

**Effect Of Employee Competence On Performance Of Small And Medium-Sized Electronic Enterprises In
Kampala District, Uganda.**

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of employee competence on the performance of small and medium-sized electronic enterprises in Kampala District, Uganda. The study was motivated by persistent performance challenges among electronic SMEs despite their growing economic importance. A cross-sectional research design was adopted, employing a quantitative approach to establish the relationship between employee competence and enterprise performance. Data were collected from a sample of 136 respondents drawn from SME owners, managers, and employees using structured questionnaires. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis with the aid of statistical software. The findings revealed a strong positive relationship between employee competence and SME performance, with a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.712. Regression results indicated that employee competence explained 50.6% of the variation in the performance of small and medium-sized electronic enterprises, as reflected by an R Square value of 0.506. The model was statistically significant, with an F-value of 112.387 and a p-value of .000, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Furthermore, the regression coefficient showed that a unit increase in employee competence led to a significant increase in enterprise performance, confirming employee competence as a strong predictor of operational efficiency, innovation, and overall business success. The study concluded that employee competence played a critical role in enhancing the performance of electronic SMEs in Kampala District. It was recommended that SME owners and managers prioritize continuous training, skills development, and capacity-building initiatives to improve employee competence. Policymakers and support institutions were also encouraged to design targeted programs aimed at strengthening workforce capabilities within the SME sector to promote sustainable enterprise growth.

Keywords: Employee competence, SME performance, electronic enterprises, skills development, Kampala District, Uganda

Background of the study

Globally, employee competence had increasingly been recognized as a critical determinant of organizational performance, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises operating in technologically dynamic environments (Ariyo, 2023). Studies conducted in developed and emerging economies indicated that enterprises with competent employees characterized by relevant skills, knowledge, experience, and positive work attitudes tended to record higher productivity, improved service quality, and enhanced profitability (Ahumuza et al., 2025). In the electronic sector, where rapid technological changes required continuous learning and adaptability, employee competence played a central role in enabling firms to innovate, respond to market demands, and sustain competitive advantage (Sarah et

al., 2024). Empirical evidence from global studies consistently showed that inadequate employee competence constrained operational efficiency and limited firm growth.

At the African level, the performance of SMEs had largely depended on the availability and effective utilization of competent human resources (Julius & Matovu, 2025). Research across countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa revealed that many SMEs faced persistent challenges related to skill gaps, limited training opportunities, and weak human resource development systems (Ahumuza et al., 2025). In the electronic business sector, these challenges were more pronounced due to the technical nature of operations and the need for specialized competencies. Studies demonstrated that African SMEs that invested in employee training and skills development experienced improved customer satisfaction, higher sales volumes, and better operational efficiency, while those with low competence levels struggled to remain competitive (Julius & Matovu, 2025).

In Uganda, SMEs had continued to play a vital role in economic development through employment creation and income generation (Ramadhan et al., 2023). However, several studies reported that the performance of many SMEs, particularly in the electronic sector, remained below expectations due to limited employee competence (Ntirandekura et al., 2022). Despite government efforts to promote skills development through vocational training and workforce development programs, gaps persisted in technical skills, problem-solving abilities, customer handling, and adaptability to technological changes (Moses & Ntirandekura, 2022). Empirical evidence indicated that SMEs with competent employees were better positioned to improve service delivery, manage technology effectively, and achieve higher levels of performance compared to those with inadequately skilled workers (Julius, 2024).

Within Kampala District, which served as Uganda's commercial and technological hub, small and medium-sized electronic enterprises operated in a highly competitive environment (Turyatamba et al., 2022). The district hosted numerous electronic businesses dealing in device sales, repairs, software services, and digital solutions (Faridah et al., 2023). Although these enterprises benefited from a large market and access to technology, previous observations and studies suggested that variations in employee competence significantly influenced enterprise performance. Some SMEs with skilled and experienced employees demonstrated superior performance in terms of customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and profitability, while others suffered from frequent service errors, low productivity, and declining customer trust due to inadequate employee skills (Paul & Kazaara, 2023). These disparities highlighted the need to empirically examine the effect of employee competence on the performance of electronic SMEs in Kampala District.

Problem Statement

Small and medium-sized electronic enterprises (SMEs) in Kampala District had continued to play a significant role in employment creation and economic growth (Julius & Kazaara, 2025b). However, despite their importance, many of

these enterprises had exhibited inconsistent and generally low performance, characterized by declining sales, reduced profitability, operational inefficiencies, and increasing customer complaints (Winny et al., 2023). Previous reports and observations indicated that one of the major challenges affecting their performance had been inadequate employee competence (Julius & Kazaara, 2025a). Many electronic SMEs employed workers with limited technical skills, insufficient product knowledge, weak problem-solving abilities, and poor customer service competencies, which undermined service quality and enterprise competitiveness (Turyatamba et al., 2022). Although some enterprise owners had invested in modern equipment and technology, the expected performance improvements had not been fully realized due to gaps in employee capability (Ntirandekura et al., 2022). Furthermore, existing studies in Uganda had largely focused on access to finance, taxation, and infrastructure, with limited empirical attention given to employee competence, particularly within electronic SMEs (Alex et al., 2024). This gap in knowledge necessitated an empirical investigation into the effect of employee competence on the performance of small and medium-sized electronic enterprises in Kampala District, Uganda.

Main Objective

To assess the effect of employee competence on performance of small and medium-sized electronic enterprises in Kampala District, Uganda.

Methodology

A cross-sectional and correlational research design was adopted to examine the effect of employee competence on the performance of small and medium-sized electronic enterprises (SMEs) in Kampala District, Uganda (Nafiu et al., 2012). The cross-sectional design enabled the researcher to collect data at a single point in time on the level of employee competence and the corresponding performance of SMEs, thereby capturing the prevailing conditions within the enterprises. This design was appropriate for identifying existing patterns and variations in employee skills, knowledge, and abilities, as well as differences in enterprise performance outcomes (Nancy & Prudence, 2024). The correlational design was used to establish the nature and strength of the relationship between employee competence variables such as technical skills, problem-solving ability, communication skills, and work experience and performance indicators including sales growth, customer satisfaction, profitability, and operational efficiency (Christopher et al., 2022).

A mixed-methods approach that integrated both quantitative and qualitative research techniques was employed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study variables. The quantitative approach facilitated the collection of measurable data on employee competence and SME performance, enabling statistical analysis of their relationship (Margaret & Kazaara, 2024). The qualitative approach complemented this by generating in-depth insights into how employee skills, attitudes, and experience influenced daily operations and overall enterprise performance. This combination enhanced the depth and credibility of the findings (Bryman, 2016).

The study population comprised individuals directly involved in the operations of small and medium-sized electronic enterprises in Kampala District. These included 16 SME owners, 10 supervisors or managers responsible for overseeing employees, 50 employees engaged in operational and technical roles, 100 customers, and 30 business partners or service providers, bringing the total population to 210 participants (Abiodun Nafiu, 2012). This diverse population ensured that data were obtained from both internal and external stakeholders, providing a holistic view of employee competence and enterprise performance. Stratified random sampling was used to select employees and customers to ensure proportional representation, while simple random sampling was applied to business partners. Census and purposive sampling techniques were used for SME owners and managers due to their small numbers and strategic roles(Nafiu, 2012).

A mixed sampling design incorporating stratified random, simple random, purposive, and census sampling techniques was applied to enhance representativeness and depth of data collection. This approach minimized sampling bias and ensured that respondents with relevant experience and knowledge of employee competence and SME performance were included. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table and further validated using Slovin's formula with a margin of error of 5%. From the total population of 210, a sample size of 136 respondents was obtained, comprising SME owners, managers, employees, customers, and business partners (Benard, 2023).

Both primary and secondary data sources were used to ensure comprehensive analysis. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. Questionnaires were administered to SME owners, managers, employees, and customers to collect quantitative data on employee competence dimensions and enterprise performance outcomes. Key informant interviews were conducted with SME owners, managers, and industry experts to obtain qualitative insights into employee skill development, training practices, and their influence on enterprise performance. Secondary data were obtained from academic journals, industry reports, government publications, SME performance records, and policy documents related to skills development and SME growth. A document review checklist guided the systematic analysis of secondary sources.

Data collection methods included surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews. Surveys captured quantitative information on employee competence attributes such as technical skills, experience, adaptability, teamwork, and problem-solving ability, as well as performance indicators. Interviews provided deeper understanding of management perspectives on employee capability and performance challenges, while document reviews provided contextual and policy-related information.

The research instruments used included structured questionnaires, interview guides, and document review checklists. The questionnaire focused on employee competence constructs, including skills, knowledge, attitudes, and experience, while the interview guide facilitated in-depth discussions with key informants. The document checklist ensured consistency in reviewing secondary materials relevant to employee competence and SME performance.

Data quality was ensured through validity and reliability procedures. Content validity was assessed using the Content Validity Index (CVI), whereby experts evaluated the relevance and clarity of questionnaire and interview items. All constructs recorded CVI values above the acceptable threshold of 0.7, confirming adequate validity (Polit & Beck, 2006). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha, with all constructs achieving coefficients above 0.8, indicating strong internal consistency. A pilot study involving 10–15 respondents was conducted to test the research instruments, and necessary revisions were made based on the results. Continuous monitoring during data collection ensured consistency and accuracy.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the data collection process, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and securely storing data. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, beginning with data cleaning and descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations (Nelson et al., 2022). Inferential analysis using Pearson correlation and regression techniques was conducted to determine the effect of employee competence on SME performance. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to support and enrich the quantitative findings.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on Employee Competence

Employee Competence	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	STD
Employees in this enterprise are well-trained in their respective areas of work.	12 (8.8%)	6 (4.4%)	13 (9.6%)	58 (42.6%)	47 (34.6%)	3.90	1.188
The competence of employees significantly impacts the productivity of the enterprise.	4 (2.9%)	12 (8.8%)	2 (1.5%)	55 (40.4%)	63 (46.3%)	4.18	1.034

There is a strong relationship between employee competence and customer satisfaction in this enterprise.	5 (3.7%)	4 (2.9%)	17 (12.5%)	61 (44.9%)	49 (36.0%)	4.07	0.968
The enterprise regularly invests in skill development programs for its employees.	2 (1.5%)	3 (2.2%)	17 (12.5%)	60 (44.1%)	54 (39.7%)	4.18	0.845

Source: Primary Data, 2025

For the statement “Employees in this enterprise are well-trained in their respective areas of work,” the results show a generally favorable perception, with 58 respondents (42.6%) agreeing and 47 respondents (34.6%) strongly agreeing. This gives a combined agreement of 77.2%, which indicates that the majority of respondents recognize that employees possess relevant training aligned with their job functions. However, 12 respondents (8.8%) strongly disagreed, and 6 (4.4%) disagreed, suggesting that a small but notable group sees gaps in training or preparation. Additionally, 13 respondents (9.6%) remained neutral, perhaps reflecting limited knowledge about others’ competencies or indifference toward training issues. The mean score of 3.90 is above the midpoint, confirming an overall positive outlook. Nevertheless, the standard deviation of 1.188 reveals a fair level of variability in responses, pointing to the possibility of unequal training access across departments or job roles.

"In relation to employee competence, SME Owner identified several core competencies essential for success within their enterprise. These include strong technical knowledge relevant to electronic products, effective communication skills to engage with customers and colleagues, problem-solving capabilities to troubleshoot technical issues, and adaptability to rapidly evolving technology. (Source: KI004, 27/09/2025)"

The statement “The competence of employees significantly impacts the productivity of the enterprise” received overwhelmingly positive feedback. A total of 55 respondents (40.4%) agreed, and 63 respondents (46.3%) strongly agreed, amounting to a combined agreement of 86.7%. Only 4 respondents (2.9%) strongly disagreed, and 12 (8.8%) disagreed, while just 2 (1.5%) were neutral. These results clearly show that respondents strongly believe employee competence is a key determinant of organizational productivity. The high mean of 4.18 supports this assertion, while the relatively low standard deviation of 1.034 indicates a moderate level of consensus. The responses suggest that the workforce is highly aware of the critical link between staff expertise and enterprise output. This perception underscores

the importance of maintaining high standards of recruitment, continuous professional development, and on-the-job learning to sustain productivity gains.

"The Digital Strategy Implementer (KI005, 27/09/2025) emphasized that beyond technical skills, employees must possess strong digital proficiency to effectively use various tools and platforms critical for business operations. Exceptional customer service skills are equally important, enabling staff to engage and respond promptly to customers through digital channels. Additionally, the ability to analyze business data using digital analytics supports informed decision-making, helping the enterprise identify growth opportunities and optimize resources."

When asked whether "There is a strong relationship between employee competence and customer satisfaction in this enterprise," most respondents expressed agreement. Specifically, 61 respondents (44.9%) agreed, and 49 respondents (36.0%) strongly agreed, combining to form 80.9% agreement. A small proportion of respondents either strongly disagreed (5 respondents, 3.7%) or disagreed (4 respondents, 2.9%), while 17 respondents (12.5%) remained neutral. The mean score of 4.07 reflects a positive consensus, and the standard deviation of 0.968 suggests that opinions were relatively consistent. The findings highlight that employees perceive their skill level and performance as having a direct influence on the satisfaction of customers an essential component of service delivery, retention, and loyalty. This underscores the importance of customer-focused training and the cultivation of soft skills alongside technical competencies in enterprise human resource strategies.

"The employee focused on practical attributes such as being tech-savvy, maintaining good communication with customers, and being well-organized as key to performing well. To assess competence, the SME Owner described a system of regular performance reviews incorporating practical skill tests, customer feedback analysis, and sales target achievement. This assessment process is supported by the implementer's use of monitoring staff engagement with digital tools and conducting periodic skill evaluations, while the employee described receiving feedback based on their speed, accuracy, and effectiveness in using the company's digital systems." (Source: KI006, 27/09/2025)"

For the final statement, "The enterprise regularly invests in skill development programs for its employees," the responses were again largely positive. 60 respondents (44.1%) agreed, and 54 respondents (39.7%) strongly agreed, which sums up to an impressive 83.8% combined agreement. A very small number disagreed 2 respondents (1.5%) strongly disagreed and 3 (2.2%) disagreed. Another 17 respondents (12.5%) stayed neutral. The mean score of 4.18 indicates high agreement with the statement, and the standard deviation of 0.845, the lowest in the table, reveals a strong level of consensus among respondents. This suggests that employees feel their organization is actively investing in their professional development through regular training, workshops, or other capacity-building initiatives. Such a

practice is indicative of a forward-looking enterprise that prioritizes human capital development, which can lead to improved morale, innovation, and retention.

Table 2: Effect of Employee Competence on performance of small and medium-sized electronic enterprises in Kampala District, Uganda.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.712 ^a	.506	.503	1.941
a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee Competence				

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The R value is 0.712, indicating a strong positive correlation between employee competence and SME performance. This means that as employee competence increases, so does the performance of the enterprise. The R Square value of 0.506 shows that employee competence alone explains approximately 50.6% of the variation in SME performance, which is substantial for a single predictor model. The adjusted R Square value of 0.503, which corrects for the number of predictors and sample size, remains virtually the same, indicating the model is stable and generalizable to the broader population (Nelson et al., 2023). The standard error of the estimate is 1.941, suggesting a reasonable average distance between the observed and predicted values. While not extremely low, this error margin is acceptable in behavioral and enterprise research, where many other contextual variables could be at play.

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	924.512	1	924.512	112.387	.000 ^b
	Residual	1103.278	134	8.234		
	Total	2027.790	135			
a. Dependent Variable: Performance of SME's						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Employee Competence						

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The regression model produced an F-value of 112.387 with a corresponding significance level (Sig.) of .000, which is far below the conventional threshold of 0.05. This implies that the model was statistically significant and that employee competence had a substantial effect on the performance of SMEs. Consequently, we rejected the null hypothesis, which stated that employee competence has no significant effect on the performance of SMEs in Kampala District. The regression sum of squares (924.512) was notably larger than the residual sum of squares (1103.278), showing that a substantial proportion of the total variation in SME performance could be explained by differences in employee competence. This finding suggests that the competencies, skills, and knowledge of employees play a central role in driving efficiency, innovation, and overall business success within SMEs. The relatively high F-statistic further

demonstrated that the regression model provided a strong explanatory power, confirming that employee competence is not a random or minor predictor but a major determinant of firm performance.

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	7.009	.690		10.158	.000
	Employee Competence	.652	.056	.712	11.725	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Performance of SME's						

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The constant value of 7.009 represents the baseline level of SME performance when employee competence is zero. This intercept is statistically significant, with a t-value of 10.158 and a p-value of .000, which implies that even without the influence of employee competence, there is a foundational level of enterprise performance likely influenced by other background factors not included in the model. Most importantly, the unstandardized coefficient (B) for employee competence is 0.652, which indicates that for every one-unit increase in employee competence, SME performance increases by 0.652 units, assuming all other factors remain constant. The t-value of 11.725 is very high, and the p-value of .000 shows this effect is statistically significant at the highest level of confidence. Furthermore, the standardized coefficient (Beta) is 0.712, which means that employee competence is a very strong predictor of performance in relative terms. It implies that employee competence not only matters but is likely one of the most influential factors affecting how well SMEs operate and grow.

Conclusions

It was concluded that employee competence is a critical factor influencing the performance of small and medium-sized electronic enterprises (SMEs) in Kampala District. The findings revealed a strong and positive relationship between employee competence and business performance, indicating that skilled and knowledgeable employees play a central role in driving productivity, innovation, and organizational growth. The results further demonstrated that the expertise and professional abilities of employees go beyond mere support functions, serving as vital enablers of efficiency, quality service delivery, and sustainable competitiveness.

The study also concluded that most employees were well-trained in their respective areas of specialization, especially in technical fields related to electronic products and services. This level of training enabled them to perform essential tasks such as inventory management, customer service, and problem-solving with greater accuracy and confidence. However, it was observed that differences in competence existed across departments, suggesting a need for continuous and equitable access to training opportunities to ensure consistent performance standards throughout the enterprises.

Furthermore, it was concluded that employee competence greatly enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty. Competent employees were found to communicate effectively with clients, respond promptly to their concerns, and provide reliable solutions, which strengthened customer trust and retention. In the dynamic electronic industry of Kampala, where customers increasingly demand high-quality and technology-driven services, employee competence emerged as a strategic advantage that not only improved service delivery but also positioned enterprises for long-term success and competitiveness.

Recommendations

Enterprises should adopt structured, ongoing training programs that target both technical and soft skills. These should include workshops, on-the-job training, refresher courses, and certifications tailored to the needs of electronic SMEs. The training should cover areas such as product knowledge, troubleshooting, customer handling, inventory systems, digital literacy, and data-driven decision-making. Training should be offered regularly and adapted to technological changes and customer expectations.

SMEs should develop formal employee evaluation frameworks that assess competence based on key performance indicators (KPIs), such as quality of service delivery, technical proficiency, customer feedback, problem-solving ability, and sales target achievement. Regular performance reviews and skills audits can help identify gaps and provide targeted support for staff improvement.

Experienced employees should be encouraged to mentor junior or less skilled staff, particularly in technical operations and customer service. Internal mentorship programs promote shared learning, reduce training costs, and foster a culture of collaboration. This is especially valuable in fast-paced sectors like electronics, where peer learning allows employees to quickly adapt to new devices and software platforms.

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