

Assessing the Impact of Expertise on Quality Production of School Uniforms to Meet Deadline by Small and Medium Scale Industries in Kumasi Metropolis

Bernard Edem Dzramedo^{1*}, Stella Daah Siaw², Tahiru Alhassan³

¹Department of Creative Design and Technology, Faculty of Industrial Art and Technology, University for Development Studies, Tamale, Ghana

²Department of Vocational and Technical Education, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

³Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, School of Agriculture, College of Basic and Applied Sciences, University of Ghana, Lagon, Ghana

Email: *edzramedo@uds.edu.gh

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Abstract

The study assessed the expertise of Small and Medium Scale (SMS) clothing industries in Kumasi metropolis, the second largest city in Ghana relating to their involvement in the production of school uniforms for second cycle schools to meet deadlines. It focuses on identifying expertise within clothing SMS and their ability to meet deadlines for school uniforms they produced on contracts for second cycle schools. The methodology employed a qualitative and exploratory approach using thematic design for the data analysis. Out of the 20 firms identified for the study, 5 declined participation leaving 15 firms. Two senior-most machinists and supervisors from each firm were purposively selected bringing the total to 30 participants. The results indicated that most SMS of clothing firms have been producing standard school uniforms for schools except that most of them do not meet deadlines of their clients. The study also provides insight into the quality level of uniforms produced by SMS for second cycle schools. It identifies the need to upgrade skill training of staff, enhances usage of new technology among workers and equally motivate staff to improve productivity to help meet deadlines of clients. The findings of the study have shown that, these firms contribute to ensuring standard dress code and moral discipline within second cycle schools which enhance their psychological status toward learning and performance in academic work. The research recommends the adoption of external training approach and use of new technology software and machinery in SMS clothing industry to improve

product delivery for their clients.

Keywords

Expertise, School Uniform, Meeting Deadlines, Small and Medium Scale, Clothing Industries

1. Introduction

In many underdeveloped nations, the textile and clothing (T&C) industry is an integral part of the manufacturing process, it is capital intensive investment and provides employment and trade (Keane & Velde, 2008). One of the oldest known, fastest, and most global industries is the T&C industry. Countries involved in export-oriented industrialisation, the typical “starter” industry (Gereffi, 2002), are labour-intensive. These industries provide several opportunities, comprising the entry-level jobs for unqualified labour in emerging countries. The T&C industry’s high-tech structure has made it appropriate as the initial stage on the “industrialisation ladder” in developing countries. Some, such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and Mauritius, have experienced a very high production growth rate in the sector and have since become middle-income countries (Keane & Velde, 2008). Ghana depended heavily on textiles and other imported items from the UK and other European countries until 1960. The Government at the time did not have adequate capital and technological expertise to set up large-scale factories but had the ability and commitment to developing viable and efficient factories in Ghana to improve its economy, this was not easy to achieve because it is capital-intensive to establish large-scale industries (Tsekpo, 2000). As technology sped up the pace of life, the procedure of obtaining and wearing clothing became easier because textiles were more readily obtainable, garments were less expensive and more comfortable to produce. The nineteenth century began the mass acceptance of off-the-rack clothing and the most critical shift in textile manufacturing technology was seen in the early twentieth century (Dunne, 2004). Technological developments in textile processing machines have further reduced the time and expense of producing clothes. The old pillar of the tailor’s craft was also assigned to machines shortly after cutting. The transition of a conventional, locally-based production-centred industry into an innovative and knowledge-based feeder for a consumer-centred retail sector is now mirrored in the apparel business (Hämäläinen, 2014). It is important to remember that textile manufacturing’s essence has changed as years pass by (Gockeln, 2014). Although this is now commonly accomplished with computer-controlled bladed cutters rather than with straight knives by hand, it is still important to cut the fabric (Mick, 2015). The fabric must be united and finally assembled and distributed, mainly by sewing. Technology allows the designer to prepare, design, cut, stitch and deliver a garment to manufacturers and customers. In view of rapid fashion, competition in the textile in-

dustry has increased. Yamin (2019) adds that another scientific change period was observed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries where popularization of information technologies quickly spread into several industries. Computers provide the fashion industry with an essential way of designing and producing garments. It helps in reducing the period of new styles' growth. New software systems based on Computer Assisted Design (CAD) programmes make it easier to build, revise, and communicate patterning, grading of patterns into various sizes, and marker making (Taylor, 1990). To speed up production processes, Computer Assisted Manufacturing (CAM) can automate such construction processes and deliver new technical solutions. Computer-Aided Design (CAD) technology is used to help design clothing items using computer technology. CAD must tackle specific unique problems relative to other mechanical products. According to Yang & Zhang (2007), CAD's early clothing focused on 2D pattern writing and alteration. In 2D CAD systems, the pattern-making techniques consist primarily of two parts. Individual pattern generation based on parametric design and individual pattern modification based on grading rules is the second component. CAD technology is designed to model soft materials rather than rigid solid objects with low bending stiffness. Secondly, clothing elements such as the collar and the sleeve are assembled according to basic patternmaking principles, distinct from traditional assembly methods. Third, although the garment is constructed from two-dimensional patterns (2D), fit quality is assessed on three-dimensional human models (3D) (Liu, Zhang & Yuen, 2010). Medium-scale industries in different countries around the world can vary. Typically, the medium-scale sector benefits from the slow and steady growth that results from a small industry boom (SIDBI, 1999). In Ghana, garment and textile manufacturing are dominated by small scale industries based on machinery and workforce strength. Companies with less than ten workers are considered small-scale enterprises by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), whereas those with more than ten are classified as medium-sized enterprises. According to the Ministry of Trade and Industry (2004) definitions, a micro-industry employs between one to five people, and a small-scale industry employs between five to thirty people. The predominance of small-scale setups in the clothing and textiles industry in Ghana is characterised by low productivity due to low educational background, source of skill acquisition, and financial problems coupled with a lack of machinery that can enhance quality garment production. Production quality of a garment partly refers to the fitness for use with the level of acceptance derived from the consumer's values from time to time which is influenced by technology usage to a large extent. Issues about quality production are essential in all garments, with school uniforms not being an exception. In Ghana, school uniforms are used at all levels of education except for universities and their production and delivery outcome are essential to clients.

1.1. Production Theory

Therefore, production criteria are crucial to output and ability to leave up to ex-

pected standards. *Early Theories of Production (2010)* relates to what is permanent and regular within the industrial manufacturing space which is historically tacitly accumulated in producers and manufacturers' technical expertise, but is recorded today by an increasing number of them in the research. This production theory relates to one of these two alternative approaches; descriptive or normative; whereas, descriptive theory involves evidence of previous or current development but does not help adjust it to suit the fundamental needs, the normative theory on the other hand, includes widely applicable information and instruments that can be used in production management, in particular, to maximise current production and plan new production. The two distinguishing production theories demonstrate that while the descriptive theory relies on ancient and academic research, the normative theory is rationally oriented and appropriate for industries dealing with observable goods, such as textile production, to maximise efficiency and produce competitive products to current needs.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

When selecting a school uniform, the ability to judge the artistry quality is critical, as well-made school uniforms look better when worn and last longer. Second cycle institutions in Ghana had their school uniforms sewn by clothing firms to meet quality standards desired by management, parents and students of respective institutions. Meaning, uniforms should not be poorly constructed and must have a good fit to enhance the confidence of the student. However, preliminary investigations and observations made by the researchers in some second cycle institutions suggested otherwise. Some uniforms identified lack quality as they had no interfacing, crests were not positioned well, some of the fastenings were not well sewn, pockets were not aligned, stitches were not properly made and some of them were shapeless, making the wearer look unkempt. In terms of meeting deadlines, few schools visited had uniforms delivered early enough for students to wear, implying producers in this case complied with deadlines. Many schools also had their orders delayed from the manufacturers. However, meeting scheduled contract time in Ghana seems to be a problem for some of the small and medium scale industries when it comes to school uniform production. In fact, it is a generally shared notion that artisans, specifically dressmakers are not truthful to their clients by not meeting set times or delivery dates most of the times. It is expected that production time would be shortened for quick delivery of getting the orders on time. For a school uniform to fulfil usefulness, its constructional details are expected to be of the best quality. Features such as collar, sleeve, pocket, seams, and stitches, opening and fastening must compare to international standard to give the school uniform a high utility value based on a combination of technology and expertise the company possesses.

1.3. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

- 1) What is the level of expertise on quality of school uniforms produced by SMSs clothing firms in the Kumasi metropolis?
- 2) What strategies are employed by SMSs in meeting deadlines for delivery of finished product (school uniform) to clients?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Quality Control and Quality Assurance

In satisfying the quality criteria for a product or service, Quality Assurance (QA) is a scheduled and structured activity implemented in a quality system. On the other hand, Quality Control (QC) is the observation method and operation used to meet quality requirements. QA is process-oriented and focuses on avoiding defects, while QC is product-oriented and focuses on detecting defects. The operations concentrate on identifying defects in the actual products produced. QC attempts to detect (and correct) flaws in the finished product, so it is a reactive operation. QC's goal is to detect defects after a product is manufactured before publication in certain concepts. Crosby (1979) argued that the totality of a product or service's features impacted its ability to satisfy the specified or implicit need. The critical element in all these concepts is the fulfilment of consumer desires and aspirations. Kadolph (2007) emphasised the value of Total Quality Management (TQM) as a fully integrated effort to achieve a competitive edge by consistently enhancing every aspect of organisational culture.

2.2. Quality of School Uniform Produced by SMS within the Clothing Industry

Quality of a product is a requirement that describes what should make that product last. The dimensions of quality as performance feature were identified by Kuei and Lu (cited in (Christiansen, 2011)) to have elements like "reliability", "conformance", "durability", "serviceability", and "aesthetics". In the apparel industry, quality is defined as the judgments of the consumers about the performance of the garment based on seven factors (Rayman, Burns, & Nelson, 2011). These were performance, components, garment care, appearance, construction workmanship, style/fashion and fit. Although there are criteria for judging a quality of a product, the user has the paramount assessment of how good an apparel is or not (Forsythe, 1991). A study conducted by Koranteng (2015) in the West Akyem Municipality in Ghana into the quality of school uniform production revealed that manufacturers rated themselves excellent, while the assessors (the beneficiaries) rated the free school uniform's quality as unsatisfactory because their constructional processes did not meet international standards.

2.3. Expertise Needed by SMS for School Uniform Production

The workplace is where the majority of adults learn, and firms with 25 or fewer employees usually accounting for well over 90 percent of all employers, the extent and quality of training offered by small firms is, therefore, a critical indica-

tor of the overall level of experience in the economy (*Enterprise Information Management (EIM)/Systems Engineering and Operations Research (SEOR)*, 2005). Even more, it is the case in smaller countries, where few organisations are above the medium size. In most economies over recent decades, smaller companies have become a far more competitive factor than big ones, and those that train their employees are far more likely to expand and less likely to shut down than those who do not (*Collier, Green, & Young-Bae*, 2007).

Training of staff in SMS is a matter of political concern that the smaller the business, the less likely it is to be engaged in training on various operation measures, and the vast proportion of small firms do not undergo any training at all. Latest LEED programme studies in Belgium, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Turkey have shown that about a third of businesses have not engaged in training in the past year, a statistic that primarily reflects the lack of participation of small companies (*Buchanan et al.*, 2010).

Although the level of participation in some training, and higher performance relating to others differs significantly as seen in Scandinavian countries and the UK as they all recorded above 70 percent (*Hoeckel*, 2008), participation is consistently lower among small firms. Generally, many SMS and small businesses, face particular challenges in terms of preparation, as confirmed by numerous studies on the subject, exploring the situation on both a theoretical and an empirical basis (*Boswell*, 2009; *Contingent Credit Lines (CCL)*, 2007; *Kitching & Blackburn*, 2002; *Lin & Tremblay*, 2003; *Observatory of European SMS*, 2003; *Shury, Davies, Riley & Stanfield*, 2008; *Stone & Bradford*, 2008). In empirical surveys, small companies seek to ensure more training hurdles than larger businesses (*Shury et al.*, 2008). As summarised by *Johnson & Devins* (2008), these businesses have less time devoted to training, fewer resources to provide it, and far less understanding of what the formal VET system could provide to their needs in the workplace.

In a recent study in Ghana and Malawi, it was clear that despite the large number of institutions offering SMS training and advisory services, there is still a skills gap in the field (*Kayanula & Quartey*, 2000). Entrepreneurs cannot bear the high cost of training and consultancy services, while others do not see the need to improve their skills as a result of complacency. SMS also has difficulties in obtaining access to relevant technology and knowledge on accessible techniques (*Aryeetey et al.*, 1994).

2.4. Quality Control during Production

Midha et al. (2009) showed that the quality of clothing manufacturing is significant for the garment supplier and the customer as well; *AMANN Group* (2008) established that every type of garment has specific use properties, mainly depending on the number of layers that one could obtain from different materials. Different approaches about the garment's quality level underline two significant categories of features that are usually involved: the design features (garment de-

sign, raw materials, manufacturing particularities, sewing parameters, and finishing techniques) and the performance features for the achievement of some physiological, physical and aesthetic properties.

The sewing threads play an essential role in sewing operation success; a wrong thread may affect the sewing machine's garment quality. AMANN Group (2008) and Pavlinić et al. (2006) pointed out that it is necessary to select the right type of sewing thread that can suit one's requirements exactly; this can be done by knowing the overall sewing processing, the raw materials, various end-uses demands, and by using modern testing techniques which are essential to seam quality (AMANN Group, 2008; Gurarda, 2008; Midha et al., 2009).

A study conducted in Malaysia has shown that all those businesses have identified their control systems mechanism by performing regular output quality inspections, either officially recognised or otherwise implemented (Yusof, Sabir, & McLoughlin, 2015). The study further suggested that the primary quality management practice in clothing manufacturing was a quality inspection, while the customers significantly determined the intensity of these procedures (Yusof, Sabir & McLoughlin, 2015). With proper quality control, the end-user would be guaranteed the product he/she is buying. The clothing manufacturing quality is significant for the garment supplier and the customer (Midha et al., 2009).

Ultimately, manufacturers' initiative to introduce quality control and demonstrate dedication to continuous improvement is to achieve customer satisfaction (Dale, Van-Der-Wiele, & Van-Iwaarden, 2007). In BS EN ISO 9000 (British Standard Institution, 2005), a quality management system (QMS) is described as a management system to guide and monitor the business in terms of quality. Manufacturing firms with a strong understanding of QMS claim that the right raw materials, procedures, equipment, techniques, and ample human capital must be used to do the job (Glock & Kunz, 2005; Dale et al., 2007).

Quality methods have been used globally in the product-based industry since the Industrial Revolution (Evans & Lindsay, 2014). Due to various outstanding internal processes with all components in the production system, producers have pursued and followed continuity, which is essential in large-scale production (Evans & Lindsay, 2014). However, performance can be improved in the apparel-making sector when the clothing is manufactured based on the written specification relating to the fabrics and findings, sizes, amounts, measurement, seam, and stitching (Kadolph, 2007). It is challenging to maintain continuity in each garment piece as manufacturing occurs, as the issues found are not limited to only one cause (Islam, Khan, & Khan, 2013).

2.5. Factors Contributing to Meeting Deadline for Sewn School Uniforms

Deadlines are the cornerstone of many individuals' working lives and a source of constant and alarming strain. Nevertheless, they are essential for almost any task and any position, and they are essential for the effective functioning of any business. Time limits are set to guarantee that work is complete on schedules

and to reassure a free flow of work. Failure to reach a deadline may have significant repercussions. In particular, when it happens more than once, it can affect a worker's self-esteem and weaken career aspirations. There are two main areas to concentrate on in reaching deadline: manipulating the time limit and controlling oneself (Griffiths et al., 2005).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study's design was a qualitative where the case study utilised was based on results the research topic produced for data-gathering techniques which mainly involved interviews and observation.

3.2. Study Area and Sampling Procedure

The research study was conducted within the Kumasi Metropolis, the second largest city in Ghana. A census approach was used for the study as all the school uniform manufacturing industries within the SMS sector in the metropolis were considered. The criteria used to select the participants were based on those who have been manning the machines and were familiar with all firms working on school uniform contracts in the metropolis. Out of the 20 firms identified for the study, 5 (15%) declined participation leaving 15 (75%) firms, out of which 2 senior-most machinists and supervisors from each firm were purposively selected bringing the total to 30 participants.

The researchers settled on 22 participants representing 73% when the responses reach data saturation point. This is identified as a point where no new information, themes or codes developed in any new respondent interviewed (Boddy, 2016). The demographic background of these participants includes; 15 males in the age group of 27 to 35 years and 7 females (25 - 36 years). Work experience for all participants ranges between 3 years to 17 years while education qualifications include Higher National Diploma (HND) 4 (18%), National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) 2 (9%), Middle School Leaving Certificate (MSLC) 8 (36%), Junior High School (JHS) 3 (14%) and 5 participants without any formal education representing 23%.

3.3. Data Collection

The instruments for data collection were interview and observation guides. Preetha et al. (2020) are of the view that data collection involves implementation of various procedures to generate information that support claims. The instruments for data collection were designed using the research questions and literature as parameters. An interview is literary interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest (Groenewald, 2004). A structured interview guide was used to collect specific data to answer the study's research questions. Arrangements were made based on the convenience of the participants in line with their schedules and assurance given them on the ano-

nymity of their responses which will be coded in themes and pseudonyms (as initials of the firms) used in place of real names. Meaning ethical consideration was paramount for the researchers in obtaining accurate data. The interviews were done face-to-face and often lasted for 25 to 35 minutes per each respondent. Interview responses were written as well as recorded with respondents' consent and transcribed verbatim to capture salient points. Observation checklist tools were designed and used to observe things that might otherwise have not been seen and missed out in the production stage of the school uniform. The instruments were pilot tested in 3 uniform manufacturing companies in Tafo Municipality in Kumasi, using 6 workers who have worked for more than two years in the company. The Pre-test result was used to determine the reliability of the instruments. This was done by transcribing the data collected to see consistency in the data collected and the result analysed to help check for inconsistencies and ambiguities.

3.4. Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected adopted a thematic and exploratory analytical approach where the interview and observation guides were transcribed and given themes. The themes were used to analyse the data based on research questions developed for the study. Thematic analysis ensures identifying and analysing records into themes or forms that support the interpretation of the data collected.

4. Results

The representation of the results is based on themes identified from the study.

4.1. Educational Influence of Participants' Background on the Work they do

The educational standing of the participants' influences their competencies in school uniform production. The result underlines the importance of those trained in clothing through formal education system (Polytechnic, Vocational and Technical Institutes). This largely influences every aspect of the production processes including sewing of the products and ability to comprehend new technology easily as compared with the informal group of training received mainly through apprenticeship. Two respondents (WF, OF) who own their firms summarised their responses as:

“Although, some of us give general training to workers employed, others with knowledge in the field from vocational training centres and tertiary institutions make our work easier. They assimilate information better than those with lesser educational background and have wayside apprenticeship training only.”

When the researchers asked why then do they employ such low-level individuals when training them is often difficult, the response was:

“Most of these groups are fast to pick-up on training with time but above all,

they are committed to work and stay under tuition for long. Meanwhile, the other group can leave your workplace anytime with the little opportunity they get which affect consistency and continuity at the workplace.”

Other 4 (13%) participants (LF, SD, SDS, WT & FC) seem to give the general picture of the kind of educational influence they have imparted on their employees through training and development over the years. They even indicated that, they further give professional training skills to some other practitioners in the field of clothing who are not their employees as part of their social responsibility to the catchment areas where they operate:

“Some of these group members that we train cannot take simply measurement correctly more or less transfer them onto patterns. They cannot cut-out patterns correctly and their seam-lines (while sewing) are terrible but after the training for few months they develop quickly. Although few of them cannot produce good results, but that is the case with every learning class’. The good news is we do engage them on contract bases when our workload and timelines are high which help both of us.”

The researchers want to know the type of training given and if these trainings are organised by expertise in the field from major industries and institutions in clothing related areas as well as the frequency at which workers are trained. The responses were negative which was in-line with few participant observations carried out by the researchers indicating training from all firms 15 (100%) were mainly done by their managers and it’s only done when they are recruiting these workers. They do not involve experts aside themselves, as they said cost of such engagement is expensive and they cannot afford it.

4.2. SMS Expertise on Production of Works

In assessing expertise that are needed by SMS enterprises to produce school uniform, respondents’ remarks revealed that, some supervisors considered as experts do demonstrate on the jobs. Meanwhile others are seen just as officials who never put their hands on skill but turns to supervise without any form of demonstration which leave doubts in the minds of workers as to the practice skills they have. But one of the respondents who is in charge of a firm with over 50 machinists elaborated on this assertion by stating that:

“For instance, how can a supervisor like me, have the time to equally participate directly in sewing parts of the contracts we are working on. I make sure things are done right and on time for quality purpose. So, I literally supervise, correct and direct to ensure accuracy and consistency in the work we do. My director (CEO) knows my competent level relating to skill and management, that’s why he trusted this position in my hand. And so far, he has not complained or we do not relearn on our contracts for the duration I have been in charge.”

Few respondents who are in managerial positions remarked that, as supervisors, they play an important role in the overall success of jobs description given them. This is to ensure consistency and continuity in the production processes,

although it's quite challenging for them to maintain continuity in each garment process, but they do their best with limited resources, training and technological support they received. These helped them produced uniforms that are faultless, in a timely manner and at acceptable rate to customers and institutions that order them. Some 27% of the employee respondents' (UF, MDD, SDS, OTF, SD, IF, SFC) interviewed remark.

“The training we received from our employers and their teams increase our expertise level in what we do, which is evidence of their knowledge level in the field. We produce uniforms with accuracy to the taste of our clients without any negative feedback from them. Although, we wish these trainings are more than onetime event and help keep us on current happenings in the clothing world. Management must equally consider motivating us to continue the good work we are doing by sending the team on tours to other working environments, giving gifts and short leaves among others to improve on the relationship among we the employees and our employers.”

As to whether expertise in the workplace (for uniform sewing) requires constant training and upgrades on new ideals and technologies to be abreast with modernity in the clothing industry or not, 16 respondents representing 73% responded positively out of the total number of 22 respondents interviewed. These groups agreed with the statement while the rest do not see the need to do so mainly because their core duty of sewing uniforms hardly see any changes in fashion. The positive responses are sum up in the following by some respondents as:

“We are ready to learn new things in our production process as fashion is dynamic and constantly changing and such is associated with school uniforms, we product. Although these trainings are not forth coming maybe because management cannot afford that or does not see it as important to do so, we are still doing our best with what we learnt at the time we were employed.”

Contrary, the other groups of respondents believe that:

“Training and upgrades are not important as their main market base (school uniforms) do not have their style changing for a long time and its likely not to change therefore there is no need to spend money training and upgrading workers whose services are almost constant. We believe if there will be changes along the line in the coming years, it will not be drastic and we can handle that when we get there.”

4.3. SMS Improvement on Production for Quality Output

When results are improved upon through conscious effort by management, quality output of the finished work is assured. Management, workers and clients are happy. These are important in sustaining and maintaining the clientele base of the company as our success is tied to the satisfaction of our customers. These help to expand and bring new partners on board mainly through referrals by satisfied customers. These were the views of about 13% of respondents OTF, IF

and LF. Another respondent (MDD) expressed that:

“For instance, where I work, we produce uniforms for three secondary schools consistently for six years now within the metropolis but every time we deliver products, responses are overwhelming from school managements and parents. These positive responses help in expanding our business, although we do not meet our deadlines as expected always.”

Other responses also indicated that improvement on production and quality output is tied to having the relevant technology and knowledge but also keeping in mind the workers welfare in general which influence output in the workplace. They suggested getting the right tools and equipment, technology and knowledge to help impact on their skills and also allow the formation of “union” among themselves for cohesive responses and improvement on their lives. This they believe will give them a voice and make them comfortable to give their very best which will lead to greater productivity by improving on output at the end of the day. Ten respondents representing 45% (UF, OF, IF, MDD, SDS, OTF, SD, LF, SFC, HF) views are summarised as follows:

“Our concerns are mainly in two folds; first and foremost, we want to work with relevant tools and equipment which are technologically driven in modern context for efficiency, quality output and growth. Management is doing well but must upgrade the firm with modern technology in this competitive era for better results. Secondly, workers need a collective voice to channel their important grievances to management for redress, it carries much weight if it is in larger collective terms. It is true that, our terms and conditions of engagement varies and the sizes of the companies we work for varies as well, but the common goal is we all produce school uniforms for second cycle schools in the metropolis as core business. Therefore, as workers of these firms, if we form an association to address our concerns in one accord it will help all of us even including management of the establishments we work for. This is why the union formation is important and this will in the long run improve on productivity and overall output of the companies.”

Observation by the researchers attest to the need for modern equipment and tools for enhance work. The employees concern of having a common voice to address issues needs to be considered by management of the various firms as well.

4.4. Meeting Deadlines

To address research question two, a question was post on whether or not workers and management of these firms are able to meet deadlines for the school uniform contracts they produce. The general response suggested that, most of them do not meet deadlines given by the institutions they sew uniforms for. These are attributed to various reasons by the respondents. Notable among them are stated as follows:

- 1) Contract timing in terms of durations is not adequate to execute the large

quantity of school uniforms they receive especially in this era fee senior high school programme with increase in the students' population, likewise the number of uniforms we need to produce.

2) Other internal issues like unstable electricity at times, faulty machines and equipment which take time to repair, the speed and accuracy levels of workers to cope with demands and deadlines and sometimes contract financing is not easy.

3) Sometimes we subcontract minor aspects of the work which we do not have the machinery and capability to do on our own such as digitally embroidering the school crest on the garments, neatening of the finished works for quality purposes which we do not have much control over.

Other respondents also believe management can help to enhance commitment level of workers by putting in measures that will encourage them to go the extra mile to meet deadlines. As explain by some of them:

“In situations where there is need to put in extra effort to meet deadlines, workers expect management to do the needful by providing motivation to workers to increase output and meet deadlines but this is usually not the case. A little bonus for overtime, extra leaves duty for few days after the contract is over, sometimes just a special treat of gifts and encouragement, additional training, promotions could go a long way to increase confidence of workers to give their best in order to meet deadlines.”

4.5. Strategies for Meeting Deadlines

Respondents in the management role who mostly stated that they do meet deadlines indicated the following strategies they have been using to achieve such results:

“Some of us believe in proper time management with our workers, given timelines through self-control by pre-commitment and setting dates earlier than the real deadline given most often help us to meet the actual deadlines. With the help of the right technology and machinery, works are done faster to meet deadline as well. For instance, some of us have software to help design and transfer design to patterns and with the use of industrial cutting machines, works that can take a week or two to complete is done within few days. This help to reduce overall timeline for the production. We have enough machines and workers work on specific parts of garment, making them experts in those areas of work overtime, hence less time to finish their tasks. This division of labour help to increase productivity which affects the overall results and timelines.”

Three other respondents said:

“They distribute the quantity of uniforms to be sewn to the workers and pay them according to the number sewn by each worker. They claim, this encourages them to do more for more money which help them to meet deadlines.”

Other strategies identify includes; avoiding procrastination by being on time and setting achievable goals and meeting them on regular bases. Increasing per-

formance level of workers with incentives and bonus, adopting management style that is cooperative and inclusive rather than autocratic in nature. However, researchers' observation, point to an autocratic leadership style being employed by most of the CEO's contrary to their statement.

4.6. Challenges Anticipated for not Meeting Deadlines

Respondents equally identify some challenges they believe are responsible for not meeting deadlines by most of the companies in this category. Inadequate training for staff; staff to work ratio is not encouraging as there are fewer staff doing too many works; management control is not good enough; competency level of employees is questionable as well as underestimating volume of contract to work on.

5. Discussion

5.1. Educational Influences

The general results indicated that individuals with some formal educational backgrounds are easier to train, have better comprehension of the work being done but are not committed to stay longer at their current employment as compared with those who are informally trained. With regard to frequency of training given, the results show that, training is mainly internal and handled by managers of the businesses as they complain of cost associated with involving expertise to do this. This is a testimony to [Shury et al. \(2008\)](#) assertion that SMSs identify training as less of priority to them, mainly because they have fewer resources and do not get the understanding of spending on training or sees it as waste of resources ([Johnson & Devins, 2008](#)). [Collier, Green, & Young-Bae \(2007\)](#) emphasised the importance of training by indicating that, those who train their employees are far more likely to expand and less likely to shut down than those who do not.

5.2. Expertise Production of Uniform and its Quality Output

From the results, employees want the involvement of their supervisors in practical activities to demonstrate their expertise abilities. However, those who do not demonstrate practically by sewing, point to their expertise in supervision roles and the confidence their superiors placed on their work as heads of the production units. The role of leaders in addressing quality and growth is vital to these SMSs and any form of misinterpretation of their roles must be managed well. This brings forth the relevance of the statement made by [Evans & Lindsay \(2014\)](#) that, leaders play an important role in the overall success of their establishments to ensure consistency and continuity in production processes which is key to quality output and growth.

It is clear that, expertise of employees is enhanced through series of training, short courses, motivation and rewards. This is necessary in upgrading skills of workers and its rippling effects will come with improved performances on speci-

fications like good measurement, accuracy in seam and stitches for better quality output. This is supported by Kadolph (2007); Islam, Khan, & Khan, (2013); Dale et al. (2007) as they expressed that achieving customer satisfaction is link to maintaining quality in each garment process and improving performance on specifications of the overall product.

The result also acknowledges that improvement on production and quality output is tied to having the relevant technology and knowledge. This supports Aryeetey et al. (1994) claim that, SMSs not having the relevant technology and knowledge on accessible techniques may not grow their businesses well. Training in new fields and technologies like machinery such as industry cutting knife and sewing machines is seen as key factor in improving the skills and expertise of workers. Indicating a move away from outdated ways of doing things like use of manual cutting which was identified to create a lot of waste in the fabric used (Saeidi & Wimberley, 2017; Obinnim & Pongo, 2015).

Modern technological software in the clothing industry involves the use of computer-controlled blade cutters rather than straight knives (Mick, 2015) which help to achieve zero waste as noted by Rissanen (2013). Pattern grading using latest sophisticated 3D body scanner will help increase output, thereby eliminating old type of machines found to be less attractive as compared to the modern machines or technologies (Aldrich, 1994; Joseph-Armstrong, 2010; Shoben & Ward, 1987). Although, the study identifies that not all employees believed in such training on modern technological upgrade in work experience as being important. They believe they can do perfectly without any modern trends in technology and learning in the clothing industry. The consequence is that, they are likely to be irrelevance at their workplace in few years to come.

There was squabble on workers welfare which across-section of the respondents believed it's not being taken care of hence their quest to introduce "welfare union" to address their grievances in collective matter. They believe this will influence quality output on the work they do, hence a quality life is a result of a quality product or outcome.

Collectively, it was indicated that expertise quality output on works produced is best determined from the satisfaction point of the consumer. This justifies Forsythe (1991) assertion that, quality is best judge by the end user as to whether the product is good or bad. Similarly, Liu, Zhang & Yuen (2010) indicate that fit quality is assessed on a 3D human model, emphasising that the satisfaction of the work done is determined by the client. It is an indication that, producing quality school uniform must start with planning, batch production and the client being the final consumer must be factored into the cycle as identified in the theory of Production (Early Theories of Production, 2010). Without having the consumer in mind, then it is better the production is not even started.

5.3. Strategies That Contribute to Meeting Deadline for Delivery of Finished Uniform

It was realised that most clothing firms do not meet deadlines for institutions

they produced uniform for due to various hindrances. Notable among them are volume of contract given, internal challenges on equipment and machinery being used, out sourcing parts of the works like school crest embroidery to third parties which delays and also commitment level of workers is low in some occasions. However, the categories of firms who meet deadlines emphasised on proper time management, dedication of workers, use of modern and appropriate technologies and good motivation for workers on work done, all of which summed up in determining the expertise level of workers.

The result generally indicated that meeting deadlines are linked to the expertise of the workers which the study identified as good, and most SMS were doing well, although some do not meet deadlines as expected of them. This finding is in line with what SEOR (2005) found that the expertise of skilled workers impact on their products and even on the economy. The expert producing good work would attract more work into the sector and this would in turn create more jobs for others as well. The experts must man the machines to determine the quality outcome. This helps to meet standards ascribed to in production processes (Christiansen, 2011).

In getting the quality of a product, Yusof, Sabir, & McLoughlin (2015) made mention of a lot of mechanisms to meet the standard set up either by the industry or the regulatory bodies in the country where the industry is located. It must come from within and then having the needed experts as established by this finding is a sign of good thing. Having adequate expertise as noted by Glock & Kunz (2005); Dale, Van-Der-Wiele, & Van-Iwaarden (2007) would help in assuring quality of the product, in this case, school uniform. It can be guessed that the owners knew the impact of expertise on producing good or quality school uniform. This might have informed their decisions to have inside training to bring their workers to that level which to a great extent reflects in their production processes. Though most of them (respondents) were not up to date with modern technology used to produce school uniform as established by the interview section conducted with respect to this study.

6. Conclusion

The study revealed that, educational background of employees in clothing firms have an influence on the competency level on school uniform production to a large extent. It also shows that expertise for improving work in the production process is better achieved through training and updates on newer technology in the clothing industry. Management of firms must be ready to support and train workers for effective output. The investigation identified that, the form of training provided are more internal and do not need engage workers in exposure to new ideas and concepts in the industry. Some challenges identified are linked to management not providing enough motivation, adequate and modern technology to work with as well as not listening to the grievances of workers which does not give them the needed working environment to give off their best. However,

it was identified that the results from uniforms they provide to their customers are generally considered to be good which is a positive effort from the limited resources available to the workers as realised from the study.

7. Recommendations

From the finding of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

- 1) CEOs and management of these clothing SMS firms must engage external expertise in the training services of their staff.
- 2) Some of these firms which lack knowledge of new technology and machinery must do well to upgrade their facilities, reduce subcontracting of parts of their works to enhance output in their uniform production and be able to meet deadlines.
- 3) Management of these firms must consider motivation for staff and encourage the formation of welfare associations among the workers to help them address their challenges.

Suggestion for Further Study

The researchers are of the view that, the scope of the current study should be broadened to include other clothing and tailoring houses who engage in uniform production for schools of basic, secondary and some tertiary institutions to assess their work. Such a study can adopt a quantitative approach to provide room for comparison with the qualitative method adopted here in this study.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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