

# Was the Help Enough?: A Systematic Literature Review on Governmental Support of Small Medium Enterprises' Export Performance

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## ABSTRACT

Government support ensures the export performance of mid-sized enterprises, especially in an intense global environment. Despite the abundance of research on governmental assistance for SMEs' export success, conducting a comprehensive review of this subject has proven difficult due to the absence of review protocols that are complex for scholars to comprehend and reproduce. This study performs a thorough literature review on governmental support for SMEs' export performance. The procedure comprises five stages: reviewing the protocol, defining research questions, identifying, screening, and determining eligibility for systematic research strategies, and the systematic research of literature based on two authentic databases, namely Web of Sciences and Scopus. This analysis advances the current literature by systematically classifying government support into financial and non-financial assistance, with the latter subdivided into five distinct types including (1) information, (2) marketing, (3) training, (4) trade, and (5) foreign office use support. This classification provides a systematic framework for comprehending the many types of support accessible to SME exporters. This research highlights the essential importance of non-financial support systems in enhancing SMEs' export performance, in contrast to earlier studies that mainly focused on financial support.

**Keywords:** Government support, Export promotion programmes (EPP), Export performance, SMEs

## INTRODUCTION

The export of Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) significantly impact the growth of developing and developed economies. Economic growth is the primary concern for any government, as it is a vital domain (Zulu-Chisanga et al. 2021). Nevertheless, enterprises, particularly companies categorized as SMEs, face numerous obstacles that must be addressed. SMEs face many issues that lower their performance and potential to grow due to divergences in culture, legislation, social background, and economic patterns of the host country, potentially leading to failure (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2023). Hence, government support is indispensable and required by SMEs to overcome their resources and capabilities limitation and enable their entrance into an international market.

While the importance of government support is acknowledged in the literature, it offers inadequate insights to ascertain the role of government in enhancing the export performance of SMEs. Several papers (Sharma et al., 2018; Ahmed & Brennan, 2019; Coudounaris, 2018; Charoensukmongkol, 2020; Wang et al., 2017; Cin & Choe, 2022; Hussien, 2022; Comi & Resmini, 2020) looked at the role of government. Some of them had negative views (Njinyah, 2018; Falahat et al., 2020; Zulu-Chisanga et al., 2021; Moreira et al., 2022; van den Berg, 2022; Traiyarach & Banjongprasert, 2022). While others indicated mixed effects (Joo & Suh, 2017; Haddoud et al., 2017; Quaye et al., 2017; Han & Park, 2019; Mostafiz et al., 2020; Malca et al., 2020; Mata et al., 2021; Mota et

al., 2021). The existing literature on small business strategies is deficient in a comprehensive framework regarding the impact of government support on performance. The issue of how governments might direct their support to SMEs remains unresolved.

It is important to note that a comprehensive assessment of studies regarding governmental support for enhancing the export performance of SMEs has not been conducted. SLR underscores the importance of employing systematic, transparent, and replicable methodologies at each level of the process (Higgins et al., 2011). Yet in this study it is based on an integrative analysis that integrates quantitative and mixed techniques. Despite extensive study on government support, there hasn't been any systematic review, pattern recognition, or thematic development in this area. The review processes, including screening, identification, and eligibility of literature, are inadequately addressed. Recognizing this gap establishes the basis for this study, which focuses on governmental assistance in improving SMEs' export performance.

The organization of this study is as listed. The next part discusses about the methodology, which includes the review process, coming up with research questions, using a systematic search strategy, judging the quality of the results, and collecting and analyzing the data. A thorough study of the results will follow, including the context of the selected studies and the emergent trends. We then present the discussion and conclusion.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **The Protocol – ROSES**

First, a review protocol was developed using the SLR approach, explaining the objective of the question under review and the proposed procedures. It also reduces biases and explains the positioning, evaluation, and production of various studies. Instead of using PRISMA, the researchers decided to utilize ROSES, which was introduced by Haddaway et al. (2018). Although it was developed to fit environment-related studies, the role of ROSES is significant for this study.

According to the given guidelines of ROSES, the SLR is established based on the formulation of research questions, followed by a document or article search based on three systematic phases. Subsequently, quality appraisal was performed per the guidelines of Hong et al. (2018).

### **Defining Research Question**

The main questions of this study "How governmental support improves the SME's export performance?" is derived from two sources. The first was based on the existing studies that were focusing on the relationship between governmental support and export performance of SMEs found in Wang et al. (2017), Njinyah (2018) and Mata et al. (2021). Additionally, the researchers utilized PICO framework by Lockwood et al. (2015) as it encompassed the three dimensions which are SMEs as the population, governmental support as the interest and improvement of SMEs' export performance as the context.

### **Search Approaches**

The retrieval of relevant articles was based on Shaffril et al. (2018), which includes three methodical steps as discussed below. This stage enables the identification and synthesis of studies that have thoroughly carried out orderly systematic literature reviews.

### **Identification**

Government support, SMEs, and export performance are keywords derived from the research question that later were enriched based on keywords that were always used by scholars in previous studies. Researchers then searched these key terms (Table 1) in established databases, Scopus and Web of Science to confirm the comprehensive selection of literature. This search identified 91 articles.

**Table 1.** Search keywords

Database	Keywords
Scopus and Web of Science	government support, institutional support, export promotion program, export performance

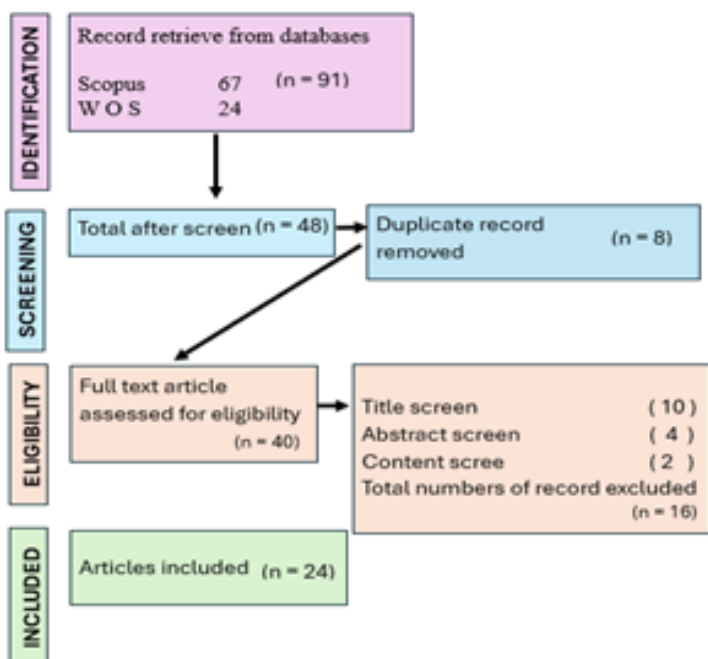
## Screening

A determined standard guides the process of screening, which involves assessing the articles identified in the previous stage which are guided by certain inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 2). This study only includes publications for seven years (2017-2023) as determined by the maturation of the area (Kraus et al., 2020) and excludes 2016 and earlier publications. This study concentrates solely on peer-reviewed research articles to guarantee the legitimacy and academic integrity of the findings. To ensure the quality of examined literature, other document formats, including book chapters, books, and conference papers, were eliminated. The research articles were chosen based on their empirical contributions to comprehending how government support can improve SMEs' export performance. This review considered only publications published in English to guarantee accessibility and analytical consistency. We excluded non-English publications to prevent translation issues and maintain uniformity in the interpretation of findings across the identified literature. 48 articles proceeded to the next stage after rejecting 43 manuscripts that failed to meet the determined standard.

**Table 2.** Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

Category	Included Criteria	Excluded Criteria
Publication Period	2017-2023	2016 and earlier
Document Type	Research Article	Book Chapters, Book Conference paper, etc.
Language	English	Non-English

## Eligibility


**Fig. 1.** Searching procedure

To identify most related articles, researchers manually checked them by reading the title, abstract, and entire paper to assess if they fulfilled the set standard. 24 articles were excluded because they were not focused on government support for SMEs. The other fifteen articles were excluded based on screening of the title, and seven more were excluded because of the abstracts of the papers. In the end, 24 articles were included in this study after excluding two articles based on content (Figure 1).

## Quality Appraisal

The quality evaluation, conducted using the Mixed Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT) developed by Hong et al. (2018), confirmed that the selected studies were conducted with proper technique and analysis, free from bias. MMAT allowed researchers to evaluate a comprehensive mixed studies review, which includes 25 criteria covering five different areas: non-randomized studies, qualitative research, mixed methods studies, randomized controlled trials, and quantitative descriptive studies (Hong et al., 2018). According to Hong et al. (2018), the selected research articles were evaluated using the five primary criteria specified in the research design and the standard of the research articles (Table 3).

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

Research Design	Assessment Criteria
Quantitative (Descriptive)	QA1—Are the research questions addressed by the adopted sampling strategy?
	QA2—Does the sample size represent the intended population?
	QA3—Are the relevant measurements considered?
	QA4—Is the nonresponse bias associated with a low level of risk?
	QA5—Does the statistical assessment effectively address the study questions?
Quantitative (Non-Randomized)	QA1—Are the participants representative of the intended population?
	QA2—Are the results and intervention metrics appropriate (or exposure)?
	QA3—Are all the results available?
	QA4—Have confounders been taken into consideration in the design and analysis?
	QA5—Did the exposure or the activity take place during the trial as planned?
Mixed Methods	QA1—Does the mixed methods design adequately justify the study's issue?
	QA2—Are the research questions significantly addressed using various study components?
	QA3—Are the results of combining quantitative and qualitative elements sufficiently interpreted?
	QA4—Have qualitative and quantitative methods sufficiently addressed discrepancies and contradictions between the findings?
	QA5—Do the various study components meet the standards of excellence for each methodology tradition?

## Extraction and Analysis of Data

The papers composed in this study were subjected to theme analysis, which looks for similarities or connections as stated by Braun & Clarke (2019) in the available data to identify patterns in previous research. In order to acquire proficiency in the dataset, the researchers conducted a comprehensive and consistent examination of it, as per Kiger and Varpio (2020). Researchers were provided with valuable guidance on the raw data, and the

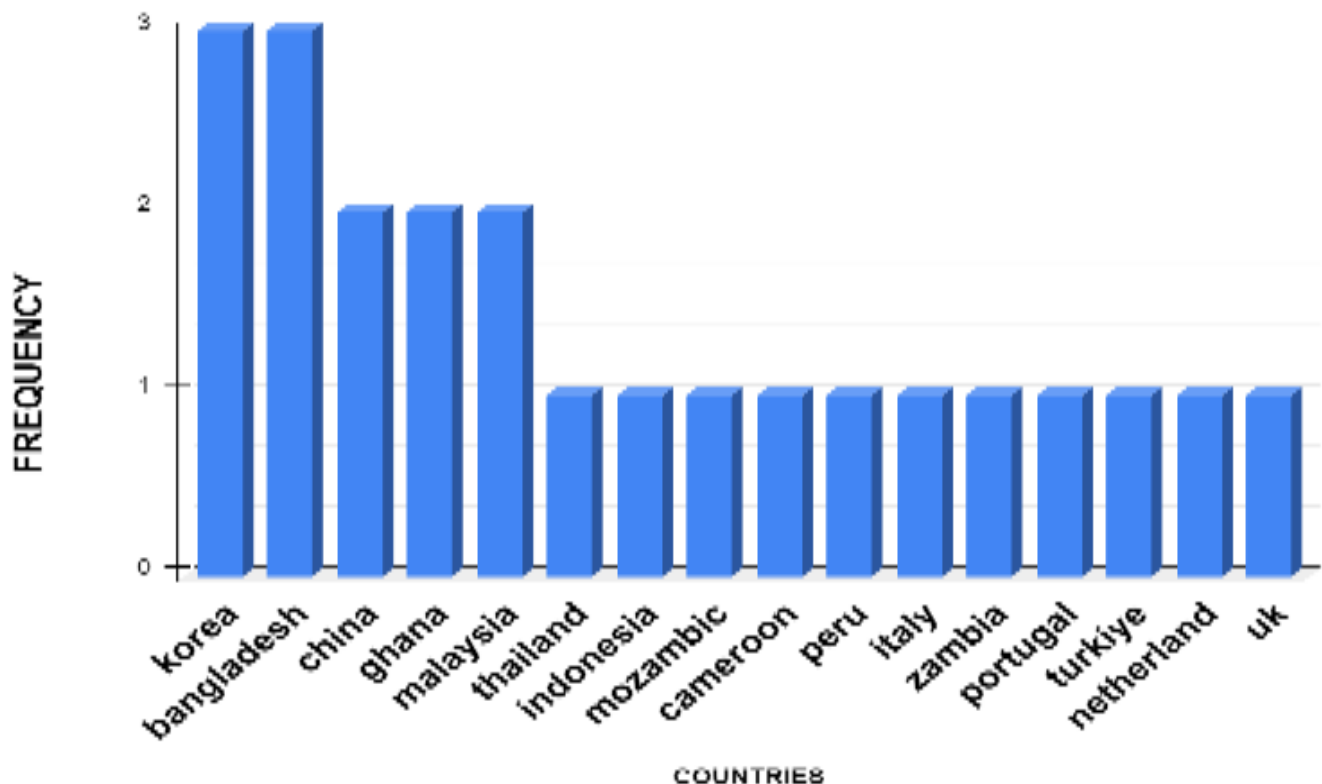
basis stages for everything coming next was established by this process.

Code is generated at this stage. The researchers arranged the data in detail and in a specific style. At this point, all chosen publications were thoroughly examined and extracted significant data on the primary study issues. It is then followed by the development of the focus area. Inductive coding frameworks were employed by the researchers to recognize trends, similarity, and connection between the data. The coded data provided themes for synthesis, employing an inductive coding approach. Extracted themes were closely linked to the original data and skillfully portrayed the entirety of the data series (Braun & Clarke, 2019). At this stage eight focus areas were established then reviewed to develop the final themes. The suitability of the two themes was examined, leading to their combination and resulting in only seven themes.

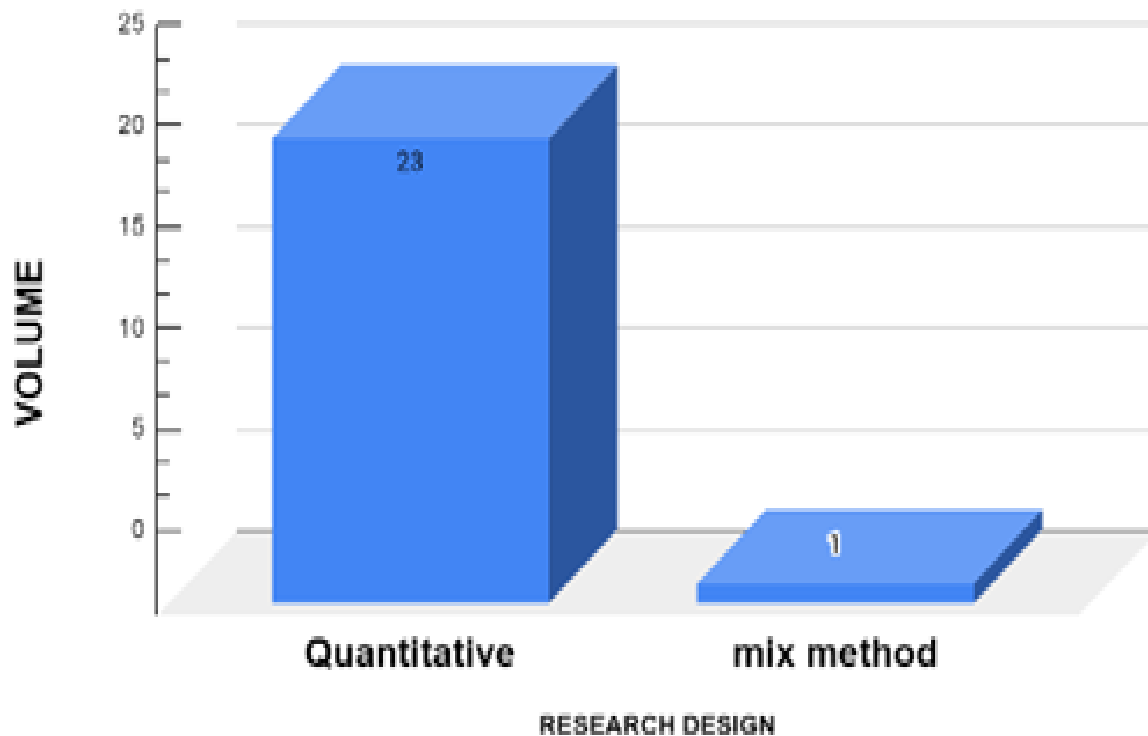
## RESULT

### Background of The Chosen Articles

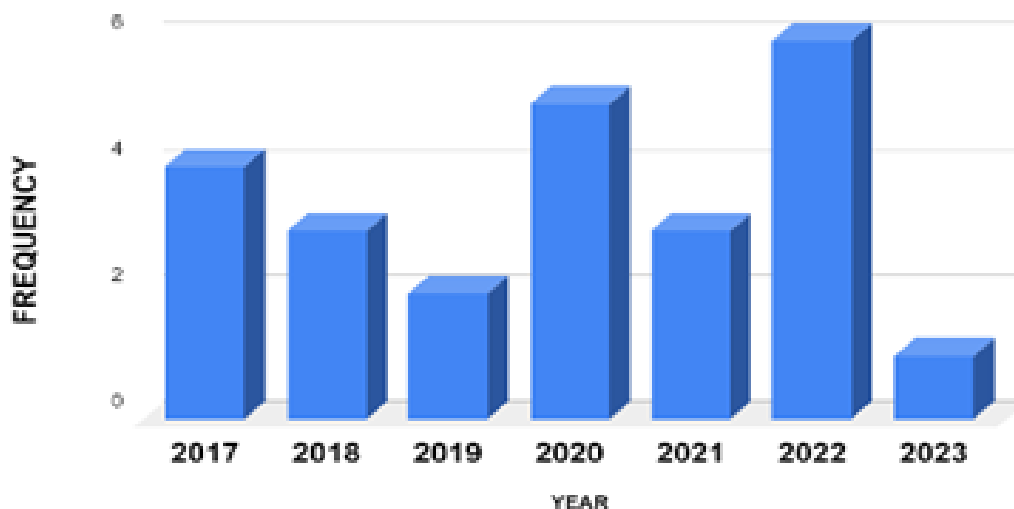
Figure 2 illustrates 16 countries from the 24 articles which comprised of one study in conducted in United Kingdom, Cameroon, Thailand, Indonesia, Mozambic, Peru, Zambia, Italy, Netherland, Turkeye (Haddoud et al., 2017; Njinyah, 2018; Traiyarach & Banjongprasert, 2022; Heriqbaldi et al., 2023; Moreira et al., 2022; Malca et al., 2020; Zulu-Chisanga et al., 2021; Comi & Resmini, 2020; van den Berg, 2022; Hussen, 2022) and Coudounaris (2018) has not reported any. While two scholars conducted study in Malaysia, Ghana and China (Mata et al., 2021; Falahat et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2018; Quaye et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Joo & Suh, 2017). In addition, three scholars conducted their study in Bangladesh and Korea (Ahmed & Brennan, 2019; Mostafiz et al., 2020; Cin & Choe, 2022; Joo & Suh, 2017; Han & Park, 2019; Cin & Choe, 2022). Figure 3 indicates one study adopted mixed-method research design (Sharma et al., 2018) while the remaining balance of 23 articles adopted quantitative analyses in their studies. Out of 24 articles, the researchers spotted a fluctuated trend regarding year of publication (see Figure 4). There are four articles published in 2017, which decreased to three in 2018 and two in 2019. It then climbed back to five articles published in 2020 and three published in 2021. 2022 scored six publications while 2023 with one publication.



**Fig. 2.** Countries where the chosen studies took place.



**Fig. 3.** Research Design of chosen articles.



**Fig. 4.** Publication years of chosen articles.

### The Developed Themes

After went through analyses of 24 articles, government support is primarily categorised into financial and non-financial assistance, with the latter subdivided into five distinct focus areas: (1) marketing support, (2) information support, (3) training support, (4) trade support, and (5) foreign office support.

Table 4 illustrates themes development from the 24 selected articles. Only one scholar concentrated on foreign offices in the host country, while two scholars directed their focus on non-financial support generally without stating the type of support provided by the home country's government. In addition, five scholars concentrated on marketing, seven on training and nine targeted on trade assistance. There are 14 authors focused on financial support which include soft loans, grants, subsidies and tax rebates. Furthermore, 12 scholars concentrated on government information support.



**Table 4.** Themes development.

Authors	Year	Government financial support	Government non-financial support
Hye Young Joo and Hyunsuk Suh	2017	■	■ (information support, training support and trade support)
Wang X.; Chen A.; Wang H.; Li S.	2017	■	■ (information support)
Haddoud M.Y.; Jones P.; Newbery R.	2017		■ (information support and trade support)
Quaye D.M.; Sekyere K.N.; Acheampong G.	2017	■	■ (trade support and foreign office support)
Sharma R.R.; Sraha G.; Crick D.Njinyah S.Z.	2018		■ (information support and trade support)
Njinyah S.Z.	2018	■	■ (marketing support)
Coudounaris D.N.	2018	■	■
Farhad Uddin Ahmed and Louis Brennan	2019	■	■ (information support and marketing support)
Han J.H.; Park H.-Y.	2019		■ (information support, marketing support, training support and trade support)
Comi S.; Resmini L.	2020		■ (information support, training support and trade support)
Mohammad Falahat and Yan Yin Lee and T. Ramayah and Pedro Soto-Acosta	2020	■	■ (information support, training support and trade support)
Malca O.; Peña-Vinces J.; Acedo F.J.	2020		■ (information support, training support and trade support)
Charoensukmongkol P.	2020	■	■
Md Imtiaz Mostafiz Murali Sambasivan and See Kwong Goh	2020	■	
Mota J.; Moreira A.; Alves A.	2021	■	■ (information support, marketing support, training support and trade support)
Zulu-Chisanga, S; Chabala, M; Mandawa-Bray,	2021	■	
Mata M.N.; Falahat M.; Correia A.B.; Rita J.X.	2021	■	■ (marketing support)
Hussen, MS	2022	■	
Cin, BC; Choe, KH.	2022		■
Faroque A.R.; Sultana H.; Ahmed J.U.; Ahmed F.U.; Rahman M.	2022	■	■ (marketing support)
Traiyrach S.; Banjongprasert J.	2022	■	■ (information support, marketing support, training support and trade support)

Moreira A.; Navaia E.; Ribau C.	2022	■	■ (information support)
Van den Berg M.	2022		■
Heriqbaldi U.; Esquivias M.A.; Samudro B.R.; Widodo W.	2023	■	■ (information support, training support and trade support)

## DISCUSSION

Providing financial support, such as export grants and subsidies, export credit and financing, and export credit insurance, can reduce the financial difficulties faced by SMEs when competing in the global market (Wang et al., 2017; Quaye et al., 2017). Contradicting Joo and Suh (2017), tax exemption has an insignificant influence on a company's eco-innovation. Offering informational support regarding trade statistics enables small and medium-sized enterprises to find prospects (Wang et al., 2017; Haddoud et al., 2017; Joo & Suh, 2017). The government has the capacity to equip small and medium-sized enterprises with comprehensive insights from market research and analysis via targeted marketing support. This data will enhance their comprehension of international markets (Mata et al., 2021; Han & Park, 2019). Furthermore, presenting the trajectory of contemporary market demands will empower SMEs to promote products that satisfy consumer needs and desires. Providing training support, including export training programs and mentorship, will furnish SMEs with essential knowledge and offer invaluable guidance for achieving success in international markets (Haddoud et al., 2017). Government trade assistance can manifest in two forms: trade missions and business matchmaking. Facilitating trade missions provides SMEs with direct experience to investigate potential and establish contacts (Haddoud et al. 2017). Sharma et al. (2018) assert that most prospective purchasers will know where to seek supplies if a trade show is effectively organised. Meanwhile, Quaye et al. (2017) found that trade shows did not enhance the export of a country. Facilitating business matches and establishing connections with potential consumers and market players empowers SMEs to cultivate significant relationships. Quaye et al. (2017) demonstrated that the support from foreign offices significantly correlates with the export performance of SMEs in Ghana, attributed to the role of embassies in facilitating connections for export firms within the country.

## CONCLUSION

Institutional support, especially the government, is essential in boosting a country's export success. This study focuses on a systematic review of previous studies regarding government support in enhancing SME export performance. 24 articles were considered for their quality, employing the SLR approach. Additionally, theme analysis was performed on 24 chosen articles because the review was dependent on the variability of research designs; this found government support is primarily categorised into financial and non-financial assistance, with the latter subdivided into five distinct focus areas: (1) marketing support, (2) information support, (3) training support, (4) trade support, and (5) foreign office support. This study offers critical insights for policymakers in formulating effective assistance programs to improve SMEs' export performance. By acknowledging the significance of both financial and non-financial assistance, government agencies can tailor and enhance their plans to effectively support SMEs exporters. The review concluded that the financial facilities provided by the government in terms of tax release and grants help new SMEs grow further as they have limited resources and funds. Meanwhile, non-financial assistance, such as marketing support, trade support, information support, training support, and foreign office support, help SMEs to spread their wings abroad. Trade exhibitions, an essential non-financial support mechanism, provide SMEs with direct access to international buyers, networking opportunities, and insights into industry trends. They function as venues for displaying SMEs' products and cultivating networking. Government-sponsored trade exhibitions facilitate market access by providing places, logistical assistance, and business-matching initiatives. Participation enables SMEs to enhance brand visibility and establish business relationships. This study offers SMEs a deeper understanding of available support, allowing them to utilise the most pertinent resources for internationalisation.

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