

## Total Quality Management as a Strategy for Competitive Advantage for Small and Medium Size Enterprises in Kampala District, Uganda

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this research was to analyze the influence of Total Quality Management (TQM) on competitive advantage of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Kampala District, Uganda. This study was undertaken using a questionnaire survey where SMEs in Kampala district contend to embrace TQM practices in their administration as a strategy for competitive advantage were interrogated. Out of 112 firms, 96 were investigated. Respondents comprised one manager and one employee in each of these SMEs. Reliability of all the variables was tested using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ). Reliability for particularly TQM was established to be at  $\alpha=0.92$ . Results deduced that effective implementation of TQM is a potential strategy for competitive advantage to SMEs. Results established that there exists a correlation between total quality factors and competitive advantage. Results inferred from the questionnaire survey is that the small and medium scale enterprises in Kampala are trying cope with new quality management practices to increase the productivity. From the findings, the study recommends that SMEs should establish quality management systems and improve on their quality management programs to ensure effective TQM implementation and for the overall success of the company.

**Keywords:** Total Quality Management, Competitive Advantage and Small and Medium Enterprises.

## INTRODUCTION

It is broadly observed that SMEs encounter unique challenges from large organizations. This affects their growth and sustainability and hence, decrease their potential to contribute effectively to sustainable economic development. SMEs play an important role in the Ugandan economy. Based on results from [11], SMEs generate over 50 percent of new jobs created in the year 2018. SMEs in Uganda are currently major contributors to the total Gross Domestic Product [2]. Thus, SMEs help alleviate poverty by providing a livelihood to workers from poor households and women who have no alternative sources of income. Given their size, SMEs contribute to a more even distribution of resources thereby balancing rural and urban economic development [3]. SMEs tend to be more sparsely spread geographically compared to large enterprises, support the development and diffusion of entrepreneurial spirit and skills and help to reduce economic disparity between rural and urban areas [7]. This minimizes economic imbalance among regions.

Irrespective of SMEs' significance, past statistics indicate that 8 out of 10 SMEs fail within the first few months of operation [12]. Ugandan SMEs

lack capacity to survive largely due to lack of competitive advantage over large organizations at national and international level. Majority of Ugandan SMEs struggle to manage, improve and sustain their businesses efficiently in order to consistently compete domestically and internationally [10]. Among the numerous bottlenecks to competitive advantage of most of these SMEs over large organizations include no separate legal entity ownership and management, limited capacity in terms of inadequate funds, less physical and human resources [3]. A number of studies have identified poor supervision by SMEs managers, lack of business management, marketing skills, book keeping, entrepreneurship and ethical competencies as some of the internal causes of SMEs failures in Uganda [9].

Although TQM can be a strategy to attaining competitive advantage, its awareness and practice by SMEs in developing economies particularly in Kampala, Uganda is still very low. Therefore, not much has been done to operationalize TQM and reap benefits. According to [13], SMEs in developing countries have not been quick at embracing TQM compared to large organizations. Research has confirmed that TQM is proven to contribute to greater

market share, increase revenue, product quality, customer satisfaction and sales growth [1].

Majority of scholars such as [1, 3, 5] have conducted studies on TQM influence on competitive advantage in large multinational corporations. Very few studies have been conducted on SMEs especially in developing economies, particularly Uganda. In light of this, closer investigation of TQM as a strategy for competitive advantage of SMEs in Uganda is necessary.

**METHODOLOGY**

This research had a deductive approach. Empirical data was collected through semi-structured questionnaires. The study focused on SMEs in Kampala. To attain a fairer level of representation, business categories, covering manufacturing and trade, hospitality services, banking, and health were selected. According to [8], there are approximately 130 SMEs

categorized in the different sectors. 130 SMEs was the target population. The study had a sample size of 97 companies that was arrived at using a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of 10% based on a population size of approximately 130. The 97 companies were selected using proportionate stratified method. The strata sample sizes were determined by the following equation:

$$nh = (Nh / N) * n$$

Where,

*nh* is the sample size for stratum *h*, *Nh* is the population size for stratum *h*, *N* is total population size, and *n* is total sample size.

The population was categorized into mutually exclusive subpopulations/ strata known as business categories as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Target Population and Sample Size**

Business Category	Strata Population	Calculation	Strata Sample Size
Manufacturing and Trade	60	(60/130) * 97	45
Hospitality Services	17	(17/130) * 97	13
Banking	13	(13/130) * 97	10
Health	40	(40/130) * 97	29
Total	130		97

Primary data was used and it was collected using self-administered questionnaires. Self-administered questionnaires were used. Secondary data was also collected by reviewing literature. Data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and correlation methods. Descriptive statistics in form of frequencies, means and standard deviations was employed to analyze data obtained from SMEs (pre-test and post-test results). Correlation

analysis was used to analyze the degree of relationship between TQM and competitive advantage using various indicators.

**RESULTS**

A total of 97 questionnaires were distributed, 67 questionnaires were successfully filled and collected. This gives a response rate of 70%. This is presented in table 2.

**Table-2: Distribution of Respondents by Sector Type**

Type of industry	No.of Firms	Percentage
Manufacturing and Trade	48	71.6
Hospitality Services	4	5.97
Banking	7	10.4
Health	8	11.9
Total	67	100

From Table 2, 71.6% of the firms were in the manufacturing and trade manufacturing ad trade, 5.97% of the firms were in hospitality services, 10.4% in banking sector while 11.9% of the firms were in the health. This signified that majority of SMEs are in the

general trade, wholesale and retail sector as represented by a percentage of 71.6.

**Demographic information**

This section highlights the demographic data collected in terms of gender, age, education

background, number of employees in the firms and positions held by the respondents in their firm.

**Table-3: Distribution of Respondents by Gender**

	Frequency	Percentage
MALE	40	60
FEMALE	27	40
TOTAL	67	100

It is clear from the findings as tabulated in Table 3 that 60% of the respondents who participated in the study are males where as 40% were females.

This shows that the workforce comprised of more men than women.

**Table-4: Distribution of Respondents by Gender**

	Frequency	Percentage
MALE	40	60
FEMALE	27	40
TOTAL	67	100

Findings tabulated in Table 4 indicate that 60% of the respondents who participated in the study were males while 40% were females. This indicates

that the workforce composed of more men than women.

**Table-5: Distribution of Respondents by Age**

	Frequency	Percentage
30 years and below	35	52.2
31 - 40	17	25.4
41 - 50	11	13.3
Above 50 years	4	9.1
TOTAL	67	100

From Table 5, most of the respondents, 52.2% indicated that they were aged 30 years and below, 25.4 % were between 31-40 years of age, 13.3% of the respondents were aged between 41-50 years while 9.1% were aged between 50 or more years.

This implied that respondents from diverse age groups were incorporated in the study, majority comprising 30 years and below.

**Table-6: Distribution of Respondents by Education background**

	Frequency	Percentage
Secondary level	6	8.3
Diploma	14	20.8
Undergraduate Degree	28	41.7
Postgraduate & above	19	29.2
TOTAL	67	100

From Table 6, majority 41.7% of respondents indicated that they had attained first Degrees only, 20.8% had attained Diplomas. 8.3% possessed Secondary School Certificates. 29.2% of the

respondents had attained Postgraduate and above. This signified that the respondents had academic qualifications at various levels and in position to participate in the study.

**Table-7: Distribution of Respondents by Number of Employees in the firm**

Work Force	Frequency	Percentage
2 -10	2	3.0
11 - 20	19	28.4
21 - 50	30	44.8
51 - 100	13	19.4
100 +	3	4.4
TOTAL	67	100

From Table 7, 76.2% of the respondents were small enterprises while 23.8% of the respondents were in medium enterprises.

**TQM Activities Analysis**

Based on review of literature, various TQM activities were well communicated with the

respondents and their response was incorporated in the survey. Respondents were asked to grade a variety of attributes under every factor on a scale of 1 to 5. (Where; 1= strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Agree; 5= strongly disagree)

**Table-8: Statistics on Top Management Commitment**

Number of Respondents = 67	Mean	SD
Top management decision to commit fully to quality programs	4.13	0.82
Top management actively championing quality programs	4.27	0.73
Planning & implementing improvement techniques	4.01	0.84
Focus on product quality rather than yield.	3.86	0.69
Firm has an effective quality improvement plan	4.10	0.70
Policies and plans are well communicated to the employees	3.96	0.60
Firm has a clear quality policy	4.09	0.77
Management involvement in planning and implementing of TQM.	4.15	0.71

From Table 8, respondents agreed that top management decide to commit fully to quality programs with a mean of 4.13 and a standard deviation of 0.82. Respondents agreed too that top management championed quality programs in the organization with a mean of 4.27 and a standard deviation of 0.73. They also agreed that there was management involvement in planning and implementing improvement techniques with a mean of 4.01 and standard deviation of 0.84. Respondents agreed that there was management focus on product quality than yield with a mean of 3.86 and standard deviation of 0.69. Other factors to show top

management commitment include managers having effective quality improvement plans with a mean of 4.10 and a standard deviation of 0.70. Respondents agreed that managers had clear firm quality policy with a mean of 4.09 and a standard deviation of 0.77. Respondents also agreed that there was management involvement in planning and implementation of TQM, indicated by the mean of 4.15 and a standard deviation of 0.71. It is apparent from table 7 that top management commitment plays a vital role in the functioning of TQM activities in the firms.

**Table-9: Statistics on Market Orientation**

Number of Respondents = 67	Mean	SD
Inclusion of customer feedback.	4.28	0.74
Techniques to determine customer satisfaction.	3.73	0.81
Program to implement customer service.	4.25	0.77
Actively seeking customer inputs to determine their requirements	4.31	0.62
Top management involvement in planning quality	4.34	0.73

Based on the findings in Table 9, respondents agreed that there is great satisfaction with the level of involvement of customers and that their inputs were sought to determine their requirements. There was inclusion of customer feedback and customer inputs were sought to determine their requirement. These are justified with the results as shown in the table with means of 4.28 and 4.31 and standard deviations of 0.74 and 0.62 respectively. The findings signify that customer satisfaction is key since it helps firms to evaluate their performance during production of any product with a mean of 3.73 and a standard deviation of 0.81. Existence of a program to implement customer service helps the firm to reexamine their product and helps them to take any decision for any future modifications in their products to ensure customer satisfaction. This is justified with results shown in the table with a mean of 4.25 and a standard deviation of

0.77 customer demand. It is one of the major reasons for the of Ugandan SMEs' products on international markets as most products fail to qualify the quality.

From Table 10, majority of the respondents agreed to bench marking through seeking customer feedback, application of ISO 9000 certification and primary consideration of quality in product design as indicated by means of 4.29, 4.33 and 4.26 respectively with standard deviations of 0.76, 0.86, and 0.93 respectively. However, respondents were neutral in their opinions in factors such as ensuring benchmark activities, multi-functional review of product/ service design and utilization of quantitative techniques in production design, indicated by means of 3.52, 3.61 and 3.69 and standard deviation of 0.74, 0.85 and 0.69 respectively. It is seen that not much care is taken in this matter and products are made only to meet the

customer demand. It is one of the major reasons for the of Ugandan SMEs' products on international markets as most products fail to qualify the quality tests. SMEs in Uganda should be aware of the quality standards of their counterparts.

From the findings, SMEs pay less attention to process management and give priority to final output. This type of culture should be avoided and a better mode of production must prevail.

**Table-10: Statistics on Benchmarking**

Number of Respondents = 67	Mean	SD
Primary consideration of quality in product design	4.26	0.93
Getting feedback from technical experts.	4.23	0.81
Inclusion of customer feedback.	4.29	0.76
Multi-functional review of product /service design	3.61	0.85
Ensuring benchmark activities.	3.52	0.74
Application for ISO 9000 certification	4.33	0.86
Company application for recognition.	2.96	0.56
Utilization of quantitative techniques in process.	3.72	0.78
Utilization of quantitative techniques in product design	3.69	0.69

**Table-11: Statistics on Employee Empowerment**

Number of Respondents = 67	Mean	SD
Organization of regular meetings.	4.02	0.88
Encouragement of employees	3.11	0.54
Training on problem-solving techniques.	2.93	0.60
Clarity and formality in goals.	3.43	0.74
Presence of quality circles.	2.67	0.75
Incentives to employees.	3.25	0.67
Integration of training lessons to work processes	3.73	0.85

From Table 9, majority of the respondents agreed to bench marking through seeking customer feedback, application of ISO 9000 certification and primary consideration of quality in product design as indicated by means of 4.29, 4.33 and 4.26 respectively with standard deviations of 0.76, 0.86, and 0.93 respectively. However, respondents were neutral in their opinions in factors such as ensuring benchmark activities, multi-functional review of product/ service design and utilization of quantitative techniques in

production design, indicated by means of 3.52, 3.61 and 3.69 and standard deviation of 0.74, 0.85 and 0.69 respectively. It is seen that not much care is taken in this matter and products are made only to meet the customer demand. It is one of the major reasons for the failure of Ugandan SMEs' products on international markets as most products fail to qualify the quality tests. SMEs in Uganda should be aware of the quality standards of their counterparts.

**Table-12: Statistics on Continuous Improvement**

Number of Respondents = 67	Mean	SD
System on item segregation.	3.56	0.86
Signboards and labels.	4.05	0.82
Records management system.	4.18	0.70
Cleanliness.	4.0	0.73
Programs on waste elimination	3.92	0.81
Periodic quality audits	4.14	0.78
Review of departmental targets.	4.233	0.56

Majority of the respondents recorded that there were continuous improvement policies in place. From the findings, respondents agreed that there were programs on waste elimination and that periodic quality audits were done, indicated by means of 3.92 and 4.14 and standard deviation of 0.81 and 0.78 respectively. Also, there were reviews of departmental targets and records management systems. These

findings signify that majority of the SMEs implement the quality improvement practices in the overall organizational structure of the enterprises.

Now days, firms are also taking utmost care in implementing continuous improvement plans in their production process to make maximum use of staff, equipment, and material.

**Measures of Competitive Advantage Analysis**

This section looks at the competitive advantage measures which are; increased revenue, increased market share, increased product quality and higher customer satisfaction. Individual analysis of the

factors was carried out and discussed here. Respondents were asked to grade a variety of attributes under every factor on a scale of 1 to 5. (Where; 1= strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Neutral; 4= Agree; 5= Strongly disagree)

**Table-13: Respondents Statistics on Revenues**

	Mean	SD
Number of Respondents = 67		
Over the past 3 years, our financial performance has been outstanding	3.21	0.56
Over the past 3 years, our financial performance has exceeded our competitors'	3.57	0.82
Over the past 3 years, our revenue (sales) growth has been outstanding	3.85	0.63
Over the past 3 years, we have been more profitable than our competitors	3.27	0.77
Over the past 3 years, our revenue growth rate has exceeded our competitors'	3.66	0.73

From the analysis on Table 13, respondents were neutral about the fact that over the past 3 years, their financial performance had been outstanding as indicated by a mean of 3.21 and a standard deviation of 0.56. They further recorded that their revenue growth had been outstanding with a mean of 3.85 and a standard deviation of 0.63. Respondents were also not certain as to whether they were more profitable than their competitors over the past 3 years as indicated by a mean of 3.27 and a standard deviation

of 0.77. This signifies that most of the companies underline that increasing revenue is not the main target regarding TQM. Also, it is important to take into account that TQM is just a co-factor for higher revenues. It can be said that there is an indirect relation between TQM and improved revenues. Thus, it can be concluded that effective TQM practices would improve revenues though not directly, as increase in revenue is also dependent on other factors.

**Table-14: Respondents Statistics on Market Share**

	Mean	SD
Number of Respondents = 67		
Our firm's market share has improved since implementation of TQM	4.63	0.76
Our market share is higher than our competitors after implementation of TQM	4.42	0.64
Our volume sales have increased after the implementation of TQM	4.47	0.83
Our customers are more satisfied with our products after the implementation of TQM	4.01	0.68
Our share of distribution is more than our competitors after implementation of TQM	4.21	0.86

Table 14 shows that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that their market share had improved upon implementation of TQM as evidenced by a mean of 4.63 and a standard deviation of 0.76. Respondents also noted that their market share was higher than their competitors' after TQM with a mean of 4.42. From the findings, respondents noted that their

volumes in sales had increased after implementation of TQM. Also respondents strongly agreed that their market share distribution was more than their competitors' after TQM implementation. Also, their market shares were relatively higher compared with their competitors. So, it can be concluded that effective TQM has improved market share of enterprises.

**Table-15: Respondents Statistics on Product Quality**

	Mean	SD
Number of Respondents = 67		
Before implementing TQM, our firm's level of product quality was high compared with our competitors	2.51	0.52
Competition in our industry is mainly on price, not product or service differentiation	4.27	0.63
Demand for our products has been growing rapidly in the past 3 years	4.02	0.84
After implementing the TQM program, our firm's level of product quality is higher compared with your competitors	4.17	0.87

Table 15 shows that majority of the respondents agreed that upon implementing the TQM program, their firms' levels of product quality was higher compared with their competitors as indicated by a mean of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 0.87 and that demand for their products had been growing rapidly in the past 3 years with a mean of 4.27 and a standard deviation of 0.63. However, the respondents

disagreed that before implementing TQM, their firms' level of product quality were higher compared with their competitors' with a mean of 2.51 and a standard deviation of 0.52. Thus, the findings showed that enterprise have relatively higher product quality after implementation of TQM. Furthermore, compared with competitors, majority of SMEs clearly highlighted that their product quality was higher after TQM

implementation. This indicates that effective TQM improves product quality of SMEs.

**Table-16: Respondents Statistics on Customer Satisfaction**

Number of Respondents = 67	Mean	SD
After implementation of TQM, customers are loyal-they rarely switch to new firms or competitors	4.03	0.77
Before implementing the TQM Program, our firm’s customers were satisfied.	2.11	0.54
After implementing the TQM program, our firms’ customer satisfaction has improved.	4.33	0.78
After implementing TQM, our firm’s level of customer satisfaction has improved compared with our competitors	4.02	0.62

According to Table 16, respondents recorded that after implementing the TQM program, their firms’ customer satisfaction had improved and that after implementing TQM, their firm’s level of customer satisfaction had improved compared with their competitors with means of 4.33 and 4.02 and standard deviation of 0.78 and 0.62 respectively. Respondents also recorded that upon implementation of TQM, customers were loyal and they rarely switched to new firms or competitors with a mean of 4.03 and a standard deviation of 0.77. The findings clearly show that after implementing TQM, companies significantly improved their customer satisfaction. Furthermore, after TQM implementation, firms’ level of customer satisfaction was much higher compared with the

competitors than before TQM indicated by a mean of 2.11 and a standard deviation of 0.54.

So, the findings provided strong evidence that effective TQM improves customer satisfaction. Also, after implementing, the level of customer satisfaction is higher than before implementing TQM.

**Correlation Analysis**

Correlation analysis was used to find out the relationships between the variables. This was used to find out the strength of the relationships between the variables, if any, and whether positive or negative. This section presents the results of the correlation analysis.

**Table 17: Correlation between TQM and Competitive Advantage**

Number = 67	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Top Management Commitment	1									
2. Market Orientation	0.43*	1								
3. Supplier relationship	0.44*	0.46	1							
4. Benchmarking	0.42**	0.49	0.52	1						
5. Employee empowerment	0.33*	0.26	0.34	0.61	1					
6. Continuous Improvement	0.30*	0.31	0.43	0.44	0.53	1				
7. Customer Satisfaction	0.6**	0.51*	0.34*	0.52*	0.20	0.35	1			
8. Market Share	0.30*	0.35*	0.13	0.50*	0.14	0.28*	0.60*	1		
9. Product Quality	0.28*	0.34*	0.26	0.49*	0.38*	0.34*	0.50*	0.68*	1	
10. Revenue growth	0.30*	0.34*	0.27	0.47*	0.17	0.26	0.67*	0.76*	0.48*	1

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Measures of competitive advantage correlated strongly with TQM activities. The competitive advantage measure with the strongest correlation was customer satisfaction which related with other factors at  $p < .05$ ,  $p < .01$ , and  $p < .001$ , except with employee empowerment factor with an  $r$  of 0.20. The competitive advantage measure that followed customer satisfaction was increase in revenue. The TQM activity

that registered highest correlation was Top Management Commitment at 0.60, followed by Benchmarking at 0.52, then Market Orientation at 0.51 all against customer satisfaction indicating that there is a strong relationship between customer satisfaction and major TQM activities. There is, therefore, clear and sustained positive relationship between TQM implementation and competitive advantage.

## DISCUSSION

An important finding is that all top management of firms participates actively in the TQM program. In fact, top management commitment is one of the most important activities for effective TQM. This is in line with Aliyu [1], who argued that commitment from executives drives effective TQM. Top management actively coordinate and integrate the TQM processes and practices throughout their companies.

The findings signify that market orientation is key since it helps firms to evaluate their customer satisfaction. This is in agreement with Frambach, Fiss and Ingenbleek [4] argument that emphasized customer focus for effective implementation of TQM. Inclusion of feedback helps the firm to reexamine their product and helps them to take any decision for any future modifications in their products

Findings indicate the importance of good supplier relations. Results indicate that the firms may produce sub-standard products since strict quality programs are not followed by their suppliers. Firms should take necessary steps to ensure that their suppliers standardize their product to ensure that the firms make their products more reliable, just like Goetsch and Stanley [6] noted.

From the findings, SMEs are seen to take less care in the process management through benchmarking and priority is given to the final output. This type of culture should be avoided and better mode of production must be prevailed, as argued by Ganapavarapu and Prathigadapa [5].

From findings, employees need to be better empowered in their places of work. Employee empowerment form critical success factors during implementation of TQM in SMEs. However, these factors are somehow neglected by most SMEs yet they have to be improved in order to have successful implementation of TQM. However, SMEs are trailing behind with the factors like employee development, training and employee empowerment.

Findings reveal that Continuous improvement programs are prime factors for SMEs survival and competitive advantage. Innovation through process improvement is vital for SMEs to favorably compete with large organizations.

From the results, it was established that the correlations between TQM activities and individual competitive advantage outcomes of customer satisfaction; increase in revenue; increase in market share and product quality implied that there was a moderately strong, positive and very significant relationship between the variables. Market orientation

had significant impact on customer satisfaction, increase in revenue, and product quality. Benchmarking had significant impact on both customer satisfaction and product quality, while top Management Commitment had significant impact on customer satisfaction. Supplier relationship had significant impact on product quality. Of the five TQM criteria in the study, four had significant impacts on the four competitive advantage outcomes of increase in revenue; customer satisfaction; increase in market share; and product quality.

## CONCLUSION

The results inferred from the questionnaire survey are that SMEs in Kampala are trying to cope with TQM activities to increase competitive advantage. On a broader picture, it can be said that top management commitment paves a path for TQM practices. Market orientation is also vital for SMEs to achieve and sustain competitive advantage, and proper care should be taken to provide adequate service and obtain feedback from the customer. Continuous improvement programs with recognition and incentives to employees are also prime consideration of management which the survey showed. However, SMEs are trailing behind with the factors like employee development, training and employee empowerment. Benchmarking is a critical factor to improvement of competitiveness of SMEs. Particular attention should be paid to this if SMEs are to compete favorably with large organizations. The above factors should be emphasized to boost competitive advantage and sustainability of firms. The results indicate that total quality management holds the key to achieve competitive advantage in SMEs in Kampala.

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