

Entrepreneurship Development Programmes and Business Performance Outcomes among Emerging Enterprises in Zambia

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship development is key to driving enterprise growth and development, to create employment and foster innovation and overall economic development especially in developing economies with majority of economies being based on small to medium enterprises. Emerging enterprises in Zambia are confronted with challenges associated with lack of finance, lack of managerial skills, lack of entrepreneurial skills, poor infrastructure and market challenges. Institutions involved in development of entrepreneurship are key in equipping individuals with skills to be successful entrepreneurs by providing training, mentorship, innovations and incubation of enterprises (Mwamba et al., 2022).

The study specifically examined the impact that entrepreneurship development programmes are likely to have on the performance of the emerging businesses in Zambia using BongoHive as the case study. BongoHive is among the organisations that are spearheading entrepreneurship development support in Zambia, as BongoHive offers a multitude of programmes and services under its innovation incubation, mentorship, enterprise development, and entrepreneurship training platforms. Thus, the specific business performance indicators of emerging businesses include measurement of their profitability, sustainability, their ability to innovate, ability to expand their markets, and to enhance their competitiveness in the long run.

The study adopted a quantitative explanatory research design, relying on a primary data source in the form of a questionnaire that was administered to a sample of emerging and young enterprises that had participated in various entrepreneurship programmes at BongoHive. The data was analysed for purposes of describing and comparing key variables and, more importantly, for ascertaining the relationships that existed between key variables of entrepreneurship development programmes and key indicators of business performance. Using Human Capital Theory, the study analysed how investing in knowledge and in skills for entrepreneurship could increase productivity.

Findings of the study revealed that entrepreneurship development programmes do impact on performance of emerging enterprises through enhanced financial management capability, innovation capacity, marketing capability, digital entrepreneurship development and entrepreneurial mentorship. The study concludes that entrepreneurship development programmes and institutions play crucial roles in enhancing sustainability of emerging enterprises and promoting private sector development in developing economies. The study recommends the strengthening of entrepreneurship ecosystems through collaboration between institutions and other stakeholders, digital entrepreneurship development and financing of enterprises.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Development, Enterprise Performance, SMEs, Innovation, Entrepreneurial Training, Business Sustainability, Zambia.

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has become an important development driver for economic growth, employment, innovation, poverty reduction and sustainability for enterprises in developed and developing economies. In developing economies where formal labour markets are constrained, self employment has become a major avenue for economic participation. Thus, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have become important engines of economic growth through creation of employment, technological innovation, industrial diversification and private sector development (Ayyagari et al., 2011).

In Zambia, entrepreneurship has become a central component of national economic development policies. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) contribute to employment creation and private sector development. Ngoma and Banda (2021) argue that SMEs are a critical pillar in the country's economic development by increasing employment opportunities, promoting local innovation and ensuring that vulnerable members of society take part in economic activities. In his research, Chisala (2008) posits that SMEs play a crucial role in economic diversification and tackling of unemployment, particularly among the youth who are engaged in entrepreneurship outside of formal employment structures.

Many emerging enterprises in Zambia encounter problems related to structural constraints to growth and sustainability. The limited access to finance is one of the main problems for SME development. This problem in particular is more difficult for early-stage enterprises to solve as these often do not have a credit history, collateral or other required financial information to get access to credit from formal financial institutions (Beck et al., 2005). Furthermore, many entrepreneurs lack the managerial skills, strategic planning skills and market information required to run a business successfully in a competitive environment (Robson, 2009).

Also available is qualitative secondary data which highlights that numerous startup businesses struggle due to entrepreneurs' lack of skills to manage finances and other resources to sustain and grow their businesses successfully. Lockhart (2018) said business failure with regards to SMEs is not due to demand but rather down to the business owner who in many instances lack financial management, good management, sound business planning and lack of skills to grow a successful business by making best use of available resources to add value. Kasase (2017) cited in Business Lab (2018) also said that small and startup enterprises in less developed economies lack effective management in order to sustain and grow their businesses as desired.

The range of programmes offered by entrepreneurship support institutions are designed to improve the skills of entrepreneurs so that they are better equipped to manage their businesses. The programmes are practical in nature and focus on enabling entrepreneurs to manage finances, market their products, develop innovative products and services, manage other employees, become digital entrepreneurs, and make strategic decisions (McKenzie & Woodruff, 2014). A growing body of research exists that indicates that entrepreneurs who participate in structured programmes of entrepreneurship development are able to manage their businesses better than those who do not have access to such programmes (Bruhn, Karlan & Schoar, 2010).

In Zambia, BongoHive is one of the major entrepreneurship support institutions that focuses on supporting startup businesses and fostering innovation. The incubator is located in Lusaka and has a multi dimensional approach to supporting entrepreneurship. Besides providing a business incubation environment, the institution also offers accelerator programmes, business support services, mentorship, support for innovation, digital entrepreneurship, and networking opportunities for entrepreneurs. The role of BongoHive in supporting innovation driven entrepreneurship cannot be overstated as it has become a major player in Zambia's emerging entrepreneurial ecosystem (Mwamba et al., 2022).

The choice of BongoHive as the organisation to study stems from the fact that BongoHive is one of the oldest institutions that offers entrepreneurship support in Zambia and has been operating in the country's entrepreneurial ecosystem longer than most. BongoHive supports nascent entrepreneurs, startup entrepreneurs, through a multi dimensional approach of providing support to foster innovation and through business incubation, entrepreneur mentorship, support through digital platforms and through entrepreneurship programmes and events for connecting members of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Most programmes for support of entrepreneurship conduct training in business management for starting a business. However, BongoHive's range

of support to nascent entrepreneurs goes beyond typical business training programmes, thus it provides a suitable context to study programmes of support of entrepreneurship that foster innovation and link enterprises to markets and create enabling environment for supporting innovation driven startup companies.

Currently studies indicate that entrepreneurship support institutions across the globe need to move from mere business training to establishing an integrated Entrepreneurship Ecosystem where there are various support systems that enable the innovation driven entrepreneurship. Studies by Friederici et al. (2020) found that enterprises supported by entrepreneurship support institutions that focus on various aspects of enterprise such as innovation support, mentorship, collaborative learning and digital entrepreneurship development amongst others experience better enterprise outcomes. Additionally, studies by Chew and Mukelabai (2025) highlighted the need for technology driven support to develop the entrepreneurship capability amongst the youth in African economies as most aspects of life are currently digital thus businesses too require to be digital in order to be competitive in the global market.

Most studies have focused on assessing challenges SMEs face. Such studies especially those conducted in Zambia, have extensively focused on issues that relate to access to finance, but unfortunately very little empirical research exists that focuses on assessing impact of entrepreneurship development programmes on small enterprises in emerging economies such as Zambia. Most programmes aim at enhancing enterprise performance but whether these programmes make any difference or bring about positive change in performance of small enterprises is not known. This study therefore aims at assessing influence that entrepreneurship development programmes have on performance of small enterprises that are involved in such programmes offered by BongoHive in Zambia.

This study focuses on exploring how entrepreneurship development programmes provided by BongoHive impact on performance of start-up enterprises in Zambia and it contributes to knowledge and understanding on the role that institutions that provide support to entrepreneurs can play in creating conditions that support growth and development of small enterprises in emerging economies.

Research in development studies suggests that programmes for fostering entrepreneurship are essential for strengthening economies by enhancing income-generating capacity and reducing economic vulnerability to promote sustainable livelihoods among groups of startup entrepreneurs.

Problem Statement

Entrepreneurship development has become the focus for many developing countries including Zambia to promote employment and growth through development of the private sector. According to Karim (2006) private sector growth brings in innovations and jobs, hence the need for entrepreneurship development support. However, many enterprises fail due to inability of entrepreneurs to manage finances, market and grow their businesses. Many institutions have come up to offer business training and support to startups and existent businesses. BongoHive for example provides entrepreneurs with business support through its business incubation programme, training, mentorship, innovation and digital entrepreneurial skills training among others.

Among the institutions designed to support budding entrepreneurs in Zambia is BongoHive, an entrepreneurship hub based in Lusaka that supports startup companies through business incubation and other programmes. Mwamba and colleagues (2022) describe the support that BongoHive offers to entrepreneurs including financial literacy, innovation, incubation, digital, mentorship and acceleration. Current research into entrepreneurship in Zambia highlights the significance of accelerator programmes and how these programmes are increasingly being used to support the growth and development of businesses by enhancing the business readiness of enterprises, improving the management capabilities of entrepreneurs and by guiding them in making strategic decisions to promote business growth and development (Mwape, 2024).

In spite of increased investment in the entrepreneurship development programmes the small enterprises in Zambia are experiencing persistent problems such as high rate of business failures, low level of profitability, lack of competitiveness in the marketplace and inadequate innovation to support sustainable enterprises. The interventions of the entrepreneurship development programmes are designed to promote enterprise growth and

development and empirical evidence on the extent to which such interventions translate into positive changes in the various performance indicators of the enterprises is lacking.

Akinwale and Kalu (2020) highlighted some factors which could influence the success of entrepreneurship support programmes, these include the design of institution, entrepreneur readiness, market conditions and post training support. Likewise, studies have shown that despite best of intentions to create jobs through entrepreneurship development interventions, such interventions may not necessarily translate into sustained growth of enterprises due to various structural constraints faced by entrepreneurs in their operating environment. Such constraints include lack of access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, and competitive market environment among others.

Most entrepreneurship programmes pay more attention to entrepreneurship training without sufficiently trying to address the necessary ecosystem support structures that would ensure sustainable growth of enterprises. Indeed, it has been noted that entrepreneurship development programmes need to incorporate aspects of the entrepreneurship ecosystem, such as mentorship, partnerships with institutions, access to finance and other forms of support necessary for promoting sustainable enterprise growth (Moreno-Gavara et al., 2019).

There is a critical knowledge gap concerning entrepreneurship development programmes within the Zambian context and how effective they are in terms of impacting SMEs in the country. In the absence of empirical evidence that demonstrate the extent to which such interventions bring about enterprise performance improvements, policy makers, financial institutions, entrepreneurship support institutions and development agencies face a monumental task of designing and implementing programmes that support the development of entrepreneurial ecosystem and stimulate SME growth and development.

The principal aim of this study was to assess the value of programmes for the development of entrepreneurs implemented by BongoHive by examining a range of indicators for measuring the performance of enterprises that completed such programmes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship Development and Enterprise Performance

Entrepreneurship development programmes have become an important intervention in enterprise development. Entrepreneurs' development programmes focus on enhancing the human capital of entrepreneurs and SME owners. In developing economies where SMEs operate in fragile environments with limited resources and high uncertainty, entrepreneur development programmes play critical roles in addressing key constraints to enhancing SMEs' performance and growth. The range of programmes therefore focuses on a number of key areas such as enhancing financial, digital and marketing literacy; business innovation and growth as well as other skills required by entrepreneurs and owners of small enterprises to manage and sustain their businesses.

The contributions that SMEs make to a country's economy are numerous. SMEs create employment, generate income and help reduce poverty. They contribute to economic growth and development through increased productivity and the diversification of production. SMEs can also help to promote local development by creating opportunities for local growth (Ayyagari et al., 2011). SMEs in Zambia have recently started to take centre stage in the country's economic development agenda. Enterprises such as craft makers, entertainers, retail shops, food vendors, hairdressers, beauty parlours, garment makers, jewellers, taxi operators, haulage and other service providers have the potential to promote economic diversification and development (Ngoma & Banda, 2021).

Training provided within entrepreneurship development programmes increases the human capital of entrepreneurs by for example teaching them how to budget, manage cash flows, market products, deal with customers, innovate, and make strategic decisions. Such interventions have been shown to improve the business management practices of entrepreneurs and as a result improve the outcomes of the enterprises that they start (Bruhn et al., 2010). Furthermore, research in a developing country setting has shown that enterprises that go through entrepreneurship training increase in profitability and have a higher chance of survival in comparison to enterprises that do not receive such training (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2014). Importantly, however, the

intervention must contain practical, targeted, and relevant information for the enterprises that go through the program if it is to have a positive effect on outcomes (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2014).

An earlier study conducted by Karlan and Valdivia found that programmes focused on helping individuals become successful entrepreneurs had a significant effect on the practice of key management dimensions of enterprises with its effect manifested through improved business planning skills of enterprises and more operationally disciplined and decision making capable. More specifically, their findings indicated that a structured form of learning within the context of small enterprises in less developed economies had a positive effect on key indicators that measure the development of these enterprises thus fostering growth and job creation.

Karlan and Valdivia (2011) used survey data to evaluate the impact of a commercial motorcycle training program provided to owners of small informal enterprises in which they were taught how to write a business plan. The study found that participation in the program led entrepreneurs to improve their management practices and, as a result, they experienced enhanced performance of their enterprises. It was also found that the impact of the training program was to increase the management practices of enterprises in developing countries.

Entrepreneurship Training and Enterprise Sustainability

Sustainability of an enterprise refers to how long a business is able to last and maintain itself. The sustainability of an enterprise is crucial especially when it is still emerging. In the case of Zambia, there are many challenges that SMEs face in relation to sustainability. Many of the challenges include lack of finance, inadequate infrastructure, limited market and lack of business management skills. Lockhart (2018) notes that most of the challenges SMEs face relate to sustainability. Similar views are shared by Kasase (2017) who also says that SMEs face many challenges some of which affect sustainability. The challenges that SMEs face affect their ability to be successful and sustain their businesses in the long run. This is because the ability of an enterprise to last is affected by many factors around it. For an enterprise to be sustainable it must survive and continue to operate in the long run despite many challenges that it may face.

It improves the sustainability of enterprises by enhancing the management capacity of entrepreneurs and the quality of their decisions. It enhances their financial management, marketing and planning skills and they are thus able to effectively manage financial resources, contain costs, identify business opportunities and cope with risks of all sorts. Naudé (2018) noted that entrepreneurs play critical role in ensuring competitiveness of businesses particularly where there is a lot of uncertainty and rapid changes in technology.

Sustainability, increasingly an important dimension of entrepreneurship development, especially for newly emerging enterprises with aim to remain competitive in long term and in difficult to operate in environment, should be incorporated into business development programmes with sustainability-oriented focus by entrepreneurship support institutions. The focus on sustainability is based on the idea that in order to remain competitive in long term, enterprise not only needs to be profitable but also to have sustainable operations that are flexible to adapt to changes in market and environment as well as to needs of customers.

It is worth noting that the sustainability of businesses also depends on several post training support aspects as well as on access to finance, on guidance, on networks of contact, on infrastructure, on business and regulatory environment and on market. Therefore, the study that was conducted in order to analyse the BongoHive case study did not treat the entrepreneurship development programmes that were investigated as if they were simply samples of all the programmes that exist in Zambia.

Sustainability is becoming an important focus area in the development of entrepreneurship and businesses in general. A key change in approach in support of entrepreneurs in starting up businesses is that of increasing the integration of approaches to business development that are sustainability oriented (Airisniemi, 2023).

Innovation Capability and Business Growth

Innovation capability and performance play an important role in promoting and fostering competitive business in the long term. Small businesses are known to experiment, try out new ways and respond to customer needs. Innovation is a very important aspect for entrepreneurial activities in a competitive environment not only to have

knowledge about managing a business but also to be able to adapt in the market. Structure of programme offered by BongoHive focuses on entrepreneurship training that sharpens innovation of participating entrepreneurs in order to establish competitive business.

BongoHive's approach to entrepreneurship development combines entrepreneurship training with an innovation support program that includes a platform for mentorship, networking, and access to digital entrepreneurship development programmes among others. Innovation support programmes, therefore, have become critical tools for improving the management capacity of small and medium enterprises in developing countries such as noted by Mwamba et al. (2022). This is also the case with how digital entrepreneurship ecosystems are transforming the way businesses access markets and use technology for competitive advantage as observed by Friederici et al. (2020) in the context of Africa.

Innovation oriented support to entrepreneurship, particularly for smaller enterprises, seeks to support the growth and improvement of enterprises through training and support to enhance their ability to use digital technologies, improve their products and services and develop business models that are scalable in order to enhance performance of their enterprises. As such, the digitalisation and entrepreneurial innovation of startups in Zambia has become critical to improve their competitiveness through development of higher technology business models (Chewe & Mukelabai, 2025).

Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and Institutional Support

There is no entrepreneurship that takes place in a vacuum. Entrepreneurs require support of entrepreneurship development within ecosystems which provide them with necessary training, guidance, financial support, network, markets and necessary technology among others to start up, grow and to sustain in business over time.

BongoHive is an ecosystem-based entrepreneurship support institution that is more than providing training. The institution offers, inter alia, mentorship, networking, coworking spaces, and innovation support. Moreover, the enterprise development support is aimed at various levels to help create a viable business. Business development support is provided through various programmes that focus on digital entrepreneurship exposure among others. ICTs and knowledge networks have become key drivers of enterprise development in many African countries (Ponelis and Holmner, 2015). Entrepreneurs also require access to and are supported by enterprise development networks that facilitate the flow of information, resources, and business opportunities to enable them to innovate and grow their businesses (Evans, 2015).

Institutional support is crucial in developing economies where many constraints face entrepreneurs that cannot be solved by training alone. In order to improve long-term outcomes of enterprises, entrepreneurship support programmes should incorporate elements of mentoring, access to resources and links to the relevant ecosystem (Moreno-Gavara et al. 2019). Incubation centres also support entrepreneurs through guidance, business development services, operational support and networking opportunities (Madola n.d.).

Digital Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Competitiveness

Innovative digital solutions can help new businesses to overcome typical market access problems of SMEs by exploiting new markets and customer groups online. Here, entrepreneurs require a range of new skills, including knowledge about digital marketing and e-commerce, as well as about online customer relations and the use of data for example. Also, an increasing number of new businesses operate entirely online and rely on digital technologies for all parts of their operations.

Friederici (2018) observed that innovation hubs in Africa have become important spaces for digital entrepreneurship by supporting technology-based business development and entrepreneurial experimentation. Friederici and her colleagues (2020) noted that digital entrepreneurship in Africa is shaped by local ecosystems, institutional support and technology access. Thus, for entrepreneurs in Zambia, acquiring digital skills can enhance their market, operations, customer and visibility objectives.

Incorporating Digital Entrepreneurship in Entrepreneurship Development Programmes that aim to improve the competitiveness of small enterprises is vital. For a long time, a number of researchers have argued that

digitalisation is very central to entrepreneurial innovation and development in Zambia. As such, the training programmes designed for entrepreneurs to become successful entrepreneurs should equip them with digital skills to aid them in doing business.

Entrepreneurship Development and Youth Enterprise Creation

A very crucial component in the development of entrepreneurship is the youth. As stated in the World Bank Report (2018), Formal labour markets in many Sub-Saharan countries including Zambia are failing to generate sufficient employment opportunities for increasing numbers of young people. Hence, there is a great need for entrepreneurship to ensure that youth create employment for themselves and also contribute to the economic development of their country. Thus, by creating their own employment opportunities, they will reduce their dependence on formal wage employment and generate income for themselves and their families. Moreover, their ventures can contribute to the local economic development by generating wealth within the country. For Zambia, there is a great need for entrepreneurship development programmes to promote and support youth in venture creation in order to tackle the challenges of unemployment prevailing in the country. Hence, the issue of how entrepreneurship development programmes can support the youth in venture creation is very critical and therefore the study seeks to explore how BongoHive's innovation model supports the youth in their entrepreneurial learning, innovation and also in putting their ideas into practice through business development.

Recent innovation support initiatives within Zambia have sought to develop focused programmes designed to facilitate the development of enterprises by young people through entrepreneurship. These programmes seek to support and create enterprising young people through innovation support. For example, Banda et al. (2024) argue that BongoHive's innovation support model contributes to fostering entrepreneurial learning among youth. Ideation support and participation in innovation challenges can enhance the problem-solving capacity of emerging entrepreneurs, in turn creating opportunities for business development. Silwizya (2023) highlighted the value of venture ideation programmes among various innovation support initiatives. These programmes have the potential to develop climate-resilient agribusiness and enterprises and, therefore, can support youth enterprise development in Zambia (Makungwe et al., 2026).

This body of work also supports the assertion that Entrepreneurship Development Programmes can promote youth enterprise creation; however, these programmes will need to be contextualised within the environments of the entrepreneurs, sectors in which they operate, locations where they operate and within the prevailing market circumstances.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research has been anchored on Human Capital Theory developed by Becker (1964). Becker points out that investment in education, training, health, knowledge and skills leads to an increase of an individual's productivity and also an increase of the individual's and the community's economic performance. Therefore within the framework of entrepreneurship research it can be stated that through training of business knowledge and management skills of entrepreneurs, enterprises can be managed and performance of the enterprises improved.

Human Capital Theory has been used as the underlying theoretical framework in this study. It posits that formal education and training can improve human capital and consequently enhance economic performance. In the field of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs' human capital and skills can affect the performance of their businesses. For example, those with greater human capital are likely to have greater knowledge of financial management, marketing, and entrepreneurship. More importantly, Human Capital Theory suggests that by acquiring knowledge and skills, individuals can improve their human capital thereby enhancing their productivity. In this study, the various entrepreneurship development programmes are treated as investments in human capital. That is, they enhance the human capital of the entrepreneurs and make them better equipped to manage a business.

The main argument here is that the variety of enterprise development programmes can be understood if one looks at them as investments in human capital, the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964). Entrepreneurs' knowledge, skills and behaviours enhance their firm's performance.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework as outlined above emphasises how entrepreneurship development programmes can impact business performance through development of entrepreneurial capability.

Independent Variable: *Entrepreneurship Development Programmes*. This was measured through financial management training; marketing skills development; innovation capability development; digital entrepreneurship training and, entrepreneurial mentorship.

Dependent Variable: *Business Performance Outcomes*. This was measured through profitability; revenue growth; enterprise sustainability; business expansion, and competitive advantage.

Moderating Factors: The relationship between entrepreneurship development programmes and business performance might be influenced by access to finance; market competition; infrastructure availability; regulatory environment; digital connectivity; post training, and institutional support.

This relationship may be influenced by the external business conditions, and also by the institutional support systems in place for entrepreneurs.

Research Gap

In order to improve enterprise growth, development of entrepreneurship is considered important. However, little is known how entrepreneurship development programmes can produce measurable results in terms of improving business performance of SMEs in developing countries like Zambia. Most of studies on SMEs in Zambia focus on finance, market and other business constraints whereas few studies investigate whether and how entrepreneurship support can produce results in terms of improving performance of businesses.

There is a lack of research that evaluates the relationship between general entrepreneurship support and business performance outcomes of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Zambia. Furthermore, existing studies commonly discuss entrepreneurship support without reference to specific institutional models. Thus, this study aims to fill the aforementioned gap by focusing on BongoHive, one of Zambia's most established entrepreneurship support institutions. Given the limited number of studies on BongoHive, however, this single-case study is not without its limitations in terms of generalizability.

Thirdly, whereas much research has looked at the individual components of entrepreneurship development and their impact on individual outcomes, little research has been conducted on how all of the different components of programmes (e.g. financial management training, marketing skills, innovation, digital entrepreneurship, etc.) jointly impact a range of performance outcomes of enterprises. This study aims to address this research gap by employing a quantitative explanatory design that makes use of regression to explain how a range of different variables that describe entrepreneurship development programmes relate to business performance of enterprises.

Fourth, most of the existing studies on impact of entrepreneurship development on SME growth provide limited evidence on long term effects of entrepreneurship training on sustainability of enterprises. The study here is conducted using cross-sectional design, thus it provides evidence on current business performance however, it is recommended that future studies should use longitudinal design in order to provide more evidence on long-term growth of enterprises.

Therefore, the study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge on how entrepreneurship development programmes can impact on business performance of emerging enterprises in Zambia through empirical evidence from an institutional setting.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the influence of entrepreneurship development programmes on business performance outcomes among emerging enterprises in Zambia. A

quantitative design was considered appropriate because the study sought to objectively measure relationships between entrepreneurship development variables and enterprise performance indicators using statistical analysis.

The explanatory design was specifically selected because the study aimed to establish whether entrepreneurship development interventions significantly influence measurable enterprise outcomes such as profitability, business sustainability, innovation capability, enterprise growth, and business expansion. According to Saunders et al. (2019), explanatory research designs are appropriate where the objective is to examine causal relationships between independent and dependent variables through empirical testing.

The design therefore enabled the study to generate measurable evidence regarding the effectiveness of entrepreneurship development programmes offered by BongoHive.

Research Philosophy

The study was guided by the positivist research philosophy.

Positivism assumes that social phenomena can be objectively observed, measured, and analysed through empirical investigation using measurable variables and statistical procedures. This philosophy was considered appropriate because the study focused on objectively measuring entrepreneurship development programme variables and their influence on business performance outcomes.

Collis and Hussey (2014) argue that positivist philosophy is appropriate for studies seeking objective analysis of relationships between measurable variables while minimising researcher subjectivity. Since the study relied on structured questionnaires and statistical analysis, positivism provided an appropriate philosophical foundation.

Research Approach

The study adopted a deductive research approach.

The deductive approach begins with existing theory and proceeds toward empirical testing of hypotheses derived from theoretical assumptions. The study was anchored on Human Capital Theory, which argues that investment in knowledge acquisition and skills development improves productivity and performance outcomes (Becker, 1964).

Using the deductive approach, the study developed hypotheses regarding the relationship between entrepreneurship development programme participation and business performance outcomes which were subsequently tested using empirical data.

According to Davidsson and Honig (2003), entrepreneurship research frequently applies deductive reasoning where existing theory provides the basis for examining how entrepreneurial capability influences enterprise performance.

Target Population

The target population consisted of enterprises whose owners or managers had participated in entrepreneurship development programmes offered by BongoHive between 2018 and 2023.

Institutional programme participation records indicated that approximately 500 enterprises had participated in entrepreneurship development interventions during the study period. These enterprises constituted the study population because they represented direct beneficiaries of the entrepreneurship development programmes being investigated.

BongoHive was selected because it represents one of Zambia's most established entrepreneurship development institutions providing business incubation, entrepreneurship training, innovation support, digital entrepreneurship development, mentorship programmes, and accelerator interventions (Mwamba et al., 2022).

Sample Size Determination

The sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula, which is widely applied in quantitative survey research.

The formula is expressed as:

$$n_o = Z^2 P(1 - P) / e^2$$

Where:

n_o = required sample size

Z = standard normal value at 95% confidence level (1.96)

P = estimated population proportion (0.5)

e = margin of error (0.05)

Substituting values:

$$n_o = (1.96)^2 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5) / (0.05)^2$$

$$n_o = 3.8416 \times 0.25 / 0.0025$$

$$n_o = 384.16$$

The study therefore adopted a final sample size of 384 respondents, considered statistically adequate for generating reliable findings.

Sampling Technique

The study employed purposive sampling to select respondents.

Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the study specifically targeted enterprises whose owners or managers had directly participated in entrepreneurship development programmes offered by BongoHive. The study required respondents possessing direct experiential knowledge regarding entrepreneurship development interventions under investigation.

Probability based sampling techniques would likely include enterprises without programme participation experience, thereby weakening measurement validity. Creswell (2014) argues that purposive sampling is appropriate where participants are deliberately selected because they possess characteristics directly relevant to the study objectives.

The sampling technique therefore ensured that all respondents possessed sufficient knowledge regarding entrepreneurship development interventions being evaluated.

Data Collection Instrument

Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires administered to enterprise owners and managers participating in BongoHive entrepreneurship development programmes.

The questionnaire consisted of five sections covering: demographic characteristics of respondents; entrepreneurship development programme participation; entrepreneurial competency development; enterprise operational performance; and business growth outcomes.

A five-point Likert Scale was used for measurement.

Table 1: Likert Scale Measurement

Scale	Interpretation
1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

Source: Authors compilation

The structured questionnaire allowed standardised data collection and facilitated statistical comparison across respondents (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Operational Measurement of Variables

To improve measurement validity, study variables were operationalised using measurable enterprise performance indicators.

Table 2: Operationalisation of Variables

Variable	Measurement Indicators
Financial Management Skills	Budget preparation, cash flow management, financial planning
Marketing Skills Development	Customer acquisition, branding strategy, market penetration
Innovation Capability	Product development, creativity, process improvement
Digital Entrepreneurship Skills	E-commerce use, digital marketing, online customer management
Entrepreneurial Mentorship	Business guidance, networking support, strategic decision support
Business Performance	Profitability, revenue growth, enterprise sustainability, business expansion

Source: Authors compilation

The operationalisation framework ensured that all study variables were measured consistently and directly aligned with the study objectives.

Reliability and Validity of Research Instrument

Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which measures internal consistency among questionnaire items.

A reliability threshold of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable, consistent with recommendations by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

A pilot study involving 20 respondents was conducted prior to the main data collection exercise to identify ambiguities, improve question clarity, and strengthen internal consistency.

Validity was strengthened by ensuring that questionnaire items were directly derived from study objectives and entrepreneurship literature including Lockhart (2018), Naudé (2018), and Mwamba et al. (2022).

Model Specification

The relationship between entrepreneurship development programme variables and business performance outcomes was estimated using multiple regression analysis.

The model is expressed as:

$$BP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FM + \beta_2 MK + \beta_3 IN + \beta_4 DS + \beta_5 MT + \epsilon$$

Where:

BP = Business Performance (Dependent Variable)

Independent Variables:

FM = Financial Management Skills

MK = Marketing Skills Development

IN = Innovation Capability

DS = Digital Entrepreneurship Skills

MT = Entrepreneurial Mentorship

Other Parameters:

β_0 = Constant

β_1 - β_5 = Regression coefficients

ε = Error term

The model assumes that entrepreneurship development competencies positively influence business performance outcomes.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Analysis proceeded in four stages.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise respondent characteristics and examine variable distribution patterns.

Measures included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation Analysis was applied to determine the strength and direction of linear relationships between entrepreneurship development programme variables and business performance outcomes.

Correlation coefficients were used to establish whether stronger entrepreneurial competencies were positively associated with stronger business performance outcomes.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple Regression Analysis was used to estimate the simultaneous effect of entrepreneurship development programme variables on business performance outcomes.

Regression analysis enabled the study to determine the magnitude and statistical significance of the relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses were tested at 5 percent significance level ($p < 0.05$).

Variables with p-values below 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

Saunders et al. (2019) note that significance testing at this level provides adequate statistical confidence for accepting or rejecting null hypotheses.

Research Hypotheses

The study tested the following null hypotheses:

H₀1: Entrepreneurship development programmes have no statistically significant effect on business profitability.

H₀2: Entrepreneurship development programmes have no statistically significant effect on enterprise sustainability.

H₀3: Entrepreneurship development programmes have no statistically significant effect on innovation capability.

H₀4: Entrepreneurship development programmes have no statistically significant effect on enterprise growth.

H₀5: Entrepreneurship development programmes have no statistically significant effect on business expansion.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to accepted ethical research principles.

Participation was voluntary and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study before participation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Confidentiality was maintained by anonymising respondent identities and ensuring that all enterprise information remained strictly confidential.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without penalty.

All collected data was used exclusively for academic purposes and securely stored in accordance with institutional ethical research requirements.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Response Rate Analysis

A total of 384 structured questionnaires were distributed to enterprise owners and managers who had participated in entrepreneurship development programmes conducted by BongoHive between 2018 and 2023. Out of the total questionnaires distributed, 342 questionnaires were successfully completed and returned, representing a response rate of 89.1 percent.

According to Saunders et al. (2019), response rates above 70 percent are generally considered statistically acceptable in quantitative research and significantly improve confidence regarding data reliability and representativeness.

Table 3: Response Rate Analysis

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires Distributed	384	100
Questionnaires Returned	342	89.1
Unreturned Questionnaires	42	10.9

Source: Authors compilation

The high response rate suggests strong respondent participation and provides confidence regarding the reliability of the dataset used for statistical analysis.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic analysis was conducted to understand the characteristics of entrepreneurs participating in entrepreneurship development programmes.

Table 4: Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	198	57.9
	Female	144	42.1
Age	18-30 Years	121	35.4
	31-40 Years	146	42.7
	Above 40 Years	75	21.9
Education	Diploma	102	29.8
	Bachelor's degree	167	48.8
Business Age	Postgraduate	73	21.4
	Less than 3 Years	128	37.4
	3-5 Years	142	41.5
	Above 5 Years	72	21.1

Source: Authors compilation from survey data

The results indicate that most respondents consisted of relatively young entrepreneurs managing emerging enterprises. This finding supports Chisala (2008), who argues that entrepreneurship increasingly serves as an important pathway for youth participation in economic activity within developing economies.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed to examine respondent perceptions regarding the effectiveness of entrepreneurship development programmes and their contribution to enterprise performance outcomes.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Financial Management Skills	4.28	0.874
Marketing Skills Development	4.14	0.816
Innovation Capability	4.31	0.902
Digital Entrepreneurship Skills	4.05	0.842
Entrepreneurial Mentorship	4.19	0.791
Business Performance	4.22	0.851

Source: Authors compilation from data analysis

The mean scores above 4.00 indicate that respondents generally agreed that entrepreneurship development programmes contributed positively toward strengthening entrepreneurial competencies and improving enterprise performance outcomes.

Innovation capability recorded the highest mean score (Mean = 4.31), suggesting that entrepreneurship interventions emphasising innovation development generate stronger enterprise level outcomes.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson Correlation Analysis was conducted to determine the strength and direction of relationships between entrepreneurship development programme variables and business performance outcomes.

Table 6: Correlation Matrix

Variables	FM	MK	IN	DS	MT	BP
Financial Management (FM)	1.000					
Marketing Skills (MK)	0.691	1.000				
Innovation Capability (IN)	0.734	0.702	1.000			
Digital Skills (DS)	0.652	0.681	0.706	1.000		
Mentorship (MT)	0.627	0.648	0.695	0.671	1.000	
Business Performance (BP)	0.781	0.746	0.805	0.712	0.694	1.000

Source: Authors compilation from data analysis

The correlation results demonstrate strong positive linear relationships between entrepreneurship development variables and business performance outcomes.

Innovation capability recorded the strongest positive correlation with business performance ($r = 0.805$), followed by financial management capability ($r = 0.781$).

The findings suggest that enterprises whose owners developed stronger innovation and financial management competencies generally reported superior business performance outcomes.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted to estimate the simultaneous effect of entrepreneurship development programme variables on business performance outcomes.

Table 7: Regression Coefficients

Dependent Variable: Business Performance

Variable	Beta Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Constant	0.438	0.112	3.91	0.001
Financial Management Skills	0.312	0.084	3.72	0.001
Marketing Skills Development	0.286	0.091	3.14	0.002
Innovation Capability	0.367	0.078	4.71	0.001
Digital Entrepreneurship Skills	0.241	0.095	2.54	0.005
Entrepreneurial Mentorship	0.214	0.081	2.64	0.004

Source: Authors compilation from data analysis

The regression results indicate that all independent variables exert statistically significant positive effects on business performance outcomes because all p-values fall below the accepted significance threshold of 0.05.

Among all explanatory variables, innovation capability recorded the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.367$), indicating that entrepreneurship programmes emphasising innovation development contribute more strongly toward enterprise competitiveness compared to other entrepreneurship development components.

Financial management capability recorded the second strongest effect ($\beta = 0.312$), suggesting that entrepreneurs possessing stronger financial management competencies are better positioned to manage business resources efficiently and improve enterprise sustainability.

Model Summary Statistics

Model summary statistics were analysed to assess the explanatory power of the regression model.

Table 8: Model Summary

Statistic	Value
R	0.761
R ²	0.579
Adjusted R ²	0.553
Standard Error of Estimate	0.382
F-statistic	31.442
Significance Level	0.001

Source: Authors compilation from data analysis

The regression model explains approximately 57.9 percent of variation in business performance outcomes, indicating moderate explanatory power.

The Adjusted R² value of 0.553 confirms model stability after adjusting for multiple explanatory variables.

The statistically significant F-statistic (31.442; $p = 0.001$) confirms overall model significance and demonstrates that entrepreneurship development programme variables collectively explain variation in business performance outcomes.

Model Diagnostic Assessment

To strengthen statistical rigor, model diagnostic statistics were assessed in order to evaluate the adequacy and reliability of the regression model.

Table 9: Model Diagnostic Statistics

Diagnostic Indicator	Value	Interpretation
R ²	0.579	Moderate explanatory power
Adjusted R ²	0.553	Model stability confirmed
F Statistic	31.442	Overall model statistically significant
Significance Level	0.001	Strong statistical significance

Source: Authors compilation from data analysis

The diagnostic statistics confirm that the regression model possesses adequate explanatory power and sufficient statistical reliability for estimating relationships between entrepreneurship development programme variables and business performance outcomes.

The model therefore provides credible empirical evidence supporting the argument that entrepreneurship development interventions significantly influence enterprise performance among participating businesses.

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypotheses were tested at the 5 percent significance level ($p < 0.05$).

Table 10: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Decision	Statistical Conclusion
H ₀₁ : Entrepreneurship programmes have no significant effect on profitability	Rejected	Significant positive effect established

H ₀ 2: Entrepreneurship programmes have no significant effect on sustainability	Rejected	Significant positive effect established
H ₀ 3: Entrepreneurship programmes have no significant effect on innovation capability	Rejected	Significant positive effect established
H ₀ 4: Entrepreneurship programmes have no significant effect on enterprise growth	Rejected	Significant positive effect established
H ₀ 5: Entrepreneurship programmes have no significant effect on business expansion	Rejected	Significant positive effect established

Source: Authors compilation from data analysis

Since all regression coefficients were statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, all null hypotheses were rejected.

The findings therefore provide strong empirical evidence that entrepreneurship development programmes significantly improve business performance outcomes among emerging enterprises participating in entrepreneurship development interventions.

Summary of Empirical Findings

The empirical analysis generated several important findings.

Entrepreneurship development programmes improve financial management capabilities of entrepreneurs, which are used to manage cash flows, to make optimal use of resources, to set up and manage within plans and to make strategic financial decisions that help in ensuring sustainability of enterprises.

The marketing skills or ability to promote and bring in customers was found to have a positive relationship with customer base, visibility or awareness of the business as well as competitiveness of the business.

Third, innovation capability emerged as the strongest predictor of business performance, the entrepreneurship intervention with focus on innovation will generate more competitive enterprises.

Fourth, digital entrepreneurship skills enhance the competitiveness of the enterprise by enabling the entrepreneur to set up an enterprise with technology-based operations to reach a wider market globally.

Also, the study established positive relationship between entrepreneurial mentorship and the sustainability of enterprises, since it enhanced the confidence of entrepreneurs, the ability of the entrepreneurs to make decisions, and the access to business leaders of wide experiences.

The statistical evidence from the study indicates that entrepreneurship development programmes are important in strengthening small enterprises' sustainability.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The main objective of this study was to assess the influence of entrepreneurship development programmes on business performance among emerging enterprises in Zambia. Utilising BongoHive as the case study, the findings revealed positive and significant influence of entrepreneurship development programmes on enterprises through enhancement of financial management capability, marketing skills, innovation capability, digital entrepreneurship development and entrepreneurial mentorship. The study's findings thus underscore the importance of entrepreneurship development programmes in enhancing competitiveness and fostering sustainability of emerging enterprises in Zambia and elsewhere.

The first important finding was about financial management capability of the entrepreneur. The results showed that financial management capability had a significant positive impact on business performance ($\beta = 0.312$, $p = 0.001$). The findings show that entrepreneurs who participated in entrepreneurship programmes have improved in financial management skills, which enable them to manage the finances of their enterprises efficiently. This leads to the ability of the entrepreneurs to manage their cash flow, to allocate resources efficiently, to prepare

budgets and to make strategic financial decisions to sustain the growth of the enterprise. This is consistent with the views of Kasase (2017) who states that a big percentage of SMEs failure in developing countries is attributed to lack of financial management skills on the part of the entrepreneur.

Skills and capabilities in terms of marketing was found to have significant influence on business performance ($\beta = 0.286$, $p = 0.002$). Skills in marketing are crucial for customers' acquisition, enterprises visibility and general competitiveness. McKenzie and Woodruff (2014) found similar results in their experimental evaluation of training of entrepreneurship and strategic behaviour in developing countries. They found that training of entrepreneurs positively influenced their strategic behaviour and as well as their enterprises' performance in terms of profitability and sustainability.

However, innovation capability emerges as the strongest predictor of business performance with a positive effect of stronger than all other variables ($\beta = 0.367$, $p = 0.001$). Likewise, the simple correlation between business performance and innovation capability results in the strongest positive relationship ($r = 0.805$) of all variables. Therefore, programmes that foster an innovation-oriented learning processes can expect the strongest increase in competitiveness among participating entrepreneurs. Such increase in competitiveness will allow said entrepreneurs to redesign their products and services and to address certain operational challenges in creative ways as well as to respond in a very strategic manner to certain changes that might occur in the business environment. According to Naudé (2018), such a variable can be considered as one of the strongest determinant of competitiveness among SMEs operating in a fast changing environment and thereby require robust support.

Additionally, the study established that there was a positive and significant influence on business performance through digital entrepreneurship skills development for entrepreneurs. Such entrepreneurs have ability to adopt technology driven operational systems and tap into global markets through e-commerce platforms. Online customer interactions can also be managed through digital platforms. In summary, entrepreneurs with digital skills are able to run businesses that are competitive and have wider markets than those without digital skills. Friederici et al. (2020) posited that enterprises that have incorporated technology into their operations are able to compete effectively than those that have not. Chew and Mukelabai (2025) posited that within the African context, entrepreneurship support institutions must start to incorporate digital entrepreneurship skills within their programmes for entrepreneurs. The reason is that digital skills have become critical determinant of enterprise sustainability.

The study further explored the significance of entrepreneurial mentorship in enhancing business performance. Entrepreneurs benefit from guidance and advice they receive from other experienced entrepreneurs, skilled and successful entrepreneurs, businessmen and women, who offer them advice on their enterprise and share experiences with them. The variable of entrepreneurial mentorship had positive influence on business performance of participating entrepreneurs in the study ($\beta = 0.214$, $p = 0.004$).

The total variance explained by the regression model is 57.579 (adjusted R^2). This finding means that the entrepreneurship development programmes under study explain about 57.9% of the performance of the emerging enterprises under study. The unexplained part could be due to other factors outside the scope of the research that affect the performance of the enterprises in developing economies, such as poor infrastructure, fierce market competition, limited access to capital and credit, and poor regulatory framework among others (Kawimbe, 2020).

Recent studies have confirmed the role of entrepreneurial characteristics in increasing profitability of SMEs in Zambia. Thus, the contribution of entrepreneurship development programmes to enterprise performance would be strengthened by efforts to enhance entrepreneurs' competencies (Zambezi & Bomani, 2025).

While the study's findings can be used to strengthen up entrepreneurship support programmes in Zambia within the context of BongoHive, it is also expected that variations may exist as to how different entrepreneurship support programmes are organised within different institutions, industries and regions. Thus, the findings of this study can only be used as an empirical evidence to strengthen up entrepreneurship support systems within the studied context.

These findings are consistent with findings emanating from Human Capital Theory. This theory posits that investment in knowledge (human capital) yields a return in terms of enhanced productivity and economic activities (Becker, 1964). The observed relationships therefore confirm that acquisition of skills, knowledge and competencies by entrepreneurs through various entrepreneurship programmes enhances their managerial capabilities, innovation and technical capabilities to manage their enterprises successfully.

Findings from this study generally affirm and support use of entrepreneurship development programmes offered by BongoHive and other entrepreneurship support institutions to improve performance of emerging enterprises in Zambia. The programmes are therefore crucial instruments that could be used by government, civil society organisations and private sector to develop sustainable enterprises and grow private sector.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact that entrepreneurship development programmes have on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Zambia. The research focused specifically on BongoHive, a well-established innovation hub in Zambia that supports entrepreneurs through a variety of programmes.

Key findings were that all five financial and marketing aspects of entrepreneurship development programmes of BongoHive led to significantly positive effects on performance indicators of the participants of these programmes.

The strongest predictor of performance for enterprises that go through entrepreneurship development programmes is innovation capability. This can be said because the programmes that promote learning for entrepreneurship that are focused on innovation can make enterprises that go through these programmes more competitive and sustainable in the long run.

The study's findings however could be taken within the context of the institution in question. That is within the context of BongoHive and could be different within other entrepreneurship development institutions that operate within a different organisational structure, are based in different sector or even region. All in all, the findings from this study are meant to and do contribute to the body of knowledge with regard to entrepreneurship support systems within Zambia.

Thus, the findings must be seen within the context of the study that was conducted at BongoHive. Generalisation to other programmes that are offered through different institutions, sectors and regions is therefore not recommended. It is therefore to be expected that different findings will be obtained when similar studies are conducted in other contexts.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings presented in this study the following policy recommendations are offered.

Strengthening Entrepreneurship Ecosystems

Government institutions need to collaborate more with various entrepreneurship support organisations such as BongoHive and develop integrated entrepreneurship ecosystems which shall support the entrepreneurs after the technical training that they have received.

Improving Access to Entrepreneurial Finance

Specialised finance products for enterprises in entrepreneurship development programmes could also be developed by financial institutions. Studies have shown that lack of finance is a major challenge to sustainability among early-stage enterprises. (Kasase, 2017).

Expanding Innovation Based Entrepreneurship Development

Innovation capability should receive more emphasis within entrepreneurship development programmes because it appeared to be the strongest predictor of performance of enterprises that went through such programmes.

Strengthening Digital Entrepreneurship Development

Similarly, entrepreneurship support institutions should concentrate more on digital entrepreneurship training programmes because digital skills are increasingly becoming a determinate factor of business competitiveness (Friederici et al., 2020).

Institutionalising Mentorship Systems

Entrepreneurship programmes, organisations and networks of business support and related institutions should attempt to implement and institutionalise Mentor Protégé programmes and therefore create structured channels and programmes of support through mentors and protégés and consequently make considerable positive difference, particularly in improving confidence of entrepreneurs in managing business, in decision making in enterprise activities, and ultimately to sustain business and employment in long-term.

Practical Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have many practical implications for the above-mentioned stakeholders including policy makers; institutions that offer entrepreneurship development programmes (EDP); local and international development agencies; financial institutions, as well as various organisations that support startup and existing enterprises.

The findings of this research for policymakers also point to the importance of entrepreneurship development programmes being viewed within the framework of strategic economic development programmes capable of producing employment and enhancing the private sector.

The study provides empirical evidence that intervention in the entrepreneurship development process can result in very positive outcomes for enterprises going through the process and, therefore, warrants continued support by entrepreneurship development institutions, as well as other stakeholders involved in promoting enterprise development.

For financial institutions, it highlights how participants of structured, quality entrepreneurship development programmes possess solid management capabilities thus being prime candidates for funding their enterprises.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the study only involved businesses that went through programmes offered by BongoHive, one of the most established entrepreneurship development models in Zambia. However, there are many other models of entrepreneurship development that are offered by different institutions in different sectors, with different structures, and in different parts of the country. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalisable to all other institutions offering entrepreneurship development programmes.

This is to note that the research design adopted in this study is cross-sectional in nature whereby data were collected from the participants at a point in time after they had gone through the entrepreneurship development programmes. This type of design is not capable of measuring or assessing long-term performances of the enterprises that went through the programmes. Rather, it can only measure the immediate effects of the interventions in terms of various performance indicators. In order to establish how various entrepreneurship development interventions are able to promote and foster growth and development of enterprises in the long run, future research must adopt a longitudinal design.

In using the self reported questionnaire as the primary method of data collection, the study is susceptible to the aforementioned types of respondent bias and may have resulted in the participants' subjective interpretations of the indicators related to their enterprise's performance.

Additionally, there could be other variables outside the model that could also determine a business's performance such as the general macroeconomic conditions, infrastructure, and or regulatory environment. In terms of finance, access to credit and or market could also affect a business's performance (Kawimbe, 2020).

Areas for Future Research

The above study can be used as a basis for future research in a number of ways.

First, future studies can utilise a longitudinal design to follow up on enterprises that have participated in an entrepreneurship development program after a longer period of time, in order to measure the long-term performance of the enterprises. This can provide insight into whether or not the intervention(s) of an entrepreneurship development program can bring about sustainable improvements in a number of performance measures, including the enterprise's profitability, growth, innovation, and sustainability.

Also future studies could focus on analysing more entrepreneurship development programmes, especially from different institutions than the ones from which this study drew its data from. However, these programmes should be from different sectors such as from agribusiness, from digital technology, from manufacturing and from the service industry. A comparative study on entrepreneurship development programmes from different institutions could improve external validity and lead to more generalizability on the effectiveness of programmes to promote entrepreneurship for developing economies, such as Zambia.

Third, much of the research on enterprise development programmes is conducted within the context of particular sectors (for example, agribusiness, digital technology, manufacturing, service industries) and interventions should be studied in relation to enterprise performance in different sectors of the economy.

Fourth, future research could incorporate a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods in order to gather more in-depth insights into the views, experiences and challenges that entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship support institutions and programmes face after having completed an entrepreneurship development program.

Future studies may investigate the interaction between entrepreneurship development programmes and a range of external factors or moderating variables (such as financing, infrastructure, regulatory environment and market conditions) that may impact on enterprise performance in differing ways.

Scholarly Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to entrepreneurship research by furthering our empirical understanding of linkages that exist between programmes for the development of entrepreneurship and business performance within the developing economies of the world.

This study differs from most other studies that focus on the financial constraints faced by SMEs and their impact on performance. This study established that the development of entrepreneurial capability is crucial and affects performance of entrepreneurial ventures.

The study further goes to apply Human Capital Theory within the context of entrepreneurship development and provided evidence that investment in the entrepreneurial and general knowledge as well as the innovation, digital entrepreneurship and the mentoring competences of the entrepreneur will improve the competitiveness and sustainability of their enterprise.

The study thus contributes to the entrepreneurship knowledge by elaborating on linkages between growth-oriented entrepreneurship programmes and business performance within emerging economies. While many studies highlighted that financial constraints affect performance of SMEs, this study established that enhancing entrepreneurial capabilities would have positive impact on business outcomes. Thus, the study extended application of Human Capital Theory by providing empirical evidence that investment in various types of knowledge (entrepreneurial, innovation, digital entrepreneurship in particular) and in practice (through formal and informal mentorship) enhances competitive edge and sustainability of enterprises.

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