

# A Systematic Literature Review on Government Non- Financial Assistance towards SMEs Export Performance

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Small medium enterprises (SMEs) require government assistance to maintain their competitiveness in a demanding global market. The government assistance comes in two forms, financial assistance and non-financial assistance. Although there is a plethora of studies on government assistance for SMEs' export performance, studies relating government non-financial assistance on SMEs' export performance are still insufficient. Furthermore, a systematic review of this topic has been challenging because it does not include review procedures that are difficult for scholars to interpret and replicate. Thus, this study seeks to conduct a systematic literature review on government non-financial assistance for SMEs' export performance.

**Methods:** The process includes five methodological steps namely review protocol, formulation of research question, systematic searching strategies based on identification, screening and eligibility on two established databases Scopus and Web of Science. The quality of the extracted literature was maintained, followed by an analysis of the gathered literature.

**Results:** Five themes discovered which include (1) information assistance, (2) marketing assistance, (3) training assistance, (4) trade assistance, and (5) foreign office support.

**Conclusion:** The government's involvement in helping SMEs to enter global market is crucial. Non-financial assistance will let the SMEs having a deep understanding of foreign markets and help them effectively navigate the complexity of international marketplaces. The five themes collectively offer a complete framework for comprehending the many forms of knowledge required for achieving successful entry into overseas markets and sustaining the firms' export performance. The study recommends that SMEs should participate in government non-financial export promotion programs, such as trade shows and missions, to improve their export performance and overcome challenges.

**Keywords:** Government support, Export performance, Small medium enterprises.

## INTRODUCTION

The growth of developing and developed economies is substantially influenced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The primary concern of any government is economic development, as it is a critical area (Zulu-Chisanga et al. 2021). However, enterprises, particularly those classified as SMEs, encounter an abundance of challenges that require solutions. Divergences in the host country's culture, legislation, social context, and economic patterns present numerous challenges that may result in the failure of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2023). Therefore, to overcome resource and

capability constraints and facilitate their entry into the global market, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) must receive government assistance. The government has channelled various support to enhance the exporters performance yet the outcome is still inconclusive (Njinyah, 2018; Comi & Resmini, 2020; Mota et al., 2021). Drawing on Institutional Theory, this study explores how the government supports, influences and shapes the behavior of SMEs in enhancing export performance.

The existing literature fails to offer sufficient information to determine the role of government in improving the performance of SMEs, even though the significance of government assistance is acknowledged in the literature. These few articles discussed the function of government (Ahmed & Brennan, 2019; Charoensukmongkol, 2020; Cin & Choe, 2022; Comi & Resmini, 2020; Coudounaris, 2018; Hussen, 2022; Sharma et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017), with some negative (Falahat et al., 2020; Moreira et al., 2022; Njinyah, 2018; Traiyarach & Banjongprasert, 2022; van den Berg, 2022; Zulu-Chisanga et al., 2021) and others reporting mix effect (Haddoud et al., 2017; Han & Park, 2019; Joo & Suh, 2017; Malca et al., 2020; Mostafiz et al., 2020; Mata et al., 2021; Mota et al., 2021; Quaye et al., 2017). Furthermore, the current literature on small business strategies lacks a comprehensive framework on how government support affects performance. The question of how governments can channel their support to SMEs to perform remains unanswered.

It is crucial to acknowledge that there has been a lack of a comprehensive review of studies on the impact of government non-financial assistance on the export performance of SMEs. Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is a rigorous methodology that entails the comprehensive identification and analysis of pertinent literature. It also underscores the importance of employing structured, transparent, and replicable methods at each stage of the process (Higgins et al., 2011). The proposed SLR is founded on an integrative review analysis that integrates quantitative and mixed methods. Despite the abundant research on government support, there is a lack of systematic evaluation, pattern identification, and development of themes in this area. It is important to note that review processes such as screening, identification, and eligibility of literature are not addressed sufficiently. Identifying this gap provides grounds for this study to focus on government non-financial assistance in enhancing SMEs' export performance.

The organisation of this study is as follows. The subsequent section delineates the methodology, which encompasses the review process, creation of research questions, systematic search strategies, quality appraisal, and extraction and analysis of data. Subsequently, a comprehensive analysis of the outcomes will be provided, encompassing the context of the chosen studies and the emerging themes. Finally, the discussion and conclusion are provided.

## METHODOLOGY

### Review protocol

Initially, the SLR approach was employed to construct a review protocol that delineated the objective of the question under review and the proposed procedures. It also mitigates biases and provides an explanation of the positioning, evaluation, and production of a variety of studies. Haddaway et al. (2018) introduced ROSES, which the researchers ultimately elected to employ. The SLR is established in accordance with the ROSES guidelines by formulating research questions and conducting a document or article search that is structured into three phases. The quality appraisal was conducted in accordance with the guidelines established by (Abouzahra et al., 2020). Ultimately, the manuscripts that were chosen were subjected to data extraction and analysis.

### Research question formulation

The research questions were developed using two sources. The initial study was predicated on the findings of Mata et al. (2021), Mota et al. (2021), Njinyah (2018), and Wang et al. (2017). The focus of all of these studies was on the manner in which government support improves the export performance of SMEs. Additionally, the

acronym PICO was implemented: 'P' denotes Population or Problem, 'I' designates Interest, and 'Co' denotes Context (Lockwood et al., 2015). The study contained three aspects based on the concepts: SMEs (population), government non-financial assistance (interest), and enhancing export performance (context). Thus, this enables researchers to formulate this study's research question: "How does government non -financial assistance enhance the SME's export performance?".

## Systematic Search Strategies

Based on Shaffril et al. (2018), the retrieval of pertinent articles was conducted through three systematic procedures: identification, screening, and eligibility evaluation. This process allows researchers to locate and synthesize studies that have comprehensively conducted well-arranged SLR.

### Identification

From the research question, three primary keywords were identified: government support, export performance, and SMEs. The researchers consulted previous studies' keywords and solicited the opinions of experts to enhance the primary keywords. Therefore, a variety of keywords, such as government support, institutional support, and export promotion programs, were examined. The search function truncation and Boolean operators were employed to analyse the keywords in two specific databases: Scopus and Web of Science (Table 1). 91 articles were identified as a result of this search.

Table 1: Search Keywords Used In the Chosen Databases

Database	String
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY(("government support" OR "institutional support" OR "export promotion program") AND "export performance")
Web of Science	ALL=(("government support" OR "institutional support" OR "export promotion program") AND "export performance")

### Screening

The second procedure, screening included or excluded articles, is guided by certain criteria (Table 2). According to Kraus et al. (2020), the screening procedure involved evaluating publications from 2017 to 2023 based on 'research field maturity'. The selected timeline accounts for enough valuable publications for representative review. Only articles written in English were chosen to avoid any confusion. In total, A total of 43 manuscripts were rejected for meeting the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Therefore, a total of 48 papers were reviewed in the following stage.

Table 2: Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Timeline	2017-2023	2016 and earlier
Document Type	Article	Chapter in a book, book, conference proceeding, etc
Language	English	Non-English

### Eligibility

The authors manually reviewed the title, abstract, and entire paper to determine whether they met the inclusion

and exclusion criteria to identify the most relevant articles. Twenty-four articles were excluded due to their lack of emphasis on government assistance for small and medium-sized enterprises. The titles of the remaining fifteen articles were screened, and seven additional articles were excluded due to their abstracts. The ultimate number of articles included was 24 after two additional articles were excluded due to their content (Figure 1).

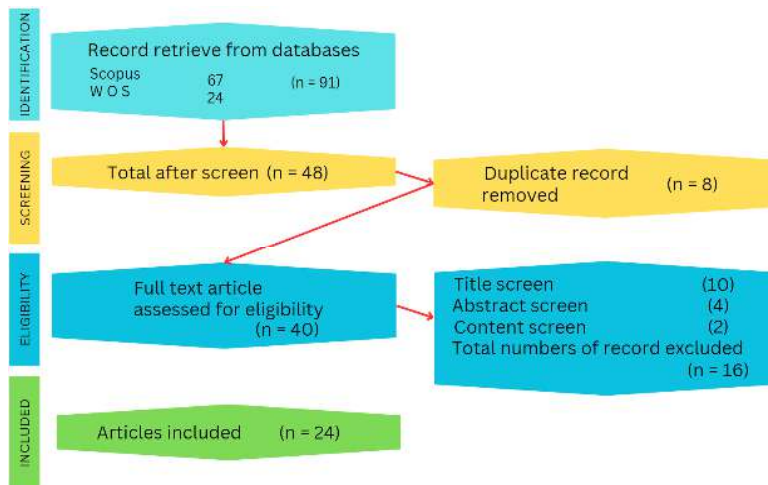


Figure 1: Flow Diagram of the Searching Process

## Quality appraisal

The next process is the assessment of article quality where this study uses (Abouzahra et al., 2020). There are 6 criteria that are assessed (Table 3). The assessment process has been conducted by a pair of researchers. The investigators have thoroughly examined and verified the selected publications to determine if they fulfil the criteria established by (Abouzahra et al., 2020). The researchers have selected the marking criteria of Yes (1 mark), Partly (0.5 marks), and No (0 marks) for this method. In order for an article to be included in this systematic literature review, it must achieve a minimum score of 3.0. Upon completion of the process, the researcher determined that a grand total of 24 articles met the criteria for quality and were deemed suitable for review in this systematic literature review.

Table 3: Standards applied to evaluate the degree of rigor in the analysis and methodology of the articles selected.

Item	Question
QA1:	Is the purpose of the study clearly stated?
QA2:	Is the interest and the usefulness of the work clearly presented?
QA3:	Is the methodology clearly established?
QA4:	Are the concepts of the approach clearly defined?
QA5:	Is the work compared and measured with similar other work?
QA6:	Are the limitations of the work clearly mentioned?

## Extraction and analysis of data

Thematic analysis was conducted on the papers included in this study to identify patterns in previous research by examining the available data for similarities or connections (Braun & Clarke, 2019). According to Kiger & Varpio (2020), the researchers thoroughly and regularly examined the complete dataset to gain expertise in it.

This process created the foundation for all subsequent steps and gave researchers valuable guidance on the raw data. In the subsequent phase, the initial codes were generated. The data was organized in a precise and detailed manner by the researchers. At this juncture, the researchers conducted a comprehensive examination of all selected publications and extracted substantial data regarding the primary study topics. The themes were developed in the final step. The researchers utilized deductive coding frameworks to identify patterns, commonalities, and relationships among the retrieved data. The derived themes were intricately connected to the original data and effectively represented the entire dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Five themes were developed at this stage.

## RESULT

### Background of the selected studies

Of the 24 selected articles, three focused on Korea (Cin & Choe, 2022; Han & Park, 2019; Joo & Suh, 2017), Bangladesh (Ahmed & Brennan, 2019; Faroque et al., 2022; Mostafiz et al., 2020), two on China (Joo & Suh, 2017; Wang et al., 2017), Ghana (Quaye et al., 2017; Sharma et al., 2018), and Malaysia (Falahat et al., 2020; Mata et al., 2021). However, few studies have focused on Indonesia (Heriqbaldi et al., 2023), Mozambique (Moreira et al., 2022), Cameroon (Njinyah, 2018), Peru (Malca et al., 2020), Italy (Comi & Resmini, 2020), Thailand (Traiyarach & Banjongprasert, 2022), Zambia (Zulu-Chisanga et al., 2021), Portugal (Mota et al., 2021), Turkey (Hussen, 2022), the Netherlands (van den Berg, 2022), or the United Kingdom (Haddoud et al., 2017), whereas Coudounaris (2018) has not stated any (see Figure 2).

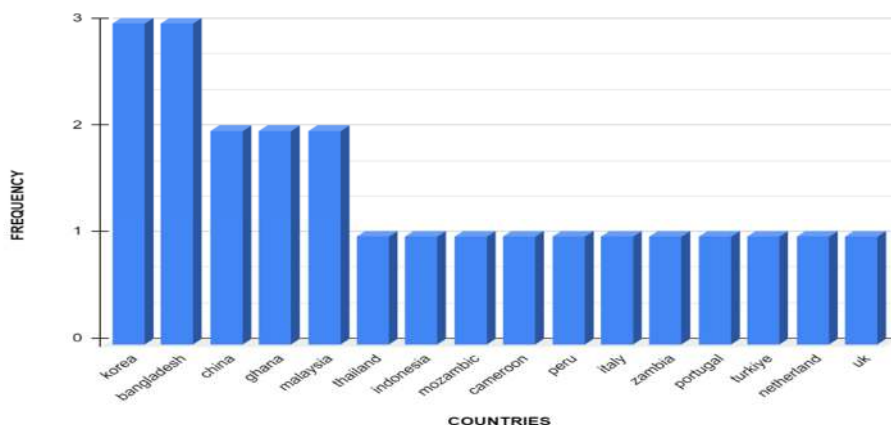


Figure2: Countries Where the Selected Studies Were Conducted.

Twenty-three studies were focused on quantitative analyses (Ahmed & Brennan, 2019; Charoensukmongkol, 2020; Cin & Choe, 2022; Comi & Resmini, 2020; Coudounaris, 2018; Falahat et al., 2020; Faroque et al., 2022; Haddoud et al., 2017; Han & Park, 2019; Heriqbaldi et al., 2023; Hussen, 2022; Joo & Suh, 2017; Malca et al., 2020; Mata et al., 2021; Moreira et al., 2022; Mostafiz et al., 2020; Mota et al., 2021; Njinyah, 2018; Quaye et al., 2017; Traiyarach & Banjongprasert, 2022; van den Berg, 2022; Wang et al., 2017; Zulu-Chisanga et al., 2021), while one study utilized a mixed-method approach (Sharma et al., 2018) (see Figure 3).

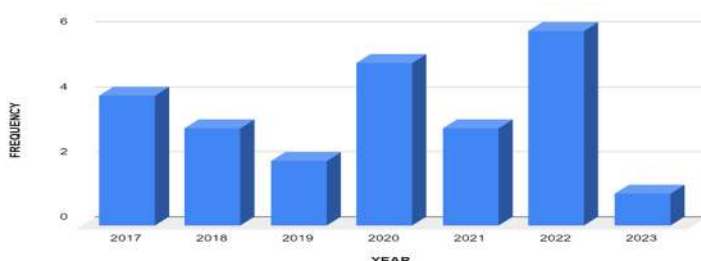


Figure 3: Research Design of Selected Studies.



Concerning the publication year, a total of four papers have been published in 2017 (Haddoud et al., 2017; Joo & Suh, 2017; Quaye et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2017), three studies were published in 2018 (Coudounaris, 2018; Njinyah, 2018; Sharma et al., 2018), two in 2019 (Ahmed & Brennan, 2019; Han & Park, 2019), five in 2020 (Charoensukmongkol, 2020; Cin & Choe, 2022; Falahat et al., 2020; Malca et al., 2020; Mostafiz et al., 2020), three in 2021 (Mata et al., 2021; Mota et al., 2021; Zulu-Chisanga et al., 2021), six in 2022 (Cin & Choe, 2022; Faroque et al., 2022; Hussen, 2022; Moreira et al., 2022; Traiyarach & Banjongprasert, 2022; van den Berg, 2022) and one in 2023 (Heriqbaldi et al., 2023) (see Figure 4).

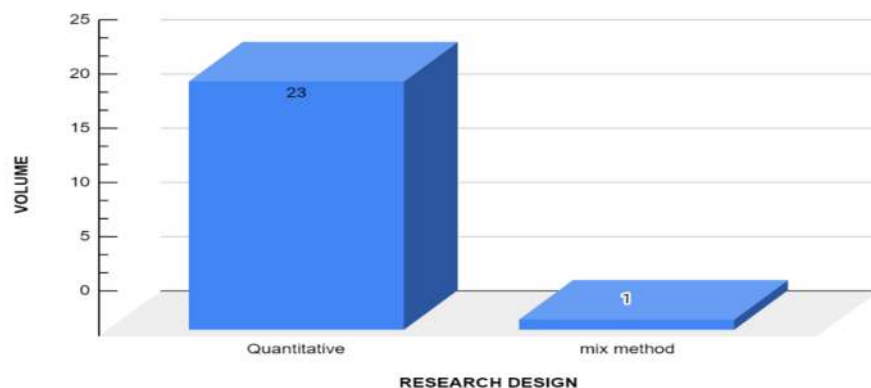


Figure 4: Publication Years of Selected Studies.

## The themes

After undertaking thematic analysis of 24 articles, five themes were identified: (1) information assistance, (2) marketing assistance, (3) training assistance, (4) trade assistance, and (5) foreign office support. ‘How will government non-financial assistance enhance SME's export performance?’ this SLR was answered by five themes based on the results.

Seventeen authors have focused on information support (Ahmed & Brennan, 2019; Cin & Choe, 2022; Comi & Resmini, 2020; Coudounaris, 2018; Falahat et al., 2020; Haddoud et al., 2017; Han & Park, 2019; Heriqbaldi et al., 2023; Joo & Suh, 2017; Malca et al., 2020; Moreira et al., 2022; Mota et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2018; Traiyarach & Banjongprasert, 2022; van den Berg, 2022; Wang et al., 2017; Zulu-Chisanga et al., 2021). Meanwhile, eight authors focus on marketing assistance (Ahmed & Brennan, 2019; Coudounaris, 2018; Faroque et al., 2022; Han & Park, 2019; Mata et al., 2021; Mota et al., 2021; Njinyah, 2018; Traiyarach & Banjongprasert, 2022). Nine scholars focused on training assistance (Ahmed & Brennan, 2019; Comi & Resmini, 2020; Coudounaris, 2018; Han & Park, 2019; Heriqbaldi et al., 2023; Joo & Suh, 2017; Malca et al., 2020; Mota et al., 2021; Traiyarach & Banjongprasert, 2022), thirteen focused on trade assistance (Comi & Resmini, 2020; Coudounaris, 2018; Falahat et al., 2020; Haddoud et al., 2017; Han & Park, 2019; Heriqbaldi et al., 2023; Hussen, 2022; Malca et al., 2020; Mostafiz et al., 2020; Mota et al., 2021; Quaye et al., 2017; Sharma et al., 2018; Traiyarach & Banjongprasert, 2022) and one on foreign office support (Quaye et al., 2017) (see Table 4).

Table 4: Developed Themes Based On the Author

Authors	Publication Year	Information	Marketing	Traning	Trade	Foreign Office
Wang X.; Chen A.; Wang H.; Li S.	2017	•				
Quaye D.M.; Sekyere K.N.; Acheampong G.	2017				•	•

Haddoud M.Y.; Jones P.; Newbery R.	2017	•			•	
Hye Young Joo and Hyunsuk Suh	2017	•		•		
Njinyah S.Z.	2018		•			
Coudounaris D.N.	2018	•	•	•	•	
Sharma R.R.; Sraha G.; Crick D.	2018	•			•	
Han J.H.; Park H.-Y.	2019	•	•	•	•	
Farhad Uddin Ahmed and Louis Brennan	2019	•	•			
Malca O.; Peña-Vinces J.; Acedo F.J.	2020	•		•	•	
Charoensukmongkol P.	2020					
Comi S.; Resmini L.	2020	•		•	•	
Md Imtiaz Mostafiz and Murali Sambasivan and See Kwong Goh	2020				•	
Mohammad Falahat and Yan Yin Lee and T. Ramayah and Pedro Soto-Acosta	2020	•		•	•	
Zulu-Chisanga, S; Chabala, M; Mandawa-Bray, B	2021	•				
Mata M.N.; Falahat M.; Correia A.B.; Rita J.X.	2021		•			
Mota J.; Moreira A.; Alves A.	2021	•	•	•	•	
Cin, BC; Choe, KH	2022	•				
Hussen, MS	2022				•	
Traiyarach S.; Banjongprasert J.	2022	•	•	•	•	
Faroque A.R.; Sultana H.; Ahmed J.U.; Ahmed F.U.; Rahman M.	2022		•			
van den Berg M.	2022	•				

Moreira A.; Navaia E.; Ribau C.	2022	•				
Heriqbaldi U.; Esquivias M.A.; Samudro B.R.; Widodo W.	2023	•		•	•	

## DISCUSSION

This study ranked information assistance as the most beneficial support provided by the government. Thirteen out of seventeen studies found information assistance has a significant effect on export performance. Providing information assistance on trade statistics and databases can help SMEs to identify potential markets and opportunities (Haddoud et al., 2017; Joo & Suh, 2017; Wang et al., 2017). The government can provide SMEs with details of market research and analysis through marketing support. This information will help them better understand foreign markets (Han & Park, 2019; Mata et al., 2021). In addition, providing the trend of the latest market needs will enable SMEs to market products that fulfil customer needs and wants. Offering training support, such as export training programs and mentorship, will equip SMEs with the necessary knowledge and provide valuable guidance on succeeding in foreign markets (Haddoud et al., 2017). Expert assistance is essential for enhancing the performance of this medium-sized firm. Mentors, who are typically experienced exporters or industry experts, offer SMEs customized advice that is geared to their individual issues, products, and target markets. This helps SMEs navigate complex export processes, avoid common pitfalls, and make informed decisions. Government trade support can occur in two forms: trade missions and business matchmaking. Organizing trade missions is a first-hand experience for SMEs to explore opportunities and connections (Haddoud et al. 2017). Sharma et al. (2018) believe that most potential buyers will know where to look for supply if a trade show is well organized. On the other hand, Quaye et al. (2017) found that trade shows are unrelated to export performance. Meanwhile, providing introductions and matchmaking with overseas consumers, distributors, and partners enables SMEs to build valuable relationships. Quaye et al. (2017) revealed that foreign office support has a strong relationship with Ghana SME's export performance due to the involvement of embassies in establishing contacts for export firms in Ghana.

## CONCLUSION

The provision of government assistance is crucial in enhancing a nation's export performance. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of prior research on the impact of government non-financial aid on improving the export performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A total of 24 papers were evaluated for their quality using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. Furthermore, a thematic analysis was performed on the 24 chosen papers due to the inherent variability in research designs. This analysis yielded five primary themes: (1) information assistance, (2) marketing assistance, (3) training assistance, (4) trade assistance, and (5) foreign office support. By providing non-monetary assistance, the government can establish a conducive atmosphere that enables small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to strengthen their competitiveness in the international market and improve their export performance.

The study suggests that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) should prioritise and enhance their participation in government non-financial export promotion programs, including trade shows, trade missions, and trade fairs, in order to enhance their export performance. The paper in particular, recommends that the government introduce non-financial assistance that is tailored to the specific needs of the various SME exporters in order to assist them in overcoming their export challenges. Several future research directions can be explored from this paper. First, as we only focus on non-financial assistance, it would be worthwhile to examine financial assistance as well. In addition, future research could identify the different outcomes of financial assistance and non-financial assistance. Finally, future research can use the outcomes of the current meta analysis of literature which is not included in this study. Future research could examine the government financial assistance particularly on its impact toward export performance.



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