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Export Barriers for Medium Sized Textile Manufacturing Enterprises in Small Island Developing States (SIDS): Evidence from Mauritius

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Abstract

International challenges constrain the international growth of many businesses, irrespective of their sizes. As exports represent a viable strategic option for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to internationalise, it is imperative to identify the export barriers that hinder these businesses' international growth potential. In this study, we explore the export barriers that affect the internationalisation of Mauritian medium-sized textile manufacturing firms. To achieve the objective of the study, a sequential mixed method was employed.

The findings of the study identified three pressing barriers impeding the internationalisation process of these businesses, namely environmental barriers, managerial competency barriers and foreign market barriers. These results have implications for policymakers and medium-sized business owners in initiating and consolidating the internationalisation presence of SMEs.

Keywords: *Internationalisation; export barriers; medium-sized enterprise; SME; Small Island Developing States; Mauritius, textile manufacturing businesses*

1. Introduction

Globalisation, fuelled by the steady growth of low-cost technology and the reduction in trade barriers, brings about opportunities and challenges to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across the globe. To cope with the challenges of internationalisation, SMEs from both developed and developing countries have effectively exploited the benefits of trade liberalisation by expanding their activities across borders (Revindo, Gan & Massie, 2019:264). Extant literature presents exportation as the most common mode of entry for SMEs, since it requires low resource commitment and is highly flexible (Ramdani, Belaid & Goutte, 2023:1). However, firms in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), such as Mauritius, face several barriers and challenges when they make strategic decisions to export either their business operations or products (Lobo, Fernandes & Ferreira, 2020:620). Export barriers, as one of the challenges in SMEs' internationalisation, have received a myriad of attention from policymakers, practitioners, and academics around the world since the 1970s (Kahiya, 2013:5). Export barriers affect internationalisation in four ways, namely they (i) dissuade non-exporters from exporting; (ii) discourage exporting firms from increasing their involvement in international markets; (iii) induce de-internationalisation, and (iv) discourage ex-exporters from reconsidering to internationalise (Kahiya, 2013:2). Therefore, the effective management of internationalisation processes is important to enhance the probability for successful growth, sustainability and to create a competitive advantage (Metsola, Leppäaho & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2020:8).

As a SIDS, Mauritius has been experiencing intense competitive pressures in its textile manufacturing industry since 2005 following the phasing out of the MultiFibre Agreement (MFA), an influx of low-cost foreign manufacturers, increased domestic labour costs, a shortage of domestic labour and the high energy and transportation costs (Mauritius

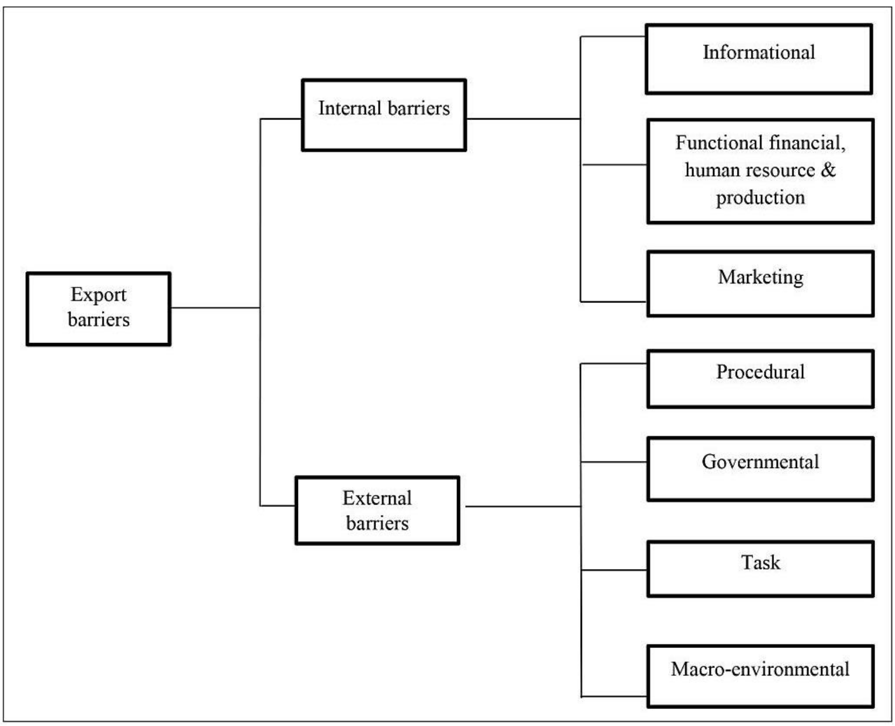
Export Association, MEXA, 2017:38). These challenges have influenced the international competitiveness of the Mauritian textile industry negatively, with a decline in exports of 8.7% from 2016 to 2017 (MEXA, 2017:38). However, since 2017, exportation to major foreign markets (the United Kingdom, Italy, France, the United States of America (USA)) increased steadily at an average annual rate of 10.1%, until the onslaught of the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The global pandemic had a memorable negative impact on Mauritian international trade with a 40.2% decline in exports in 2020 in comparison to 2019 (Statistics Mauritius, 2020). According to Pessu and Agboma, (2019:479), medium-sized textile-manufacturing firms are more affected by the liberalised trading environment, due to their specific organisational resource constraints. As Mauritius relies heavily on the SME sector for its socio-economic development, the Government has invested massively in promoting the growth and internationalisation of these firms. Being one of the main pillars of the Mauritian economy, the survival and growth of the textile industry are significant for the country's economic prosperity. Nevertheless, it is observed that medium-sized textile manufacturing firms are confronted with export barriers that dissuade their involvement in international markets. It is, therefore, imperative that the export barriers hindering the foreign operations of these firms be uncovered to facilitate existing exporters in intensifying their involvement in international markets as well as in inducing non-exporters to consider international markets for future growth.

A review of extant literature revealed that (i) there is a lack of research on export barriers faced by SMEs in SIDS; in particular, businesses operating in the textile manufacturing sector, (ii) most of the studies investigating the nature of the exports barriers faced by internationalised SMEs have been conducted in Western developed countries, and (iii) the African continent is disproportionately represented in this research domain. Moreover, Kahiya (2013:5) notes that research on export barriers is characterised by an underrepresentation in emerging economies. Therefore, the problem investigated in this research entails the identification of export barriers for medium-sized textile manufacturing firms in Mauritius, since it is not clear which specific export barriers are experienced by these businesses. Moreover, this study corresponds to the call made by Zahoor, Al-Tabbaa, Khan and Wood (2020:22) to intensify internationalisation research in developing economies, in particular those in Africa. The findings of the study will help managers of these businesses to increase the firm's export performance by developing export strategies, which are built on a thorough understanding of the export barriers and challenges. Moreover, the success of these businesses will contribute to the island's socioeconomic development by increasing the gross domestic product (GDP) and creating supplementary employment (Özbuğday, Fındık, Özcan & Başçı, 2020:2).

2. Export Barriers

Export barriers typically include attitudinal, structural, operational, and other restrictions that affect firms' capabilities to expand their operations across borders (Narayanan, 2015:111). Leonidou (2004:281) classifies SMEs' export barriers as internal and external export barriers (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Export barriers



Source: Adapted from Leonidou (2004:283)

2.1 Internal export barriers

Internal export barriers are intrinsic to the firm and typically relate to inadequate organisational resources and are grouped into informational-, financial-, human resources- and marketing barriers (Gebrewahid & Wald, 2017:400).

2.1.1 Informational barriers

A lack of information pertaining to all aspects relevant to export initiatives would normally influence SMEs' willingness to either initiate or expand on their internationalisation (Osano, 2020:4). Since access to information is the most difficult asset to acquire for resource-constrained SMEs in developing countries (Dorozynski & Kuna-Marszalek, 2017:313), this is an important barrier that needs to be realised by Mauritian-based medium-sized textile manufacturing businesses.

2.1.2 Financial Barriers

Export-oriented firms require a sound financial basis to remain competitive in international markets (Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2015:13) and to cover diverse internationalisation costs such as costs of market research, transport, insurance, currency volatility, and the risk of payment default by foreign business partners (Leonidou, 2004). Mansilla-Fernandez and Milgram-Baliex (2022: 1804) consider the shortage of working capital to finance exports as one of the major barriers impacting firms' decisions to internationalise. Financial constraints are more daunting for the internationalisation of SMEs in emerging countries (Rahman, Akter & Radicic, 2019:5).

2.1.3. Human resource barriers

Human resources directly influence SMEs' internationalisation efforts (Saeed & Ziaulhaq, 2018:3). Indeed, firms require competent personnel to identify international market opportunities, establish and maintain international networks, coordinate international activities and administrate export paperwork and logistics (Mendy & Rahman, 2018:367). The notable human resources barriers identified by SMEs in developing countries include low export commitment, limited export knowledge, fear of exporting (Julian & Ahmed, 2005) and a lack of experienced managers and personnel (Chandra, Paul & Chavan, 2021:316).

2.1.4. Marketing barriers

Marketing barriers relate to firms' products, pricing, distribution, logistics, and promotional activities across borders (Muhos, Saarela, Virkkala, Majava & Helander, 2023:207). Pricing decisions, such as offering an appropriate price, matching the price of competitors, and granting credit to foreign buyers, influence SMEs' export decisions (Lasserre, 2017:149). Moreover, SMEs often find it difficult to access export distribution channels, obtain reliable foreign representation, maintain control over foreign intermediaries and supply inventory in foreign markets (Alon, Chen & Mandolfo, 2018:2). Moreover, budgetary limitations and scarce resources make it difficult for SMEs to adjust export promotional activities (Muhos *et al.*, 2023:207).

2.2 External export barriers

2.2.1 Procedural barriers

Firms aiming to internationalise experience procedural barriers when they are confronted with unfamiliar exporting procedures/paperwork, communication barriers and slow collection of payments from foreign markets (Franz, Canare & Labios, 2018:251). These barriers increase international transaction costs and impact negatively on the SMEs' intention to internationalise (Revindo *et al.*, 2019). Over the years, the Mauritian government initiated various schemes and signed international agreements to decrease the procedural barriers among member states of the South African Development Community (SADC) as well as the African Union (AU).

2.2.2 Government barriers

These barriers include the lack of government assistance/incentives, as well as unfavourable government-imposed rules and regulations (Rahman *et al.*, 2019:5). According to Alkahtani, Nordin and Khan (2020:1), government support significantly contributed to the internationalisation of SMEs in countries such as Brazil, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Russia and the United Kingdom. Realising the increasing importance of medium-sized textile manufacturing firms to the island's economic development, the Mauritian government has contributed extensively to the internationalisation efforts of Mauritian-based medium-sized textile manufacturing firms through various incentive schemes and budgetary measures such as financial support, grant schemes, and network support.

2.2.3 Tasks barriers

Task barriers relate to the barriers in the foreign markets resulting from the difference in the habits and attitudes, competition and difficulty to accept the product offerings (Gulati*,* Mayo & Nohria, 2013:54). Changes in variables such as the topography, climatic conditions, foreign economies, as well as the preferences and habits of foreign customers ultimately increase SMEs' internationalisation expenses (Narayanan, 2015:115). According to Ali, Hao and Aijuan (2020:964), task barriers can be reduced by adapting products or promotional messages to suit a global market, as well as initiating strategic alliances with other firms operating in foreign markets, to assist in decreasing distribution and logistical costs.

2.2.4 Macro-environmental barriers

Macro-environmental export barriers occur due to rapid changes in the economic, political-legal and sociocultural environments of the markets whereto firms are exporting, or to which they are planning to export (Muhos *et al*, 2023:208). According to Mendy, Rahman and Bal (2020:201), unfavourable economic conditions affect consumers' spending patterns and frequency. On the other hand, political instability in foreign markets and trade restrictions increase business risks which, in turn, reduce the level of export confidence of SMEs, in particular from developing countries, to initiate or even continue their exportation (Chandra *et al.*, 2020:1292). Exporters experience sociocultural barriers when they face challenges related to unfamiliar foreign business practices and differences in sociocultural traits, and verbal and nonverbal language (Muhos *et al.,* 2023:207).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research paradigm

Mixed-method researchers usually take on the philosophical position of pragmatism, which is the ontological orientation for this study (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:181). Valuing both quantitative and qualitative research strategies, this method allows researchers to use the information of one method to support the other method used. This specific research made use of an exploratory sequential approach (QUAL/quan) in which the qualitative approach was used as the main approach to investigate the internationalisation phenomenon of medium-sized textile manufacturers. This data was then used to develop the measuring instrument to gather data quantitatively.

3.3 Population and sample

Participants were not chosen by chance (Ary *et al.*, 2019:172), but were included by giving preference to their location, status, position, and agreement, and therefore non-probability purposive sampling was used in the qualitative study. The researchers collected data up to saturation; that is, a point where they felt that asking any further questions would not reveal new themes (Bell *et al.*, 2019:393). In this study, qualitative data was collected from 10 medium-sized textile manufacturers. The saturation point was reached after the sixth interview, but the researchers decided to conduct four more interviews to validate the point of diminishing returns. In the quantitative study, a census approach, including all the medium-sized textile manufacturers in Mauritius, was used to collect the data for this research.

3.3 Data collection

For the purpose of this research, an exploratory research design and a descriptive research design were used for data collection. With the exploratory research design, qualitative interviews were conducted to collect information on export barriers. Descriptive research was also employed by using a questionnaire to validate and extend the findings of the qualitative data (Bukve, 2019:205). For the means of the qualitative data collection, all the sampled participants were informed before the interviews about the aim of the research, the various themes that would be discussed as well as and how the collected data will be used, disseminated, and stored. The point was emphasised that participation in the interviews was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the interviews at any stage during the process. Consent to make use of the collected data was also gained, and the participants were guaranteed that all information will be handled in a confidential and anonymous manner (Bell *et al.,* 2019:115). The quantitative data was collected by contacting all 56 internationalised medium-sized textile manufacturing firms. After obtaining respondents' consent to participate in the survey, appointments were made with them to complete the questionnaire on their premises or by means of an email.

3.4 Qualitative data analysis

The data analysis process, as presented by Sekaran and Bougie (2016:333), which was based on the approach by Morse and Field (1996), was used in this research. All interviews were transcribed and compared to the original recordings to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed data. Thereafter, the coding of each transcript was done by using the line-by-line analysis approach recommended by Morse and Field (1996:104). The software program ATLAS.ti 8 was used to code the data and to categorise the relevant themes.

According to Maree (2016:123), the validity and reliability of data collected by means of interviews rely on the trustworthiness of the data, the method as a whole and its implementation. To improve trustworthiness, we scrupulously focused on the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the data, as proposed by Bell *et al.* (2019:363). Strategies used to enhance trustworthiness included member checking, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, direct quotations, audio recordings, transcriptions of interviews and reflexivity. The interview transcripts were given back to the participants, which gave them the chance to reshape their narratives by overlooking certain aspects, which they may feel were not a true reflection of their experience. Concerning prolonged engagement, we conducted this research as part of a larger research project, which spanned more than three years. This prolonged engagement in the research project enabled the researchers to make knowledgeable decisions based on the literature investigated as well as the exposure to the context of this research. Peer debriefing was done by submitting all the findings and interview transcripts for validation to some knowledgeable qualitative researchers.

Reflexivity was improved when any bias in conducting the interviews was overcome by keeping a neutral stance without introducing personal insights and/or understandings during the process of data collection.

3.5 Quantitative data analysis

Due to the mixed-method approach used, quantitative data was collected in support of the qualitative data. The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) program, version 25 was used to analyse the data. Firstly, the psychometric properties were determined, where the reliability of the measuring scales was measured by means of Cronbach's alpha values. An exploratory factor analysis was also done to contribute to the validity of the instrument. Descriptive statistics were completed for each of the items linking to the export barriers experienced by Mauritian medium-sized textile manufacturers.

4. Results and Discussion

In this section, the empirical results of the research are presented to address the formulated research objectives. The discussion is divided into two separate sections, which address the qualitative and quantitative results.

4.1 Qualitative results (exports barriers)

Participants mentioned several barriers in the interviews that they experienced in exporting their products to foreign markets. The researchers decided to classify these mentioned barriers into two categories, which were also found in the literature. Table 1 indicates the classification of the internal and external barriers according to the participants.

Table 1: Internal and external barriers

Internal barriers	External barriers
Knowledge barriers	Legal/compliance barriers
Logistical barriers	Trade barriers (duties)
	Procedural barriers

Source: Researchers own compilation

In this regard, the participants revealed that certification and the long procedures to obtain these certifications and the lack of trading agreements were the most significant barriers they experience, which affect their firm's export performance. One participant remarked that

> .... if you do not comply you run the risk that the products do not get access to the foreign markets.

They also added that rules and regulations in the foreign markets and a lack of knowledge thereof can be a constraint. Nevertheless, most of the participants claimed that they have been able to overcome these barriers by adhering to certification prerequisites; one participant replies that "*.... certification allows us to have easy access in foreign countries*", which resulted in them growing considerably over the years. These findings corroborate the work of Franz *et al.* (2018) and Osano (2020), who identified procedural barriers, informational barriers and government barriers respectively as the main impediments to the internationalisation of SMEs.

In addition to the above-mentioned barriers faced by the participants, other concerns raised, which also affect their internationalisation, include price barriers, relationships with suppliers, the sources of raw materials and credit terms. One participant mentioned that "*.... financially it is impossible for a small business to have a production facility in another country*". These findings are consistent with the work of Rahman *et al.* (2019), who postulate that financial constraints limit the internationalisation scope of SMEs in emerging countries. Most of these concerns, however, pertain to the upstream part of the supply chain rather than the downstream part. Since this study focuses primarily on the downstream part of the supply chain, future studies can investigate issues underlying the upstream dimension of the supply chain.

It is concluded that the medium-sized textile manufacturing firms in Mauritius use exportation as the preferred mode of entry into foreign markets (Ramdani *et al.,* 2023:1). Due to financial constraints and the lack of knowledge during the initial stages of internationalisation, a gradual involvement in foreign markets is concluded as being the most suitable approach to engage internationally. To limit the influence of the lack of knowledge, important export-related information can be obtained from agents, foreign customers, and the Ministry of Trade. Supported by the Uppsala model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), agents are especially seen as having an important role in facilitating the export process in terms of sending the products to foreign markets and establishing relationships between manufacturers and buyers. Furthermore, the operational process followed to secure international transactions entails the receiving of orders, manufacturing the products and then exporting the products.

4.2 Quantitative results

Within the exploratory sequential mixed-method approach that was adopted in this research, this section builds on the quantitative data gathered. The following sections highlight the reliability and validity (psychometric properties) of the measuring instrument.

4.2.1 Psychometric properties of the measuring instrument

The psychometric properties of the measuring instrument were examined by addressing its validity and reliability.

4.2.1.1 Validity of the research instrument

To determine the validity of the measuring instrument, the researchers opted for a factor analysis. Since there was some uncertainty about the number of factors that may exist among the set of items in the questionnaire, exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were conducted in this study to statistically reduce the number of factors from the larger number of measured variables. All the 25 items (barriers) that can potentially affect the firm's internationalisation were subjected to factor analysis. Prior to the factor analysis, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed and the results revealed many coefficients of 0.3 and higher in the correlation matrix, with a KMO-value of 0.504 and the test of sphericity reaching $p \approx 0.00$, indicating that the data was well suited to be evaluated by means of factor analysis.

Hereafter, the 25 items were subjected to principal component analysis (PCA). Using Kaiser's criterion, only eigenvalues exceeding 1 were used to determine how many factors to extract. An inspection of the scree plot revealed a clear break after the fourth factor, which led to the decision to retain only three factors, which explained a total variance of 46.22%. These three factors contributed to 21.47%, 14.93% and 9.81% of the variance, respectively. To aid in the interpretation of these three factors, Varimax rotation was performed. The rotated solution revealed strong factor loadings using a significant factor criterion of 0.3. However, two items (knowledge of foreign markets and the use of technology) did not measure significant correlations with any of the other items and were consequently removed from the final analysis. The three retained factors were further labelled according to their groupings as environmental barriers (factor 1 with ten items), managerial competency barriers (factor 2 with seven items) and foreign market barriers (factor 3 with six items).

4.2.1.2 Reliability of the research instrument

All of the extracted factors from the EFA were subsequently subjected to reliability testing to determine the internal consistency by means of Cronbach's alpha (α). Hair *et al.* (2016:168) postulate that the value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient ranges from 0 (no internal consistency) to 1 (total internal consistency), with an acceptable outcome of equal to or above 0.7. Table 2 indicates the interpretation of the various Cronbach's alpha values for this study.

Table 2: Cronbach alpha values for the identified factors

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach alpha coefficient (α)
Environmental barriers	10	0.830
Managerial competency barriers	7	0.785
Foreign market barriers	6	0.745

Based on the factor analysis conducted on this section of the questionnaire it can be concluded that this section of the measuring instrument contains acceptable elements of validity. The alpha values obtained from all the factors confirmed that all the respective sections in the measuring instrument contain acceptable elements of reliability ($\alpha > 0.7$).

4.3. Internationalisation Barriers

Internationalisation barriers affecting the firm's internationalisation were subdivided into three constructs, namely environmental barriers, managerial competency barriers and foreign market barriers. The interpretation of the calculated mean scores ($\bar{x}$) for the three constructs is based on the scale descriptions of the five-point Likert scale used in the questionnaire to rate the elements. The scale ranged from "1 = being a minor obstacle" to "5 = being a major obstacle").

4.3.1Environmental barriers

Table 3: Environmental barriers

Statements	**n**	$\bar{x}$	**σ**
Competition from low-cost manufacturing countries	43	3.74	1.049
Availability of local skilled workforce	43	4.26	0.621
Economic conditions in the foreign market	43	3.33	0.778
Trained personnel to deal with exports	43	3.33	0.808
Transportation costs	43	3.26	0.848
Financial assistance from Government	43	3.16	0.924
Shipping arrangements	43	2.67	0.808
Exchange rate fluctuations	43	3.86	0.675
Access to distribution channels in foreign markets	43	3.23	0.751
Cashflow to finance internationalisation	43	4.56	0.666
Overall mean score		**3.54**	**0.792**

Environmental barriers include statements that relate to barriers in the internal (micro-) environment, the market environment and the macro-environment. Overall, the respondents indicated that environmental barriers (x = 3.54; σ = 0.792) are moderate barriers to their internationalisation. The respondents agreed most with the statement "Cashflow to finance their internationalisation" (x = 4.56; σ = 0.666) (major barrier), which indicates that this barrier is seen as having the largest influence on the internationalisation activities, stemming from the micro-environment. This finding confirms the results obtained in the qualitative study and is in line with Rahman *et al.*'s (2019) study. The respondents further agreed least with the statement "Shipping arrangement" (x = 2.67; σ = 0.808) (somewhat of a barrier), which indicates that this factor is seen as having the least influence on their internationalisation activities.

4.3.2 Managerial competencies

Overall, the respondents indicated that managerial competency barriers (x = 2.86; σ = 0.862) are somewhat barriers to their internationalisation (Table 4). They agreed most with the statements "Information about foreign markets" (x = 3.95; σ = 0.815) (moderate barrier) and

"Knowledge about export procedures/documentation" ($x = 3.91$; $\sigma = 0.868$) (moderate barrier), which indicates that, although these barriers are seen as only moderate, they portray the highest measured managerial competency barriers influencing internationalisation activities. These findings correspond to the findings of the qualitative study and are in line with the work of Franz *et al.* (2018:251), who posit communication barriers as a major factor restricting SMEs' internationalisation. Findings also revealed that "Cultural barriers" ($x = 1.91$; $\sigma = 0.781$) are considered a minor barrier, having the least influence on their internationalisation activities.

Table 4: Managerial competency barriers

Statements	**n**	$\bar{x}$	σ
Handling of export documents	43	3.19	0.958
Language barriers	43	2.74	0.902
Knowledge about export procedures/documentation	43	3.91	0.868
Managerial time to deal with exports	43	3.70	0.832
Information about foreign markets	43	3.95	0.815
Contacting prospective client	43	3.47	0.882
Cultural barriers	43	1.91	0.781
Overall mean score		**2.86**	**0.862**

4.2.5 Foreign market barriers

Overall, the respondents indicated that foreign market barriers ($x = 4.43$; $\sigma = 0.672$) are major barriers that influence their internationalisation initiatives and activities (Table 5). Although the respondents indicated that all the statements are major barriers, they agreed most with the statement "Quality of products" ($x = 4.74$; $\sigma = 0.581$) (major barrier). This finding corresponds with an earlier finding that quality products are also seen as an important consideration factor in terms of the firm's capabilities (Islam, Hossain & Olalere, 2023:1). Respondents further agreed least with the statement "Tariff and non-tariff barriers" ($x = 4.05$; $\sigma = 0.653$) (major barrier), which indicates that from all the statements, they regard this statement as having the least influence on their internationalisation activities.

Table 5: Foreign market barriers

Statements	**n**	$\bar{x}$	σ
Meeting foreign market standards	43	4.42	0.763
Quality of products	43	4.74	0.581
Timely supply of raw materials	43	4.30	0.674
Tariff and non-tariff barriers	43	4.05	0.653
Rules and regulations in the foreign market	43	4.60	0.695
Government restriction in the foreign markets	43	4.49	0.668
Overall mean score		**4.43**	**0.672**

In conclusion, the respondents indicated that foreign market barriers represent the greatest obstacles that they need to overcome to ensure the success of their internationalisation activities. In this regard, they further indicated that the quality of their products is the greatest obstacle that they need to focus on when they decide to internationalise. This is supported by the literature, namely that the successful internationalisation of Mauritian-based medium-sized firms depends to a large extent on their ability to overcome challenges in developing ownership advantage (such as technology and unique products). In addition, foreign market barriers intensify whether businesses are not able to adapt their products to suit the foreign market.

Finally, despite the moderate environmental barriers, cashflow to finance internationalisation is a major obstacle that businesses need to overcome to ensure successful internationalisation. This finding is supported throughout this paper (literature review and qualitative findings): that the availability of finance is a determining factor for successful SMEs' internationalisation (Mansilla-Fernandez & Milgram-Baliex, 2022: 1804). Although managerial competency barriers are somewhat barriers to their internationalisation, managers need to overcome the lack of information about the intended foreign export markets as well as the accompanying export procedures/documentation to increase the likelihood of internationalisation success. According to the literature, SMEs' willingness to either initiate or expand on their internationalisation is influenced by a lack of information (Osano, 2020:4) and their ability to deal with unfamiliar exporting procedures/paperwork (Franz, Canare & Labios, 2018:251)

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

As medium-sized textile manufacturing firms are under pressure to extend their activities in foreign markets, this study sought to identify the export barriers faced by these businesses. The findings of the qualitative and quantitative studies have provided a better understanding of the export barriers faced by these businesses. The main export barriers identified in this study have been categorised into three, namely environmental barriers, managerial competency barriers and foreign market barriers. As the government is encouraging local SMEs to extend their activities beyond national borders, policymakers can use the findings of this study to formulate appropriate strategies aimed at reinforcing the presence of these businesses in international markets.

In light of the findings, recommendations have been made to different stakeholders (including policymakers of the SME sector and SME owners) with a view to assisting these businesses in overcoming the export barriers. These recommendations at the policymakers' levels revolve around the need to (i) set up special fund schemes and export assistance programmes by the Government, (ii) have more flexible lending policies by commercial banks to exporting firms, (iii) set up dedicated information desks to provide key information on international markets and international trade policies, and (iv) ease export documentation/procedures. At the firm level, SMEs' managers/owners should (i) gather maximum market information to ensure that the products meet the client's expectations, (ii) resort to the services of exporting agents to cater for the international lack of knowledge about the export, and (iii) continuously innovate to improve the quality of the products.

This study has contributed empirically to the ongoing debate on international business, more specifically on the export barriers faced by SMEs from a new lens, that is, from a SIDS perspective. However, as with all studies, this study also suffers from certain limitations, which may narrow the generalisation of the findings and conclusions. The first limitation pertains to the small size of the population which may raise generalisation issues. Moreover, we acknowledge that, since this study is limited to a specific geographical boundary, i.e. Mauritius, generalisation of findings to other SIDS may be a matter of concern. Therefore, to validate the findings of the study, future research should be carried out in other SIDS economies that are comparable to Mauritius. Thirdly, since the quantitative technique applied in this study is limited to exploratory factor analysis (EFA), we recommend that future studies should apply robust multivariate statistical techniques such as CB-SEM or PLS-SEM to substantiate the findings of this study. Finally, since not all exporting barriers have been explored in this study, it is suggested that future studies should consider other exporting barriers impeding the internationalisation of businesses. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the findings have provided both the SME owners/managers and policymakers with valuable guidelines for the formulation and implementation of export-oriented strategies and export assistance programmes. We also contemplate that this study has laid the foundation for future studies to enhance the internationalisation of export-oriented businesses as well as not internationalised firms.

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