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Literature review, prospects for exporting and internationalization in small and medium-sized companies

Revisión de la literatura de la exportación que realizan las pequeñas y medianas empresas

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Abstract

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent a crucial component of the economy. The ability to internationalize through exporting is essential not only for their growth, but also with a view to fostering the internal economic advancement of countries. This information crawl seeks to address the common obstacles faced by small and medium-sized enterprises at the beginning of the export process as a model for internationalization. The methodology applied was a literature review with an in-depth data analysis, which identifies the importance of good decision making by managers, who value direct communication with their customers as a primary source of information. In turn, exporting is one of the most common ways for SMEs to enter foreign markets in the initial stages of their internationalization, focusing their efforts on selecting export channels that optimize transaction cost efficiency. This research offers SMEs a guide to have an approach to the common difficulties that may arise internally in these companies, and what it means to sell in an international market, where the adaptability of products and transportation to these markets can represent a significant increase in their costs a priori for these companies to reach new markets and initiate export processes becomes something that can be very difficult for them.

Keywords: Small and medium-sized enterprises; International trade; Culture; Politics; Law and economics; Market.

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Resumen

Las pequeñas y medianas empresas (PYMES) representan un componente crucial de la economía. La capacidad de internacionalizarse a través de la exportación es esencial no solo para su crecimiento, sino también con el objetivo de fomentar el desarrollo económico interno de los países. Esta recopilación de información busca abordar los obstáculos comunes que enfrentan las PYMES al iniciar el proceso de exportación como modelo de internacionalización. La metodología aplicada fue una revisión de la literatura con un análisis de datos en profundidad, que identifica la importancia de una buena toma de decisiones por parte de los gerentes, quienes valoran la comunicación directa con sus clientes como una fuente primaria de información. A su vez, la exportación es una de las formas más comunes para que las PYMES ingresen a mercados extranjeros en las etapas iniciales de su internacionalización, enfocando sus esfuerzos en seleccionar canales de exportación que optimicen la eficiencia de los costos de transacción. Esta investigación ofrece a las PYMES una guía para comprender las dificultades comunes que pueden surgir internamente en estas empresas, así como lo que implica vender en un mercado internacional, donde la adaptabilidad de los productos y el transporte hacia esos mercados puede representar un aumento significativo en sus costos. En consecuencia, para estas empresas, alcanzar nuevos mercados e iniciar procesos de exportación puede resultar un desafío considerable.

Palabras clave: Pequeñas y medianas empresas; Comercio internacional; Cultura; Política; Derecho y economía; Mercado.

Introduction

Small and medium enterprises face various challenges when exporting, among the main challenges are the different tax rates established by each country, the lack of knowledge of international markets and language issues are some of the challenges faced by SMEs (Civelek et al., 2022). Likewise, Abubakari et al. (2022) in the Greater Accra - Ghana region, through 350 questionnaires of which 257 responses were usable, identify challenges in the lack of knowledge of foreign institutions markets, and limited understanding of internationalization. In turn, within the growing ocean technology industry of Atlantic Canada, SMEs tend to export to nearby markets, in terms of geographical and cultural proximity, exporters in this region identify two critical barriers that hinder their entry into new markets (Civelek et al., 2022; Kalafsky & Raymond, 2022).

Firstly, the costs associated with the export process present a significant challenge. Conversely, adapting products to meet various international standards is also a crucial factor. Additionally, legal and economic considerations play a vital role in the internationalization processes of SMEs. In the legal field Civelek and Krajčí, (2022), specify that perspectives on legal and fiscal barriers related to exporting do not vary based on the age, size, or sector of these companies. Regarding economic aspects, Ključnikov et al. (2022) through a questionnaire administered to 408 executives in the Central European region identifies that SMEs in the growth phase, facing precarious financial situations, tend to perceive barriers that may impact the export process—such as language and cultural barriers—less intensely. Conversely, SMEs with strong financial performance tend to navigate these export barriers more effectively. At the same time Bertrand et al. (2022) using a qualitative comparative fuzzy set analysis—a technique that generates linguistic summaries of data related to specific cases— a unique dataset of private Russian manufacturing SMEs was employed. The economic and institutional context of the home country plays a crucial role in the internationalization and exporting behavior of firms in emerging markets.

Two key economic and institutional factors characteristic of emerging countries are identified: industrial growth and corruption practices, which vary by industry within a given country. Initially, industrial growth is viewed as a crucial phase of the domestic market and an indicator of market attractiveness. An attractive domestic market may deter SMEs from exporting, serving as a barrier to export activities. However, competition in growing markets is often less intense, which may enable these companies to allocate resources for export activities. Regarding corruption, it can function both as an obstacle and as a

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facilitator for exporting. A corrupt industrial environment can increase operating costs in the home country; companies that engage in corrupt practices not only have to pay bribes but also incur additional costs.

Additionally Kalinic and Brouthers (2022), through information from German and Italian SMEs indicates that these companies, when engaging in export activities, tend to focus solely on selecting a distribution channel, neglecting important factors such as the added value their products can offer in international markets. Moreover, e-commerce—also known as online commerce—facilitates the acquisition and distribution of goods and services via the Internet, becoming a strategic tool for SMEs. Cassia and Magno (2022) identify the increasing significance of implementing e-commerce models for small and medium-sized enterprises as a strategic approach for accessing international markets. Additionally, technological resources such as back-end systems—comprising a suite of applications and processes that operate in the background—are becoming essential tools for managing large volumes of data and supporting organizational processes. According to Uwizeyemungu et al. (2022), developing companies that implement technological resources such as back-end systems are more likely to become exporters, particularly in nearby international markets.

Finally, it is essential to consider how the internal dynamics of SMEs, whether family-owned or not, can impact their ability to fully capitalize on international trade opportunities. Research by Pascucci et al. (2022) highlights how the presence of ‘conflicting voices’ within these firms can influence export performance. Such internal tensions may hinder the effective implementation of e-commerce strategies and the optimal use of technological resources like back-end systems. When strategic visions and approaches are overshadowed by internal conflicts, the firm’s commitment to export activities can be compromised, limiting its competitiveness in international markets and its ability to maximize the added value of its products.

According to a review of documents in Scopus, five literature reviews were identified. First, Haddoud et al. (2021) conducted an information crawl on the export performance and survival of SMEs, developing a holistic framework that reviewed 82 papers related to the determinants of export start-up factors for SMEs from 2008 to 2019. This review highlights the positive impact of exports on trade balance and job creation, as well as their crucial role in the recovery of states affected by global crises. Additionally, it identifies that current literature does not adequately address the factors motivating SMEs to begin exporting. A comprehensive approach that recognizes the various phases over different periods is essential for understanding the facilitators of SME exporting, particularly given the increasing complexity of internationalization processes driven by global economic crises.

In addition, the report (Innovating to Aid Growth 2018) highlights that SMEs can enhance their export performance through innovation. Globalization has significantly intensified competition, and companies aiming to succeed in foreign markets must adopt strategies that enable them to navigate these challenges. This is particularly relevant for SMEs, which often lack the abundant resources available to larger firms. Consequently, innovation is viewed as a crucial growth strategy that can substantially improve SMEs’ export capabilities. Moreover, innovation itself is often considered an important resource that influences the extent and scope of a company’s export activities. In line with this approach, Ribau et al. (2019) examine the impact of various internal capabilities on the development of new ideas and their subsequent effect on the export performance of SMEs. This study is based on an analysis of 147 surveys from SME managers in the plastic manufacturing sector operating in Portugal. The findings indicate that innovation capabilities are significant predictors of export performance, aligning with existing literature. Furthermore, the mediating effects of entrepreneurial orientation reveal that proactive firms not only excel in innovation but also leverage their entrepreneurial capabilities to achieve better performance in international markets compared to firms that merely react to external stimuli.

Moreover, according to the report Expanding out of Britain (2017) despite uncertainty

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in global markets, exporting and international expansion are crucial for financial success. SMEs, which constitute most companies in the UK and a significant share globally, are often less likely to invest in exports due to intense competition and limited resources compared to large multinational corporations, making them more risk averse. However, exporting also serves as a strategic tool that can enhance their resilience to future economic and market turbulence. In addition, Mogos Descotes & Walliser (2011) explore SME exports within institutional contexts in France and Romania using an interview methodology with 18 managers from both countries. They highlight that foreign customers are regarded as the most valuable source of information, as they provide accurate and relevant insights tailored to the specific needs of the company in a timely manner, facilitating informed decision-making. Managers emphasize the importance of direct interaction with customers, which allows for the exchange of ideas and the acquisition of real-time, detailed responses. This direct communication enhances their understanding of market needs; the information provided by customers is both detailed and reliable. This quality of information enables SMEs to adapt their offerings more effectively to meet the demands of the international market and to identify new opportunities.

Finally, no recent literature reviews were identified that link trends in SME exports. In the research conducted, a scientific mapping was performed using documentation obtained from the Scopus platform. This information was analyzed using RStudio software, incorporating the Bibliometrix bibliometric tool, which enabled the construction of a social network related to the studied topic and facilitated the identification of research trends.

The present study is structured into four sections. First, the methodology is outlined, describing the process of data collection and the subsequent analysis and treatment of the information. Next, the bibliometric analysis is presented, evaluating publications, leading journals, authors, affiliations, and a list of countries. Following this, the relevant social network is discussed, which aids in the presentation and analysis of research trends, allowing users to access a wide variety of data and relevant information in this field. In the final section, we conclude the study and propose directions for future research

Methodology

The aim of this research is to identify the primary challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs during the process of internationalization through export activities, utilizing a bibliometric analysis approach. The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved a comprehensive review of the scholarly output in the field over the past decade, identifying key journals, countries, and authors contributing to this topic, with data sourced from the Scopus database. The second phase focused on constructing a collaboration network among authors and identifying emerging research trends in the field.

Table 1 presents the search equation, employing a quantitative methodology through a literature review in the Scopus database. The review focused on two variables: the first being "SMEs" (Small and Medium Enterprises) and the second, "Export," covering the period from 2010 to 2023, which resulted in 237 findings.

Table 1. Search criteria

Databases used	Scopus
Study period	2010-2023
Date of consultation	March 6, 2023
Document type	Article, book, book chapter
Search fields	Title, abstract and keywords
Search equation	(TITLE ("SMEs") AND TITLE ("export")) AND PUBYEAR > 2009 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 AND PUBYEAR > 2009 AND PUBYEAR < 2024
Results	237

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Aria & Cuccurullo (2017) developed Bibliometrix as an open-source tool for performing comprehensive scientific mapping analyses of the scholarly literature. This tool, programmed in R, was designed to be highly flexible and to enable integration with various statistical packages, including those for graphical representation. Argues that in the digital and information era, where the volume of publications is ever-increasing, obtaining a comprehensive overview of research has become both challenging and valuable. For this reason, and due to its advantages—such as its analytical functionality and public availability—RStudio software, in combination with the Bibliometrix tool, has become an effective solution.

In the second phase, an analysis of the knowledge networks within the studied subject was conducted, revealing the connections between different areas of research. This phase included an analysis of co-citations, which highlights the interrelationships between various research topics (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2017; Zuschke, 2020). Similarly, such methodologies have been successfully applied in numerous studies, yielding significant results (Alzate Cárdenas et al., 2022; Duque et al., 2021; Guerrero Molina et al., 2022).

Results

In the review of records obtained from Scopus covering the period from 2010 to 2023, the main challenges faced by SMEs when embarking on their internationalization journey through export activities were identified. Initially, a general review of the data was conducted, followed by the filtering out of duplicate records or those not directly associated with the analyzed topic. In 2010, five articles and one book chapter were published.

First, D'Angelo (2010) analyzes the impact of technological resources and the influence of external researchers on the export development of high-tech SMEs in Italy. One of the main findings for these high-tech micro-enterprises is that the creation of novel products significantly enhances their export capacity, yielding better results in global markets where these innovative products are more favorably accepted.

Additionally, Pérez and Camarero (2010) examine the factors influencing the decision to export among SMEs. Their findings indicate that competitiveness is a crucial aspect when considering exportation, particularly when conditions in the domestic market are favorable. In scenarios where SMEs operate in growing local markets with limited competition, they can accumulate resources and develop essential skills that facilitate their international expansion, enabling them to engage in export activities without jeopardizing their position in the local market. A favorable domestic environment fosters the stability and incentives necessary for firms to cultivate and sharpen their competitive advantages, enabling them to navigate and conquer challenges in foreign markets. In this context, Okpara and Kabongo (2010) gathered data from 120 firms across four cities in Nigeria. Their findings highlight the key barriers hindering export activity, such as the lack of skilled labor to support export planning, reflected in the shortage of qualified personnel for decision-making and market expansion efforts. Other significant challenges include the absence of export knowledge, inadequate infrastructure, and widespread corruption.

From 2010 to 2023, the production of publications has exhibited fluctuating growth. A modest rise was observed in 2010 and 2011, with increases of 3% and 4%, respectively. Starting in 2012, the growth rate accelerated, leading to more notable increases, such as 5% in 2013 and 6% in 2015. However, from 2016 onwards, while the absolute number of publications continued to rise, the rate of percentage growth began to decline gradually, reaching 2% by 2023.

Figure 1 illustrates an overall upward trend beginning in 2010, followed by a slight dip in 2012. This decline was reversed in 2013, where an increase of 5 publications was observed, maintaining this growth through 2014. The upward trajectory resumed in 2017. One of the highest peaks occurred in 2019, with 29 publications, but a sharp decline followed in 2021, dropping to 20 publications. In 2022, the number of publications surged to 30, marking the highest output in the period. As of the review date in 2023, there are 5 publications.

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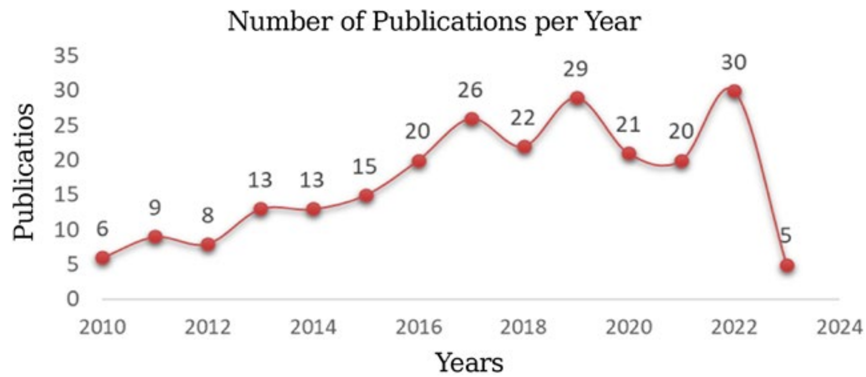
Figure 1. Yearly Growth of Specialized Publications (2010-2023)



Additionally, **Table 2** presents the top 10 journals, which help identify the most influential publications on the export activities of SMEs, based on the 2023 results Scimago Journal & Country Rank. The analysis includes quartiles, the H-index, and the 2021 SJR (Scimago Journal & Country Rank, n.d.). These metrics are essential for assessing the quality and impact of scientific publications, enabling the selection of the most relevant journals within the analyzed context.

The top position is shared by two journals: the Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development from the United Kingdom and Small Business Economics from the Netherlands. Both journals account for 2.53% of the total contributions, with a combined total of 12 entries. However, neither of these journals boasts the highest "H-Index," which serves as an indicator for measuring the impact of publications in academic journals. The H-Index considers both the quantity and quality of papers published within a specific journal. Notably, the United Kingdom leads in participation with a total of six journals, representing 12.24% of contributions, followed by the Netherlands at 2.53%, the United States at 2.11%, and Malaysia at 1.69%.

Table 2. Key Journals Analyzing SME Export Activities

Source	Number of records	%	SJR 2021	Quartile SJR	H index (SJR)	Country
Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development	6	2,53%	0,73	Q1	73	United Kingdom
Small Business Economics	6	2,53%	2,63	Q1	142	Netherlands
Developments in Marketing Science Proceedings of The Academy of Marketing Science	5	2,11%	0,00	0,000	0	No record
European Journal of International Management	5	2,11%	0,53	Q2	28	United Kingdom
International Business Review	5	2,11%	1,69	Q1	105	United Kingdom
Journal of Business Research	5	2,11%	2,32	Q1	217	United States
Review of International Business and Strategy	5	2,11%	0,45	Q2	32	United Kingdom
International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business	4	1,69%	0,29	Q3	38	United Kingdom
International Journal of Globalization and Small Business	4	1,69%	0,18	Q4	18	United Kingdom
Journal Pengurusan	4	1,69%	0,15	Q4	15	Malaysia

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Similarly, **Table 3** presents the ten most prominent authors based on the number of publications in the Scopus database. The leading author is Manon Enjolras from the University of Lorraine, France, with a total of six publications. However, she has one of the lowest H-index scores and citation counts among the authors listed.

In contrast, authors Mauricio Camargo, Mohamed Yacine Haddoud, and Paul Jones each have five publications, with Jones standing out due to his H-index of 32 and a total of 3,601 citations. Additionally, Francisco J. Acedo is notable for having a moderate H-index of 18 while accumulating a total of 2,295 citations, reflecting his significant impact and influence within the scientific community.

Additionally, the positive impact of author collaboration on publication productivity is identified, enriching current research and generating new knowledge. Similarly, **Figure 2** illustrates the collaboration among authors, as obtained through the bibliometric tool. This analysis was conducted using records from the Scopus database. Twelve collaborative groups were identified, with two primary groups highlighted. The first group consists of researchers Enjolras Manon, Camargo Mauricio, and Schmitt Christophe, all affiliated with the Université de Lorraine in France, who collectively authored a total of 15 publications.

Table 3. Leading Authors in SME Export Research

No.	Author	Number of publications	Number of citations	Index H
1	Enjolras, Manon	6	110	6
2	Camargo, Mauricio	5	1.807	24
3	Haddoud, Mohamed Yacine	5	873	15
4	Jones, Paul	5	3.601	32
5	Ayob, Abu H.	4	160	7
6	Civelek, Mehmet	4	393	11
7	Schmitt, Christophe	4	114	7
8	Acedo, Francisco J.	3	2.295	18
9	Bodlaj, Mateja	3	158	5
10	Malca, Oscar	3	34	2

Figure 2. Author Collaboration Networks

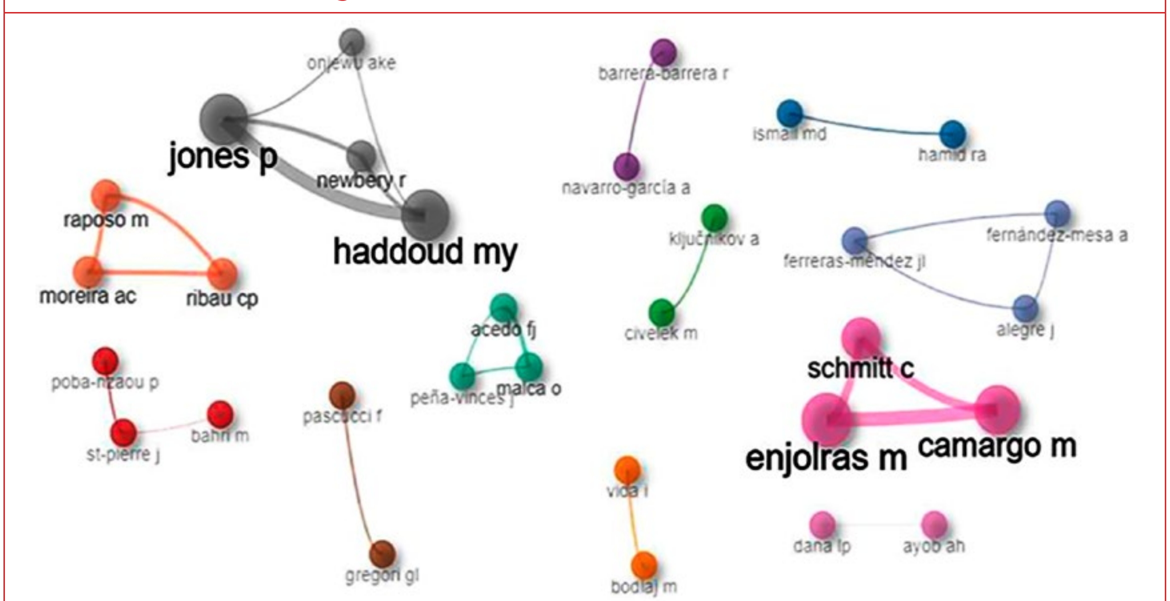

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Table 4 displays the top 10 organizations and institutions ranked by the number of publications and their respective participation rates. Leading the list is the University of Seville, with a total of 11 publications and a participation rate of 4.64%. Following closely is "Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia" and "Université de Lorraine," each with 7 publications and a participation percentage of 2.95%. Notably, the Spanish institution "Universitat de València" contributes 6 publications, while "Univerza v Ljubljani" from Slovenia has 5 publications, reflecting a participation rate of 2.11%.

It is important to highlight that 8 of the 10 leading organizations and institutions are in Europe, collectively representing a participation rate of 19.41%. Malaysia stands out as the only non-European country in the top 10, with two universities contributing to a total participation of 4.64%.

Table 5 presents the number of publications by country, with Spain leading the list as the country with the highest number of publications in Scopus. This aligns with Table 4, where the University of Seville holds the top position with a total of 11 publications.

The United Kingdom and the United States both have a total of 19 publications, contributing to a combined participation rate of 16% for the two countries. Additionally, Italy, France, South Korea, Malaysia, and Canada demonstrate moderate participation in terms of both the number of publications and their respective participation percentages. In contrast, Indonesia and Portugal rank at the bottom, each with 8 publications and a participation percentage of 3.4%.

The data indicate a heterogeneous distribution in the production of scientific publications across various countries and regions. Spain tops the list with 30 publications, followed closely by the United Kingdom and the United States, each contributing 19 publications. This level of research activity suggests a dynamic academic environment and substantial resources dedicated to research in these countries. Additionally, Italy, France, and South Korea exhibit a significant presence with 18, 16, and 15 publications, respectively, highlighting a strong investment in research and development.

Additionally, countries such as Malaysia, Canada, Indonesia, and Portugal exhibit lower participation in terms of the number of publications, with figures ranging from 8 to 14. While their contributions are more modest compared to the leading countries, they nonetheless represent a meaningful contribution to the global research landscape. This diverse pattern in the distribution of publications suggests varying levels of academic development and different approaches to global scientific research activities.

Table 4. Author Affiliation

Organization or institution	N° publications	% share	Country
University of Seville	11	4,64%	Spain
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	7	2,95%	Malaysia
University of Lorraine	7	2,95%	France
University of Valencia	6	2,53%	Spain
Univerza v Ljubljani	5	2,11%	Slovenia
Centre Européen de Recherche en Economie Financière et en Gestion des Entreprises CEREFIGE	5	2,11%	France
University of Beira Interior	4	1,69%	Portugal
Universiti Utara Malaysia	4	1,69%	Malaysia
Autonomous University of Barcelona	4	1,69%	Spain
University of Plymouth	4	1,69%	United Kingdom

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Table 5. Publications by country

Country/Region	Scopus	%
Spain	30	12,7%
United Kingdom	19	8,0%
United States	19	8,0%
Italy	18	7,6%
France	16	6,8%
South Korea	15	6,3%
Malaysia	14	5,9%
Canada	11	4,6%
Indonesia	8	3,4%
Portugal	8	3,4%

Cluster 1. International markets and innovation

This cluster provides insight into the interplay between global dynamics and the capacities of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to adapt and prosper. As these two pillars are examined, patterns and opportunities emerge that redefine how organizations confront challenges and capitalize on possibilities within an increasingly competitive and diverse landscape.

Additionally, Cluster 1 illuminates the optimal strategy for small and medium-sized enterprises that face limitations in their management capacity. It suggests that these firms can maximize their growth potential by focusing on penetrating new international markets rather than concentrating exclusively on product innovation (Wai et al., 2022). This recommendation is supported by evidence indicating that SMEs adopting a dual strategy—combining export activities with technology implementation—experience higher sales growth compared to those following a singular strategic path or lacking a defined technology strategy (Ramos et al., 2020).

The analysis reveals that the synergy between international expansion and technology adoption not only enhances financial performance but also fosters the adaptability and competitiveness of SMEs in an increasingly globalized and technologically advanced business environment. Furthermore, companies that successfully integrate these strategies are better positioned to leverage emerging opportunities in the global market and navigate challenges more effectively. In this context, the significance of proactive management is underscored, enabling SMEs to identify and capitalize on the interconnections between international expansion and technology adoption, while also overcoming the barriers associated with each strategy. This implies a holistic approach that encompasses strategic organization, efficient resource allocation, and risk management to ensure sustained growth and long-term competitive advantage.

Moreover, Rialp-Criado & Komochkova (2017) emphasize that the strategic adoption of technological advancements can broaden the global reach of these companies, enriching their competitiveness. This context highlights the importance of creating new avenues for growth and expansion in international markets. Entrepreneurial and innovative capabilities serve as both objective and subjective measures of a firm's international performance (See **Table 6**).

Table 6. Main research areas and key references

Research Areas	Key Documents	Word Cloud
International markets and innovation	Wai et al. (2022); Ramos et al. (2020); Rialp-Criado & Komochkova (2017); Abubakari et al. (2022); Ribau et al. (2019); Ferreras-Méndez et al. (2019)	

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Finally, being entrepreneurially proactive in response to external influences, along with possessing strong entrepreneurial capabilities, is associated with enhanced innovation and more successful international performance compared to companies that are more reactive.

Cluster 2. Export and globalization

This cluster analyzes various aspects related to the exporting activities of small and medium-sized enterprises within the context of globalization and the current economy. Paul et al. (2017) identifies gaps in the literature concerning studies aimed at reviewing the challenges and issues faced by SMEs when entering foreign markets in the era of globalization.

Additionally, Sandberg et al. (2019) note that globalization has intensified competition and heightened the risk of business failure for companies venturing into international markets in recent years. These dynamics present particularly significant challenges for SMEs from advanced economies seeking to expand into emerging markets (See **Table 7**).

This cluster underscores the significance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in today's economy. Like their larger counterparts, SMEs encounter both the challenges and opportunities presented by globalization, with exporting serving as one of the most common avenues for these companies to enter foreign markets during the early stages of their internationalization. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that various external factors significantly influence a company's ability to penetrate the global market through exporting. Among these factors, the geographical, political, and economic environments in which a company operates play a crucial role.

Specifically, a company's geographic location can impact both transportation costs and the trade barriers it faces while seeking international expansion. Firms situated in remote areas or regions with underdeveloped transportation infrastructures may encounter logistical challenges and higher costs compared to those located in more accessible regions.

From a more detailed perspective, Ipsmiller et al. (2021) aim to thoroughly analyze the various export channels available to SMEs. This involves examining not only traditional variables, such as transaction costs and market factors, but also the real options that emerge throughout the export channel selection process. Real options refer to the flexible opportunities that allow firms to make critical decisions over time in response to environmental changes or new opportunities. In the export context, these options may encompass the ability to switch between different distribution channels, adapt products to meet the demands of new markets, or even exit certain markets if conditions become unfavorable.

Additionally, Kalinic and Brouthers (2022) assert that the export channel a firm selects can significantly impact its export performance. While export channel choice models often emphasize transaction cost efficiencies, it is crucial to recognize that entrepreneurial

Table 7. Main research area and key references on exports and globalization

Research Areas	Key Documents	Word Cloud
Exports and globalization	Paul et al. (2017); Kalinic & Brouthers (2022); Ipsmiller et al. (2021); Di Maria & Ganau (2017); Imbriani et al. (2014); Sandberg et al. (2019); Sun (2021).	

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firms may possess value-added orientations that are not fully captured by these models.

Cluster 3. Exports and emerging economies

This cluster examines the evolution of export research and underscores the significance of foreign language proficiency for the export success of small and medium-sized enterprises. It addresses several key issues related to SME exporting, including the evolution of research, the influence of language, and the importance of banking support.

First, Leonidou et al. (2010) provide a detailed analysis of advancements in the field of exporting within international business, covering a substantial period from 1960 to 2007. Their study systematically reviews 821 academic articles related to the phenomenon of exporting, selected from a diverse array of 75 academic journals. This comprehensive approach encompasses various perspectives, methodological approaches, and areas of expertise within the field, enabling a thorough understanding of export research over time. The analysis identifies trends, focal areas, and potential gaps in knowledge that warrant further exploration.

Additionally, Ding et al. (2021) highlight a significant gap in the literature regarding the resources and capabilities required for SMEs operating in regional, rural, and remote areas. These companies often face additional challenges due to limited resources and restricted access to financial capital. Neglecting these specific areas can impede economic development and hinder the ability of these SMEs to compete in international markets.

Moreover, the achievement of goals among SMEs is closely linked to their proficiency in foreign languages. Companies with extensive export experience tend to value foreign language skills more highly than those with less experience. Furthermore, SMEs with significant export experience utilize foreign language skills more frequently in their operations compared to those with limited export experience (See **Table 8**).

Similarly, Lundberg (2019) explores how various types of banking support influence the export performance of SMEs. This research contributes to both the theory and practice of bank marketing and international marketing by clarifying the role of banks in enhancing SMEs' export performance at the enterprise level. The study confirms the significance of transaction and foreign exchange services provided by banks in facilitating overseas business operations, although it notes that this effect tends to diminish with the number of markets served.

Finally, Acar (2016) concludes that the survival of small and medium-sized enterprises is increasingly tied to their ability to capitalize on opportunities in foreign markets. Given their resource constraints, exporting emerges as one of the most viable entry strategies for these companies in accessing new markets.

Table 8. Main research area and key references on exports in emerging economies

Research Areas	Key Documents	Word Cloud
Exports in emerging economies	Leonidou et al. (2010); Acar (2016); Ding et al. (2021); Lundberg (2019).	

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Conclusions

This research conducts a literature review in Scopus, focusing on exports by small and medium-sized enterprises from 2010 to 2023. Exporting has emerged as a vital strategy for the survival and growth of these companies, enabling them to access new markets and diversify their revenue streams. However, many SMEs overlook the significance of selecting appropriate export channels, often basing their decisions solely on transaction costs. This narrow focus can lead to the neglect of the unique advantages their products may offer.

Additionally, international trade entails various complexities, such as logistics and transportation. SMEs operating in regions with poorly developed transport infrastructure may incur higher costs compared to those situated in more accessible areas. Adapting products to accommodate the cultural and linguistic traditions of foreign markets, along with the lack of trained personnel knowledgeable about international market dynamics, can impede effective decision-making. Factors such as compliance with destination country regulations, understanding payment processes, and navigating external challenges like corruption further complicate this landscape.

A lack of comprehension regarding foreign market dynamics can result in misguided decisions and ineffective strategies, thereby hindering export success. Insufficient information about consumer preferences, trade regulations, and market trends can lead to inadequately tailored products, logistical challenges, and increased costs. This highlights the necessity for SMEs to cultivate strong relationships and direct communication with their customers, who serve as crucial informants about real-time market dynamics and needs. However, unfamiliarity with international business practices and cultural barriers can obstruct effective communication and business relations with foreign clients.

Ultimately, the unfamiliarity with international markets poses a significant barrier to growth and expansion for these companies in the global marketplace. It underscores the importance of education, market research, and expert guidance to navigate these challenges and maximize export opportunities. SMEs face considerable hurdles in meeting the product standards prevalent in developed markets, which often impose strict regulations regarding quality, safety, and sustainability. These conditions necessitate ongoing efforts for SMEs to enhance their production processes, innovate, and maintain quality management by leveraging technological resources such as backend systems, e-commerce platforms, and emerging tools.

Furthermore, competition with high-quality products from developed countries can be intense, compelling SMEs to strategically focus on product differentiation. There exists a continual demand for innovation, robust brand development, and the creation of unique value propositions tailored to their customers. Despite these challenges, SMEs can capitalize on their agility, flexibility, and innovative capacities to compete successfully in global markets, tapping into the sustained demand for specialized, customized, and value-added products.

Conflict of interest

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