Government COVID-19 stimulus package, SMEs' awareness, accessibility, and challenges in Cape Coast

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Abstract

Purpose: This study analyzes the level of knowledge of the government's Covid-19 stimulus package among SMEs in the Cape Coast Metropolitan area.

Research methodology: A quantitative and descriptive approach was employed. Using purposive sampling, 234 SMEs were selected. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics via SPSS version 20.

Results: The findings reveal that SMEs have a poor level of awareness and low access to the stimulus package. Additionally, political affiliation emerged as a significant barrier, along with other challenges in accessing support.

Conclusion: Low awareness and limited access have hindered SMEs in Cape Coast from benefiting from the government's Covid-19 stimulus package. Political factors and poor information flow were identified as key obstacles. More transparent and inclusive approaches are necessary to enhance support effectiveness during crises.

Limitations: The study is limited in scope, focusing only on a single urban area. As the pandemic continues to affect business operations, broader research is recommended across wider regions.

Contribution: The study reinforces the theoretical understanding that during a crisis like Covid-19, government intervention through financial support—explicit or implicit—is crucial to sustain the SME sector. It emphasizes the need for well-structured, inclusive policy implementation to enable SMEs to contribute effectively to national economic resilience.

Keywords: *COVID–19, Government, SMEs, Stimulus Package*

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1. Introduction

In late 2019, the entire world was shocked by a virus that originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan. The disease spread quickly, bringing nations and businesses to their knees in 2020, forcing governments and their people to adapt quickly to new ways of life and doing business(Hao et al., 2022; Kwame Amegayibor, 2023). Covid – 19, as it was dubbed, has compelled SMEs to develop new strategies and formats for developing and serving customers. It was, however, declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) as one of the pandemics that had hit the world in recent years, and governments all over the world were asked to follow the necessary protocol established by the organization to come back to a normal way of life. Some of the mantras heard in offices and business centers included "No mask, no entry, wash your hands with soap, and frequently use hand sanitizer, social distancing, etc." which has made some customers wary of doing business with SMEs in the country(Susanty, Puspitasari,

Bakhtiar, & Prasetya, 2022). Naab and Bans-Akutey (2021) added that, by the end of 2019, the world had been infected with an infectious virus known as 'Covid – 19' that prevented human contact.

The World Health Organization has declared it a global pandemic due to its rapid spread in various parts of the globe. As a result of the virus's spread, countries all over the world have devised strategies to help stop it(Gao, Yin, Jones, & Wang, 2020). The country's social and economic activities have been severely hampered as a result of the closure caused by Covid – 19. El-Sayyad and Abdalhafid (2020)emphasized that just at the start of the year 2020, the entire world was infected with Covid – 19, one of the speediest viruses, which was first discovered in the Chinese city of Wuhan. This has hampered the performance of SMEs. However, zoom, telemarketing, social media marketing, and other forms of technology have taken over almost every aspect of business transactions, and employees' physical appearances in offices, factory shops, and production units have decreased dramatically. Countries' economies begin to contract as suppliers and customers find it difficult to do business, and the approach to doing business has completely changed(Ittelson, 2021).

SMEs have been left in a quandary and have begun to feel the pinch of Covid – 19 because their role in creating jobs, generating revenue, and supporting the country's economy has completely dwindled and requires immediate attention. SMEs have been recorded as a means of support for modern economies because they promote growth and sustainable development by creating jobs, alleviating poverty, creating wealth, and ensuring food security (Peter et al., 2018). Financial analysts, NGOs, and think tanks around the country and the world urged governments to provide a stimulus package to SMEs so that they could stand on their feet and avoid the shock of economies melting down at the hands of Covid – 19, especially in Africa, where it was expected to bite harder and leave a scar. In Africa, SMEs face difficulties in obtaining government funds or financial assistance, which is often contingent on one's political affiliation (Quartey, Turkson, Abor, & Iddrisu, 2017). The withdrawal of this barrier, as well as government action in the way of monetary assistance, will enable Africa to achieve employment, poverty reduction, and economic growth in these hard times.

According to Muriithi (2021), removing roadblocks and providing financial assistance is required because Africa will require approximately 122 million new jobs by the end of 2020 to absorb a growing workforce and address unemployment. This agenda has been tossed aside, necessitating governments to rescue the SMEs sector by providing a stimulus package to help them hold their ground and provide the needed support and jobs shortly. According to (Mensah, 2004), many interventions have been launched by governments and development partners to stimulate the flow of financing to SMEs in Ghana due to a persistent financing gap. Despite the incentives, policies, programs, and packages aimed at revitalizing SMEs during the Covid - 19, it appears that they have struggled to obtain or recognize these stimulus packages in Ghana. Policymakers, academics, and a slew of other industry players have debated the level of awareness, as well as the challenges faced in accessing the packages and the impact of these initiatives on Ghana's SMEs. This raises the question of whether SMEs in Ghana, particularly those in the Central Region, are aware of the government's stimulus package for SMEs and challenges in accessing it. Hence the study is motivated to explore the awareness level and challenges of SMEs accessing the Covid – 19 stimulus package in the Central Region, especially Cape Coast using monetary policy theory (Kwame Amegayibor, 2023).

1.1 Objective of the Study
1. To assess the level of awareness of the government's Covid – 19 stimulus package in the Cape Coast metropolitan area.
2. To find out how the government's Covid – 19 stimulus package for SMEs is being accessed in the Cape Coast metropolitan area.
3. To investigate the barriers to SMEs in the Cape Coast metropolitan area receiving government Covid – 19 stimulus package.

1.2 Research Question
1. What is the level of SMEs' awareness of the government Covid – 19 stimulus package in the Cape Coast metropolitan area?

2. Have SMEs in the Cape Coast metropolitan area accessed the government's Covid – 19 stimulus package?

3. What are the impediments to SMEs in the Cape Coast metropolitan area receiving government Covid – 19 stimulus packages?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Monetary Policy Theory

The study is based on monetary policy theory. Financial support from the government, donors, and financial affiliates is one of the most important factors in the lives of SMEs. Various theories have been proposed to better understand how financial stimulus packages affect small businesses. Milton Friedman's monetary policy theory, first proposed in 1912, serves as the theoretical foundation for this study (Udoh, Gbande, & Acha, 2018). According to the theory, short-term and long-term money supply, interest rate management, and inflation have a significant impact on SMEs' development and performance. Governments should implement policies to increase capital flow and direct it to sectors like SMEs that are more likely to contribute to national economic productivity. It should try to use the cash reserve ratio more in controlling commercial bank operations, and interest rates should be set so that banks can efficiently intermediate funds in the economy, which will have an impact on SMEs (Udoh et al., 2018). According to Udoh et al. (2018) one of the macroeconomic management instruments used to steer the SMEs sector of the real economy in the desired direction is a fiscal stimulus package. Kwaku (2014) used monetary policy theory to investigate the impact of micro and small credit schemes on the performance of SMEs in Ghana. While microcredit is critical for SMEs in Ghana, it has been discovered that the sector's performance is hampered by the excessively high-interest rate and rigidity of the loans. The theory is relevant to this study because it provides certain dimensions or factors that the government or central bank can use to manage economic shocks, such as the Covid - 19 and others. To encourage the growth of SMEs, these dimensions of short and long-term money supply, interest rate, and inflation management should be controlled to enable SMEs to blossom (Kessey, 2014).

2.2 The Concept of Government

The term "government" refers to the position, authority, or function of governing (Fasenfest, 2010). According to Boadway and Shah (2009), the government is a territorially based body that makes authoritative decisions that are binding on inhabitants and enterprises within its limits (for which it has constitutional or legislative power). In the process of economic development, government plays a crucial role. Market forces are generally responsible for economic progress, but the government sets and enforces market norms and operating procedures, such as property rights and contract law. Governments have a role in the economy by providing collectively owned public goods and by attempting to correct market flaws such as externalities and lack of knowledge. It is in charge of overseeing the financial systems of all organizations under its jurisdiction to manage the economy without jeopardizing growth. The government holds and distributes money into the economy to boost growth and strengthen struggling organizations that employ citizens and sustain the country's economy.

2.2.1 Government Financial Assistance

Money systems for SMEs are far from optimal, prompting policymakers worldwide to address "financing gaps." Globally, as ACCA Forum members' real-world experience demonstrates, offering loan guarantees or supplying SMEs with money from the central budget is a common practice. Even though the positivity behind these schemes is admirable, governments must seriously reconsider whether they are sustainable, especially when they aim to significantly improve SMEs. The maximum potential for failures on such schemes cannot be determined during the first length of experience when the most attention is usually (Tytarchuk et al., 2020). Various researches on SMEs financing have revealed two primary sources of SMEs financing (thus debt and equity financing) (Prempeh, 2015). In light of these options for financing SMEs, the Ghanaian government and donor agencies have devised several schemes, including the Ghana private sector development fund, business assistance fund, Ghana investment fund, private enterprises and export development fund, trade and investment program, Africa project development facility, support for the small and micro-enterprise fund, private enterprise expansion and development, business sector program support, and revolving credit facility (OPPONG & AGYEMANG, 2023)

2.2.2 Government Stimulus Package

A stimulus package is a set of economic policies implemented by a government to help a struggling economy. A stimulus package's goal is to re-energize the economy and avoid or reverse a recession by increasing employment and consumption(Sahm, 2019). A stimulus package is a concerted attempt to boost government expenditure while lowering taxes and interest rates in promoting an economy and raising it out of a slump. These are all used by the government to encourage SMEs to expand. These are provided by state agencies or commercial financial institutions that determine whether SMEs are eligible to apply. The effectiveness of using such instruments to resolve or minimize market failure is debatable, given the use of public funds and the risk of state budget deficits, but they are widely used by policymakers seeking to promote SMEs sector growth (Berg et al., 2012). Government is just one of those financial providers, and it must step in to help SMEs get the funding they need. Government funding is a formal source of resources or funds that SMEs can use to expand their operations, create jobs, and increase productivity. Government funding is an important tool for business development and is required at all stages of a company's lifecycle. The ease with which SMEs can obtain funds is an important factor in improving productivity (Ou & Haynes, 2006).

2.3 Monetary Stimulus

Monetary stimulus is a type of monetary policy used by governments to stimulate the economy by assisting key sectors in developing and performing well. This manifests itself in the form of lower interest rates for borrowers and the required motivation for SMEs to perform to sustain the country's economy. According to (Piter, Satrasna, & Saputro), monetary stimulus entails lowering interest rates to stimulate the economy. When interest rates are reduced, people are more likely to borrow since the cost of borrowing is reduced. More money in circulation means less motivation to save and more incentive to spend when individuals and corporations borrow more. Lowering interest rates could also decrease a country's exchange rate, encouraging exports. More money enters the economy as exports rise, encouraging spending and stimulating the economy.

2.4 Fiscal Stimulus

Fiscal stimulus is a purposeful program in which the government boosts consumption, transfers funds, and encourages SMEs to expand their operations through targeted, expansionary, and fiscal policies. This takes the shape of deficit spending and tax cuts to help small firms and individuals grow their businesses. Government chooses fiscal stimulus, it lowers taxes or boosts spending to stimulate the economy. When taxes are reduced, people have more money available to them. People have money to spend when their disposable income rises, which boosts demand, production, and economic growth. When the government spends more, it puts more money into the economy, which lowers unemployment, boosts spending, and eventually mitigates the effects of a recession.

2.5 Quantitative Easing

Quantitative easing is a sort of monetary policy that is designed to expand the economy. When a country's central bank purchases a significant quantity of financial assets, such as bonds, from commercial banks and other financial institutions, this is known as quantitative easing. The large-scale purchase of these assets boosts financial institutions' excess reserves, facilitates lending, expands the money supply in circulation, raises bond prices, decreases yields, and lowers interest rates. When a traditional monetary stimulus is no longer effective, a government will usually turn to quantitative easing. Quantitative easing is a monetary policy directive aimed at growing a country's economy in which the central bank buys assets and bonds from the market using unconventional methods to expand the money supply and encourage investment. This purposeful policy ensures that the government stimulates the economy for businesses to expand in tandem with it.

2.6 Equity Financing

Equity financing is a set of activities in which investors provide funds (and sometimes non-financial assistance) in exchange for a share of a company's ownership. It includes a variety of funding options, including business angel networks, venture capital, private equity, and initial public offerings (IPOs) (IPOs). Convertible loans, for example, are debt-equity hybrid instruments that allow both parties to

agree in writing to exchange a loan for shares at a later date(Bayai, Aluko, Booyse, & Ramushwana, 2024). Equity financing, according to (Wilson, Wright, & Kacer, 2018), is also known as 'Entrepreneurial Finance' or 'Patient Capital,' because it is used to fund new and creative projects.

2.7 Debt Financing

Debt financing, This is a loan in which the borrower repays the funds plus agreed-upon service fees such as interest and loan origination fees. The process of borrowing money from financial institutions to fund a company's operations is known as debt funding. According to (Muchugia, 2013), debt financing is a formally sanctioned source of funding. Credit lines, loans, rolling overdrafts, and other debt items that must be repaid over time with interest are common forms of SMEs. The borrower owes the lender nothing but loan repayment in this type of money supply; the relationship ends once the entire amount is repaid; interest on debt financing may be tax-deductible, depending on the loan terms; and the loan repayment is always a fixed, monthly expense.

2.7.1 Ghana's Covid – 19 Stimulus Package (Obaatapa)

In April 2020, the Ghanaian government, concerned about the impact of the Covid – 19 pandemic on people and businesses, called for a large consultative meeting with stakeholders from across the country to discuss measures to revitalize the economy during and after the pandemic(Antwi-Boasiako, Abbey, Ogbey, & Ofori, 2021). Following the meeting, the Ghana COVID – 19 alleviation and revitalization of enterprise support (Ghana CARES) Obaatanpa program was developed, with the main goal of revitalizing the country's economy and accelerating the transition to a Ghana Beyond Aid, as well as doing things differently during and after the pandemic. Building stronger institutions to deliver efficient services, providing the necessary infrastructure to support business and improve access to long-term finance, developing skills to deepen the quality and impact of services, and maintaining financial sustainability with all priorities. A hundred billion Ghana cedis (Ghc 100 billion) has been set aside for the revitalization of local businesses and the transformation of the economy to speed up Ghana's progress beyond aid. Increase the CAP-BuSS Program's budget to help more MSMEs, as well as the creative arts industry, media, and private universities. Create a Ghc 2 billion Guarantee Fund to allow large businesses to borrow from banks at lower interest rates and for longer terms. This will make it easier for these businesses to adapt to COVID-19's challenges and maintain employment. It will also assist businesses in sectors (for example, food import substitution, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and garments, etc.) as identified opportunities to expand production, increase exports, and create jobs. The Guarantee Fund will work in tandem with the CAPBuSS Fund, which was established to assist MSMEs.

2.7.2 Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs)

According to Nkuah, (Nkuah, Tanyeh, & Gaeten, 2013), there is no commonly accepted definition of a small and medium-sized business. The legal concept of a "small-medium enterprise" varies by region, ranging from fewer than 15 employees in Australia to fewer than 500 employees in the United States (under the Small Business Administration Program). That the definition of a small business varies depending on who is naming them. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are private-sector businesses. A small or medium-sized business (SMB) is a legal entity that conducts some type of economic activity. Self-employed individuals and family businesses that engage in crafts or other hobbies, as well as alliances or organizations that engage in regular economic activity. A small business is defined as one that operates on a smaller scale than the industry average (Quaye, Abrokwah, Sarbah, & Osei, 2014). Small businesses, or SMEs, are defined in Ghana by the National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI) as businesses with fewer than 29 employees and investments in plant and equipment (other than land and construction) of less than $100,000. The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) looks at firms with 5 to 29 employees and fixed assets of less than $100,000 as a minimum in their 1987 Ghana Consensus, as well as those with 30 to 99 employees who work in the middle class (Naab & Bans-Akutey, 2021).

2.7.3 Impact of Covid – 19 on SMEs

Internally and internationally, SMEs were severely impacted, and production and marketing strategies were also impacted, necessitating immediate changes in procedures and processes. Many small and medium-sized businesses have come up with new ideas in response to the Covid - 19 crisis. In total,

43% of small businesses have changed their product/service offerings, sales processes, or business model. When combined with businesses that still intend to do so, the percentage rises to 57 percent. Retailers, which have been hit particularly hard by the crisis, are leading the charge. Small businesses with fewer than five employees have also changed their offerings in a surprisingly high proportion – especially when compared to their normal innovation activity. Coronavirus adaptations have been made by a disproportionately large number of businesses that have previously introduced innovations. This emphasizes the fact that the ability to develop and successfully implement innovations also enables businesses to respond quickly to crises. This ability also helps these businesses to be more crisis-resistant (Thomä & Zimmermann, 2020). (Milzam, Mahardika, & Amalia, 2020)looked into the impact of the covid -19 pandemic on the revenue of Pekalongan City's Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Descriptive data analysis was used to carry out the analysis. There was a 53.5 percent decrease in total sales revenue among the 282 SMEs sampled. The fashion industry is the one that has seen the greatest drop in revenue sales. The coronavirus pandemic has had an economic impact on the community, particularly on Pekalongan City's Micro Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

2.7.4 Challenges of SMEs faces in accessing government finance

These are challenges SMEs face in an attempt to sort for the government financial package. Access to credit is one of the primary barriers to SME development. Another stumbling block for credit facility evaluation is the documentation requirements of credit facilities such as banks and other financial institutions (Davenport, 1967). The enormous interest rates levied by these micro-credit organizations cripple small businesses because all of their profits are spent to service their loans, leaving them with no money to produce new creative goods or expand their operations. SME development is further hampered by the high cost of licensing, legal fees, and the rigid regulations and procedures required in doing business. According to a survey done in 2006 into how business is conducted in many economies, dealing with concerns such as licensing can take up to 127 days and need the completion of 16 distinct procedures. This process hinders the development of legal SMEs because their owners have little financial resources and hence cannot afford the costs and time required by these processes. Lack of financial support, insufficient economic infrastructure, lack of policy coherence, and lack of business support are only a few of the issues that entrepreneurs and small-medium firms in Africa face. Given the relative scarcity of indigenous African small businesses compared to those from other regions of the world, education and training support for entrepreneurs and small businesses will help lay a solid basis for small company growth.

2.8 Empirical Review

In their 2015 study, Rupeika-Apoga and Danovi looked at the availability of alternative financial resources for SMEs in Italy and Latvia, two key components of the entrepreneurial eco-system. Although the study found that alternative financing options are becoming more readily available in Italy and Latvia, SMEs still favor using conventional sources. The primary sources of funding for medium-sized businesses are debt capital (short-term credit loans, bank overdrafts, and credit lines), leasing, retained earnings, government grants, and various types of guaranties, particularly export guaranties. As for small and micro businesses, the share of own capital and family and friends (also known as FF) is dominant in total capital. Different state support/grants programs for start-ups are also very popular. What are the barriers to SME financing within ECOWAS? (Quartey et al., 2017)investigate the financing growth of SMEs IN Africa. It was discovered that the SME sector has very little access to long-term financing in the form of equity capital. Due to this, debt financing now represents the main funding source for SMEs. Most countries in the ECOWAS sub-SME region's sector experience severe barriers to accessing formal financing. The issue is related to a number of issues, including the SME sector's lack of collateral, challenges demonstrating credit worthiness, small cash flows, inadequate credit history, high risk premiums, underdeveloped bank-borrower relationships, and high transaction costs.

In three states in (Peter et al., 2018) examined how financial assistance affected the performance of SMEs. Semi-structured interviews and a survey were used in a mixed methods approach. The study chooses the respondents to the questionnaire using a stratified and straightforward random technique. Owners and managers of SMEs were given a total of 400 copies of the questionnaire; however, only

360 of those copies were returned and deemed useful for the analysis. In addition, 20 semi-structured interviews with the owners and managers of SMEs were also conducted. Multiple Regression and descriptive statistics were applied to speed up the estimation process. The qualitative interviews were also analyzed using thematic analysis. This study came to the conclusion that improving access to financing has a significant direct impact on firm performance. However, due to a bureaucratic bottleneck and the cost of accessing the fund, there is still a problem with underfunding.

(Prempeh, 2015)examined the Sunyani Municipality as a case study to better understand the challenges SMEs face in Ghana. having used interviews, questionnaires, and both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data. Poorly compiled records and accounts, particularly audited accounts (lack of proper bookkeeping), low technical and managerial skill levels, outdated technologies with few economies of scale and unacceptable rates of return, a lack of collateral, and SMEs' limited understanding of business opportunities were all discovered. (Sharma, 2022) investigated the effects of policy initiatives for MSMES in the context of COVID-19's economic disruptions. It ws found that the stimulus programs will push MSMEs to look for funding in the capital market in the form of equities and bonds in addition to encouraging them to borrow money from banks. Increasing the upper limits of investment and turnover may result in an increase in the number of businesses that fall within the definition of MSMEs by using a composite criterion that takes both investment and turnover into account. Given the updated definition of MSMEs, it's feasible that some large businesses will qualify as MSMEs. The majority of MSMEs, especially micro-enterprises that make up a sizable portion of the sector, may not be qualified to receive the incentives stated for MSMEs because to the high level of informality in the MSME sector. In the future, it might promote formalization in the MSME sector. Furthermore, major companies that would be classified as MSMEs as a result of the adjustment to the criteria would be in front, taking advantage of the incentives made available under it. Furthermore, the operations and market access of micro businesses are very regional and diversified. More programs need to be created expressly to support micro firms as a result.

The two issues facing the government in implementing the Covid-19 Stimulus Packages. The analysis came to the conclusion that the government's current actions are unquestionably praiseworthy. But it's still unclear how the government will put such a significant quantity of stimulus into action. The government will be up against two obstacles in this situation. First, how will all of this money be made? Second, how will this reward be given out? If the government is able to successfully handle these two issues, the stimulus program's goals will be achieved. In their study, Innovation Practices for Survival of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the COVID-19 Times: The Role of External Support, Adam and Alarifi (2021) examined this topic. The key findings reveal that SMEs' innovation methods have a substantial impact on their performance and ability to survive. The study's findings also supported the importance and moderating impact of outside assistance given to SMEs during the COVID-19 epidemic crisis, which helped ensure their survival. According to the study's findings, Saudi Arabia's government's actions to lessen the COVID-19 epidemic crisis' effects on SMEs, which included a number of financial assistance programs and a call for support from nongovernmental organizations, were anticipated to help these businesses be more resilient in the face of a crisis.

During COVID-19 (Deb, Furceri, Ostry, Tawk, & Yang, 2021) looked into the consequences of fiscal policies. The findings demonstrated that fiscal policy responses to the COVID 19 pandemic, as evidenced by industrial production, manufacturing PMI, unemployment, confidence indicators, and sovereign CDS spreads, have generally been successful in boosting economic activity. The effects hold up well under different econometric assumptions and are statistically and economically significant. Additionally, during times of lockdown and supply side shocks, emergency lifeline measures like loans to businesses and households, umbrella guarantees, and equity injections (which make up the majority of below-the-line measures) were more successful in boosting economic activity than demand support measures like tax cuts or payment delays, cash transfers, and unemployment insurance.

The Covid-19 Economic Stimulus Packages: Viewpoints from Malaysian Young Entrepreneurs were the subject of a study by (Lim, Phua, Teh, & Lok, 2021). The findings indicate that most interviewees support a six-month wage subsidy scheme, a suspension on loan payments from banks, and a delay in

paying corporate taxes. The respondents made the observation that tax breaks for some expenses are not as advantageous as they are for luxuriant spending. As a result of the government removing the incentives, some respondents' feedback indicates that they are still waiting for their subsidies, and they are worried about how they will be able to pay their future tax and loan installments. They believe it will take more time for demand to increase. Respondents saw the Malaysian government's stimulus packages optimistically and praised them as one of the greatest government policies based on the positive effects. In their study for COVID-19, (Igan, Mirzaei, & Moore, 2022) looked at the relationship between stimulus packages and firm performance. It was discovered that there was a strong correlation between changes in the firm performance indicators (as evaluated by the sales-to-assets ratio, profit margin, interest coverage ratio, and default probability) in pandemic-prone sectors and fiscal stimulus. Additionally, there were minor impacts of monetary policy on the sales-to-assets ratio and foreign exchange intervention on the interest coverage ratio in the most severely impacted companies. It has been demonstrated that businesses are more likely to benefit from stimulus packages to withstand the pandemic shock if their financial situation is better.

2.9 Conceptual Framework
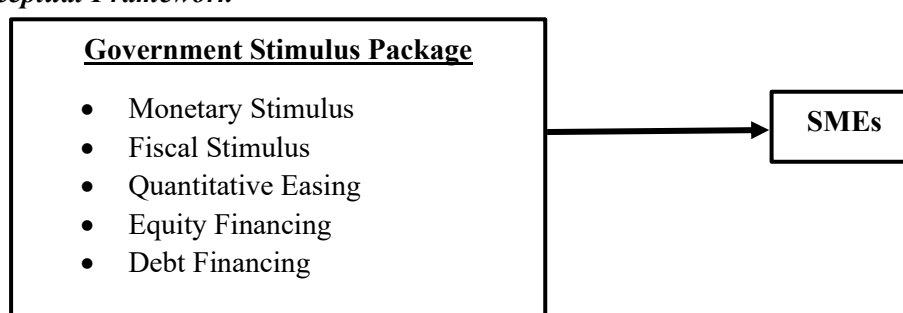
The conceptual framework is based on the idea that monetary policy, along with fiscal policy, is one of the two ways in which government authorities can influence the direction and level of economic activity in a market economy. These influences have an impact on more than just the level and variability of GDP and the general level of prices. According to the theory, these packages will have a significant impact on the growth of SMEs if they receive the necessary attention, awareness is raised, and accessibility is made simpler and more problem-free. Therefore, removing government barriers to SMEs accessing these stimulus packages will increase production.

3. Research Methodology
3.1 Research Design
The study took place in Ghana's Central Region, in the Cape Coast Metropolis. It is the administrative and district capital of the Central Region, as well as the Cape Coast Metropolitan Area's district capital. It was the first national capital of the former Gold Coast (now Ghana). In 1984, Cape Coast was the only prominent urban center in the Metropolitan region, with a population of 65,763. In this study, a quantitative method was applied. A quantitative approach, according to Creswell (2014), helped the investigator to apply statistical methodologies to reach objective and logical findings. Quantitative methods provide increased functionality in data handling in terms of comparison evaluations, data analysis, and collection repeatability, all of which contribute to data integrity. This study employed a descriptive research method to guarantee that the study population's characteristics were accurately represented. Descriptive research design provides for the collection of data to answer questions or test hypotheses regarding the present status of phenomena, as well as provide an accurate and objective summary of a current scenario or specific case.

That descriptive design has the opportunity of eliciting a wide variety of replies from a diversified population of SMEs. There are 60,330 SMEs in the Cape Coast Metropolis involved in manufacturing, Agric business, trading (retail), and service provision (PHC, 2010). Between 2019 and 2020, there were 607 SMEs registered with the NBSSI in the metropolis, according to data. This study's SME population is made up of NBSSI-registered SMEs that have been in business for at least 3 to 5 years and employed at least one to ten people or more. In this study, a technique known as purposive was applied. Purposive

sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which the researcher's judgment is used to select the items for the sample. It is more efficient to use the purposive sampling method (Bernard, 2002). This strategy is particularly effective when cash and other resources are limited. A sample size of 234 SMEs was chosen from a total of 607 table to limit error, improve estimation, and enhance applicability, allowing statistical inference for the full population.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Structured questionnaires were of choice for data collection instruments. The use of structured questions allows for the inclusion of closed-ended and multiple-choice questions, which are thought to be easier for respondents to answer. Structured questionnaires are easier to analyze and tabulate. The instrument had four sections: A, B, C, and D. The first section of the survey focused on demographic: job title and years in the industry. A particular matter of inquiry was included in section, B of the questionnaire, which requested information on awareness level SMEs of government Covid – 19 stimulus package. Whether SMEs in the Cape Coast metropolitan area benefited from the government's stimulus package was discussed in Section C. Section D also dealt with the impediments to SMEs in the Cape Coast metropolitan area receiving Covid - 19 stimulus packages. The researcher and four certified research assistants collected data from the chosen respondents. The researcher and the four helpers administered the questionnaire in two stages. Stage one was the distribution of questionnaires to responders, and stage two was the collecting. It took five months to complete the exercise (from June to October, 2020). The process of evaluating, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the proof to answer the study's basic assertions is known as data analysis. To examine data acquired in the field, this study used both descriptive and inferential statistics. The information gathered was initially sorted and structured. The data was then coded, allowing the researcher to give codes to each questionnaire object's possible responses. However, 205 questionnaires were returned and examined, accounting for an 89 percent response rate. The data entry, transformation, and analysis were done using a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20.0.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Information (N = 205)

Factors		Frequency	Percent
Ownership Characteristics	Private limited	2	1
	Sole Proprietorship	176	86
	Family-Owned	27	13
Type of Business	Manufacturing	26	13
	Retailing	94	46
	Services	74	36
	Agric Business	11	5
Operational Years	Less than a year	34	17
	1-5 years	52	25
	6- 10 years	62	30
	11 years and above	57	28
Employees	1-5 employees	79	39
	6-10 employees	61	30
	11-15 employees	17	8
	Above 15 employees	48	23

Table 1 indicate that the ownership of SMEs was (1) 2 percent private limited company, (176) 86 percent sole proprietorship, and (27) 13 percent family-owned business. Manufacturing accounts for (26) 13% of all enterprises, retail accounts for (96) 46%, services accounts for (74) 36%, and agriculture accounting for (11) 5%. The table again reveals that (34) 17 percent of enterprises lasted for less than one year, (52) 25 percent functioned for one to five years, (62) 30 percent operated for six to ten years, and (57) 28 percent operated for eleven years or more. Again, (79) 39 percent had 1 to 5 employees,

(61) 30 percent had 6 to 10 employees, (17) 8 percent had 11 to 15 employees, and (48) 23 percent had 15 or more employees.

4.1.1 Assessing the level of awareness of the government's SMEs Covid – 19 stimulus package

Table 2 SMEs Level of Awareness of Government Covid-19 Stimulus Package

Statement	Response	Frequency	Percentage
SMEs Level of Awareness of Covid – 19 Stimulus Package	Yes	154	75
	No	51	25

The level of awareness of the Covid - 19 government stimulus package among SMEs in the Cape Coast Metropolitan Area is shown in Table 2. While 154 respondents, or 75%, claim to be ignorant of the government's Covid - 19 stimulus package, 25 respondents, or 25% of SMEs, claim to have information about it and be aware of its disbursement.

4.1.2 How many SMEs accessed the government's Covid – 19 stimulus package for SMEs

Table 3: SMEs accessibility of the Government Covid – 19 Stimulus Package

Statement	Reponse	Frequency	Percentage
Inability to access government's Covid – 19 stimulus package for SMEs	Yes	154	75
	No	51	25

Table 3 shows that while 75% of respondents representing 154 SMEs in the Cape Coast Metropolitan said they had not accessed the government's stimulus package for 2019, 25% of respondents representing 25 SMEs said they had..

4.1.3 Barriers to SMEs receiving government Covid – 19 stimulus package

Table 4: Challenges SMEs faced accessing the Covid – 19 stimulus package

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
Lack of standard application procedure	3.70	0.80
Unregistered businesses struggle to access	4.12	0.80
Lack of good record Keeping causes duplication	3.92	1.07
Lack of information	4.33	0.80
Consideration based on Political Party Affiliations	4.42	1.30
Amount not enough to support growth and expansion	3.94	1.04

Table 4 demonstrate the challenges faced by SMEs in accessing government Covid – 19 stimulus package, respondents indicate lack of standard application (*M = 3.70, SD = 0.80*), unregistered businesses struggled to access (*M = 4. 12, SD = 0.80*), lack of record keeping causing duplication and multiplication (*M = 3.92, SD = 1.07*), lack of information (*M = 4.33, SD = 0.80*), consideration based on political party affiliation (*M = 4.42, SD = 1.30*) and amount not enough to support growth and expansion (*M = 3.94, SD = 1.04*) were the problems faced acceesing the stimulus package.

4.2 Discussion

Sole proprietorships made up the majority of SMEs operating in the study area, followed by family-owned businesses and private limited companies. The prevalence of sole proprietorship and family-owned businesses was found, which is not surprising given that large or multinational corporations are reluctant to invest in this area due to the possibility of not making back their investment. Retail, services, manufacturing, and agriculture are the respective industries represented by these businesses. The main business model has been one of buying and selling, which has slowed the growth of industry and agribusiness. Importation has largely been the main source of supply for businesses. Retailing had the largest percentages, followed by services. The average number of years these SMEs have been in operation is 11 years or more, and the average number of employees is more than 15. SMEs owners (25 percent) answering questions say they are aware of the Covid – 19 stimulus package and other financial

support provided by the government; nonetheless, the majority of these SMEs exhibit a lack of awareness.

Only a quarter of SMEs (25%) said they had accessed the Covid – 19 stimulus package or any other government package aimed at supporting and developing SMEs. This demonstrates that the majority of SMEs working in this sector have not profited from the Covid – 19 stimulus program or any other package. It was also demonstrated that SMEs faced challenges in their attempts to access these packages, such as a lack of standard application procedures, unregistered businesses struggling to access, a lack of good record-keeping causing duplication, a lack of information, consideration based on political party affiliation, and an amount insufficient to support growth and expansion.

The theory clearly shows why, for SMEs to develop and the sector to perform in support of any country's economy during a pandemic like the Covid – 19, the government, as the controller of money and other resources, needs to provide the necessary financial package, whether implicit or explicit, to oil a crumbling sector due to pandemic. Lack of awareness of Covid – 19 or any other stimulus package supplied by the government indicates that such package will be difficult to obtain. At the awareness level, all necessary efforts should be made to disseminate and make information available to all stakeholders in the SMEs sector, allowing everyone to access the amount of money or facilities adequately presented in a battle against the shock of a pandemic. The sector is very fluid and must be supported by the government to ensure that access to such packages is made more flexible because the failure of any government to build its economy is the failure of the SMEs sector. Supposed roadblocks SMEs face to getting such packages should be removed since when they become insurmountable, they drain on personal and family funds, which are not as productive in the long run.

5. Conclusion
Previous financial management study has highlighted the need for government financial support for businesses to grow, but the level of awareness and problems experienced should be addressed to make SMEs' development simpler. The study's goals were to determine how well SMEs were aware of government stimulus packages, how well they were able to receive them, and what problems they faced in doing so. Per the findings, SMEs have a poor level of awareness. The SMEs have a low level of access, and it was also discovered that SMEs confront numerous problems in obtaining packages, particularly when political affiliation is taken into account.

Many governments developed new policy initiatives to enhance SMEs' access to financing. Government financial support continues to be the most popular policy tool for reviving and energizing a nation's economy. These tools, which support domestic production, are primarily used by the SMEs sector. The implication is that accessibility would be poor when recipients of these financial supports or government initiatives lacked information on these supports. Therefore, it would be difficult to implement these government initiatives even though they are available due to a lack of knowledge and awareness.

5.1 Implacation
Many governments developed new policy initiatives to enhance SMEs' access to financing. Government financial support continues to be the most popular policy tool for reviving and energizing a nation's economy. These tools, which support domestic production, are primarily used by the SMEs sector. The implication is that accessibility would be poor when recipients of these financial supports or government initiatives lacked information on these supports. Therefore, it would be difficult to implement these government initiatives even though they are available due to a lack of knowledge and awareness

5.2 Limitation and Study forward
The drawback is that the government stimulus package has received little attention in the financial management literature, particularly in Ghana. The study was small and focused on a single urban area. Since the pandemic is still with us and has a significant impact on commercial transactions, more research should be undertaken in a large study region.

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