

4. Do you have any knowledge and skills in financial management business, and how does it affect the growth of your business?

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Section C: External Environment Factors (EF)

Laws and Regulations

5. Have you faced any challenges or opportunities related to compliance with specific regulations? How did it affect your business?

Access to Finance

6. Did you encounter any difficulties in accessing finance or securing funding for your business growth? How has it affected your business?

Competition

7. How would you describe the competitive landscape in which your business operates, and how does it affect your business growth?

Infrastructure

8. Have you faced any infrastructure challenges that hindered your business growth?

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Location

9. Have you faced any challenges or opportunities related to your business location?

Access to Market

10. Have you faced any challenges or opportunities related to accessing markets or distribution channels, and how has it affected your business growth?

Section D: Government Support

11. In your view, what are the weaknesses and strengths of the current government support initiatives for SMMEs?

12. Do you think the government is doing enough to support the growth and development of SMMEs?

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Cnr Smuts and First Avenue Midrand 1685 Tel: +27 11 652 0000 Fax: +27 11 652 0299
Email: sbl@unisa.ac.za Website: www.sblunisa.ac.za



Section E: Business growth

13. Which factors, both internal and external, do you believe have contributed most to your business growth?

14. Which factors, both internal and external, do you believe have hindered your business growth?

7.2. Institutional Permission Letter

KANTOOR VAN DIE MUNISIPALE BESTUURDER
OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL MANAGER

NAVRAE | ENQUIRIES:
LEËRVERW. | FILE REF.:
DATUM | DATE:

Mr Dean O'Neill
21 April 2023



Ms N Basson
Chief Operations Officer
HS Business Solutions

Dear Ms Basson

GRANTING OF INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH

I, Dean O'Neill, Municipal Manager of Overstrand Local Municipality, grant permission to collect data within the municipal area for your research project titled *Internal And External Factors Affecting The Growth Of Small, Medium And Micro Enterprises In Overstrand Local Municipality, Western Cape Province*.

I grant this permission as the authorised person to do so and am aware of the following:

1. The study is conducted as a UNISA researcher and remains the property of UNISA;
2. You can use the name of the municipality in your research project;
3. All data and information collected will be solely in the possession of the researcher;
4. I will require feedback on the research;
5. The research may be published in the public domain under the supervision of the supervisor.

I wish you every success with your research.

Signature:		Date:	21 April 2023
Name:	Dean O'Neill		
Title:	Municipal Manager: Overstrand Local Municipality		
Full contact details:	Overstrand Municipality 1 Magnolia Avenue, Hermanus, 7200 P.O Box 20, Hermanus, 7200 Contact Number: 028 313 8003 Email: mm@overstrand.gov.za		

Yours sincerely,

MR DGI O'NEILL
MUNICIPAL MANAGER

Tel: 028 313 8003 | Fax: 086 568 9726 | E-mail: mm@overstrand.gov.za
PO Box 20 | HERMANUS, 7200
www.overstrand.gov.za

7.3. Ethical Clearance Letter



Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC

Date: 18/08/2023

Dear: Ms Nicolene Basson

Ref #: 2023_SBL_MBA_DD4_FA_D991

Name: Ms Nicolene Basson

Student #: 53518942

Decision: Ethics Approval from
August 2023 to December 2024

Researcher: Ms Nicolene Basson

8 Piet Relief Street, Sandbaai, 7200

Hermanus

53518942@mylife.unisa.ac.za 0835254121

Supervisor: Dr Oseyuwamen Omatuyi; oseyuwamen.omatuyi@spu.ac.za

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE GROWTH OF SMALL, MEDIUM AND MICRO ENTERPRISES IN OVERSTRAND LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, WESTERN CAPE PROVINCE

Qualification: MBA

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC for the above-mentioned research study. Ethics approval is granted for two years.

The low-risk application was reviewed by Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC on **16 August 2023** in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.

7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (**December 2024**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal, for Ethics Research Committee approval.


Additional Conditions

1. Disclosure of data to third parties is prohibited without explicit consent from Unisa.
2. De-identified data must be safely stored on password protected PCs.
3. Care should be taken by the researcher when publishing the results to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the university.
4. Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication practices, principle 7 referring to Social awareness, must be ensured: "Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible." Unisa will not be liable for any failure to comply with this principle.

Note

The reference number 2023_SBL_MBA_DD4_FA_D991 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,



Prof N Mliwa
Chair of Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC
E-mail: willanb@unisa.ac.za



Prof P Msweli
Executive Dean / By delegation from the Executive Dean of Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC
E-mail: mswelp@unisa.ac.za

7.4. Supervisor Letter of Consent

CONSENT TO SUBMIT RESEARCH REPORT FOR EXAMINATION 2023

MBLREP / MBL5913 / MBA5929

Consent is hereby given to:

Student name: BASSON NICOLENE ...

Student number: 53518942, to submit her research report in its final form.

Supervisor Signature:

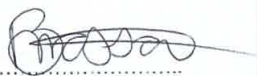


Date: 30-11-2023.

Supervisor Name: Dr. Osayuwamen Omoruyi.

The student acknowledges that sufficient feedback was provided by the supervisor and that s/he took the responsibility to attend to the feedback in a way that satisfies the requirements for a research dissertation on the MBA and MBL level.

Student signature.....



Date:

30-11-2023

7.5. Turn-It-In Report

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