

The impact of managerial and firm characteristics on barriers in export businesses



Jayanty Kuppusamy*, R. N. Anantharaman

Faculty of Business, Multimedia University, Malacca, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The growth of export in many countries all over the world signifies it as the most important mode of internationalization. However, some exporters face difficulties in managing export due to the barriers they face. It is, therefore, important to identify the factors that might influence export barriers. The study attempts to identify the relationship between demographic factors and export barriers which has not been much researched. Demographic factors are represented by managerial or executives' characteristics as well as firm characteristics. A cross-sectional survey was conducted where a total of one thousand and four hundred and thirty-nine questionnaires were sent to the exporters. The respondents include executives who were in charge of exporting. Two hundred and twelve responses were found to be usable which formed the basis for the analysis. The response rate was 14.9%. The export barriers include marketing barriers, financial barriers, government barriers, informational barriers, administrative barriers, production barriers, and external barriers. Correlation analysis was used to conduct the analysis and it is found that age of executives, age of firms, size of firms, and export experience of firms have a negative relationship with some of the export barriers. On the other hand, there was no relationship between the employee experience and export barriers. This finding contributes to the limited knowledge on the relationship between demographic characteristics with export barriers. Thus, it provides support for the resource-based view. From a practical perspective, it is essential for business to accumulate knowledge, expertise and experience in order to reduce the export barriers.

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1. Introduction

The increase in the number of businesses involved in internationalization especially through exporting is spurred by globalization and this trend is likely to remain for years to come. Realizing the importance of exporting, various incentives and policies have been introduced by governments to motivate businesses into exporting their products. As a developing nation, it is important for Malaysia to continue its efforts in increasing export. Firms that export include small and medium industries (SMEs) as well as larger firms. According to [Ahmad and Seet \(2009\)](#) generally, more than fifty percent of SMEs collapsed within the first five years of operation. Although the internationalization level of

these SMEs, was not indicated, it is an alarming figure. Businesses that have been operating at the international level may face difficulties too. This is due to the barriers they encounter. Therefore, there is a need to understand the factors that have an influence on the barriers. According to [Chung \(2003\)](#) and [Leonidou \(1995b\)](#), the need to understand barriers to export is essential in determining why exporters are unable to reach their full potential or fail in their export activity. In addition, studies on export barriers provide evaluative insights for the government policymakers in drawing up the national export policy ([Julian and O'Casey, 2002](#); [Katsikeas, 1994](#)).

A number of studies had focused on exporting barriers, where the emphasis was towards identifying the difference between exporters and non-exporters or differences between types of exporters ([Suarez-Ortega, 2003](#); [Ahmed et al., 2004](#); [Barker and Kaynak, 1992](#)), the barriers that influence export performance ([Al-Hyari et al., 2011](#); [Milanzi, 2012](#); [Rutihinda, 2008](#)) and the types of barriers ([Jayanty and Anantharaman, 2014](#)) among

* Corresponding Author.

Email Address: jayanty.kuppusamy@mmu.edu.my (J. Kuppusamy)

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Corresponding author's ORCID profile:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4782-9441>

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others. Furthermore, the existing studies related to demographics characteristics focused more on firm characteristics rather than managerial characteristics. In addition, the studies are oriented towards export performance (Gashi et al., 2014; Cieslik et al., 2015; Aralica et al., 2018; Recica et al., 2019; Vitezic et al., 2018). Therefore, the relationship between demographic factors and export barriers is limited and signifies there is a gap for more research to be done in this area. The resource-based view (RBV) theory indicates that the internal resources and capabilities of the firm are able to generate a competitive advantage (Barney, 2001). The resources and capabilities include both tangible and intangible resources such as experience and expertise. The size of firms which is based on the number of employees is related to resources. Firms that do not have the specific capabilities may face difficulty or barriers in their exporting venture. Therefore, the current research finding will contribute towards the support of the RBV theory.

The focus of the current study is to test the relationship between demographic factors and export barriers. Demographic factors are represented by managerial and firm characteristics. Managerial characteristics or executive characteristics include the age of executives and employment experience while firm characteristics include the age of firms, size of firms, and export experience of firms.

2. Export barriers

Any obstacles that firms face in the export market are referred to as export barriers. According to Leonidou (1995b; 2004), barriers are seen as constraints faced by firms that hinder firms' capability in operating in international markets. This includes attitudinal, structural, operational, and other constraints. According to Köksal and Kettaneh (2011), export barriers are constraints that hinder the ability of the firm in initiating, developing, or sustaining its international operation. It is essential to study about export barriers since it has an impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the firm (Jalali, 2012). Researchers have given their own classification of barriers. Leonidou (1995a) classified export barriers into two categories: Internal which is related to the firm and external which is related to the environment. Based on this, Ortiz and Ortiz (2010) proposed the following classification: Knowledge barriers, resource barriers, procedure barriers, and exogenous barriers. Kahiya (2013) suggested that internal barriers arise from resource-related constraints, managerial related constraints, marketing-related constraints, and knowledge related constraints. Leonidou (2004) in a detailed analysis of SMEs' export barriers, gave a new reclassification. He pointed out that internal barriers are those related to information, function, and marketing while external barriers are those related to the procedure, government, task as well as environment. This new classification was followed

by Narayanan (2015) who did an analysis on SMEs' export barriers.

Among the barriers faced by exporters is insufficient knowledge related to export market opportunities and how to export (Milanzi, 2012; Pinho and Martins, 2010; Ortiz and Ortiz, 2010). The financial problem of insufficient capital is another type of barrier which exporters face (Shaw and Darroch, 2004). Another type of barrier is lack of skills such as in terms of export planning or export administration or managing international trade activity (Ortiz and Ortiz, 2010). Barrier due to insufficient production is indicated by Ahmed et al. (2004) although Leonidou (2004) identified it as a low barrier. Marketing-related barriers are due to distribution channels' complexity, accessibility level, and distributors. This involves the difficulty in locating distributors that are suitable, reliable, or capable (Ortiz and Ortiz, 2010; Rutihinda, 2008). In addition, quality standards or requirements (Rutihinda, 2008), and product adaption issues (Ortiz and Ortiz, 2010) are product-related barriers. Packaging quality (Katsikeas et al., 1996), cost of promotion (Köksal, 2006), the difficulty in setting the competitive pricing (Rutihinda, 2008; Milanzi, 2012) and modifying the price that suits the needs of the foreign market (Julian and Ahmed, 2005) are also types of marketing-related barriers.

Government-related barriers include lack of assistance and insufficient or ineffective export promotion (Rutihinda, 2008). Lack of information and keen competition are also common types of barriers studied (Pinho and Martins, 2010; Ortiz and Ortiz, 2010). A number of studies indicated competition is a barrier for exporters (Predrag et al. 2014; Ahmed et al., 2004) although Pinho and Martins (2010) found otherwise. Complex, extensive or cumbersome procedures in export documents are indicated as a barrier (Al-Hyari et al., 2011; Milanzi, 2012; Köksal, 2006). Red tape is another exporter's problem (Barker and Kaynak, 1992). Similarly, rules and regulations and trade barriers (Rutihinda, 2008; Al-Hyari et al., 2011) are found to be barriers (Ahmed et al., 2004; Barker and Kaynak, 1992) in addition to the cost of transportation or difficulties of goods' transportation (Ortiz and Ortiz, 2010). Language and culture as a barrier have been studied by a number of researchers (Al-Hyari et al., 2011; Ortiz and Ortiz, 2010; Ortega and Vera, 2005). However, most of the studies did not identify it to be a significant barrier. Nevertheless, Ahmed et al. (2004) pointed out language and cultural differences are barriers to export. Payment delay or difficulty of payment collection is tested in various export studies and Ahmed et al. (2004) and Yaprak (1985) found it to be a barrier faced by exporters.

2.1. Managerial characteristics

Managerial characteristics refer to demographic factors of the managers or executives. For the purpose of this study age and employment, experience are chosen. According to Chen (2017),

some researchers posit those management characteristics to be important. This includes age and work experience among others (Shih and Wickramasekera, 2011). Managers especially decision-makers are really critical for an organization. This is highlighted by Chetty (1993) and Axinn and Matthyssens (2002) who stressed the importance of characteristics of the decision-maker or managers who deal with internationalization issues. According to Moon and Lee (1990) age can predict export behavior. Younger managers are found to be more internationally minded (Pinney, 1970) and internationalize faster (Caughey and Chetty, 1994). Although previous studies did look into the link between the age of executives with export performance (Jayanty and Anantharaman, 2019; Kotorri and Krasniqi, 2018) or export behavior, they have neglected the link between age and export barriers. Therefore, the current study aims to fill this gap. Younger managers may be internationally inclined but they lack the experience which may cause them to face export barriers more than older managers.

In terms of employment experience, the foreign experience would be more beneficial since invaluable knowledge such as identifying market risk and the ability to build a network that assists in acquiring useful market information can be obtained (Ellis, 2000; Ellis and Pecotich, 2001). According to Moini (1995), Westhead (1995), and Ogbuehi and Longfellow (1994) through experience, exporters can better identify risk and opportunities in a foreign market. Supporting study is by Williams (2011) who pointed out previous international job experience provides information and challenges of foreign markets. Therefore, working experience especially foreign-related may reduce export barriers faced. Based on the review of literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Age of executives has a negative relationship with export barriers.

H2: Employment experience has a negative relationship with export barriers.

2.2. Firm characteristics

Firm characteristics refer to the demographic characteristics of the firms. Predrag et al. (2014) included the firm's size and firm's export experience in their study of barriers of Serbian exporters. For this study, business age, business size, and business export experience are chosen. Autio et al. (2000) pointed out older firms usually have more resources. Due to these resources, older firms are able to operate at an international level (Bloodgood et al. 1996; Williams, 2011). Although younger firms are said to have an interest in exporting (Rhee, 2002; Autio et al., 2000) older firms have more knowledge and are more efficient in operating at the international level (Andersson et al. 2004). This is supported by an earlier study by Suarez-Ortega (2003) who pointed out younger firms lack

knowledge and experience. In addition, Leonidou (2000) found younger firms are generally more sensitive to export barriers compared to those in the market for a longer period. Thus, younger firms are more likely to face barriers compared to older firms. In terms of size, larger firms are able to internationalize since they have more resources (Bonaccorsi, 1992; Katsikeas, 1994; Andersson et al., 2004). They also have a higher capacity to produce and attain economies of scale. This would then reduce the risk level in exporting operations. According to Barker and Kaynak (1992) and Katsikeas and Morgan (1994), smaller organizations have limited resources, difficulties in operation, and have a problem related to trade restrictions. Further support is provided by Ortiz et al. (2012) where they concluded that perception of export barriers is inversely related to firm size. Therefore, smaller firms are more likely to face barriers. Another firm characteristic that is important is export experience. Experience is regarded as a vehicle of expertise (Fuensanta, 2010) and furthermore, experience bring benefits such as understanding differences in environmental conditions (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994), reacting to opportunities available in the foreign market (Piercy, 1981), and the ability to select the most attractive market for the venture (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994). In addition, risk due to uncertainty is reduced (Katsikeas, 1996). Ortiz et al. (2012) reported experience decreases the intensity of perception of export barriers while Predrag et al. (2014) found the export experience has an impact on export barriers. This means firms with less experience will face more challenges in managing export compared to the more experienced firms. Based on the review of literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H3: Age of firms has a negative relationship with export barriers.

H4: Size of firms has a negative relationship with export barriers.

H5: Export experience of firms has a negative relationship with export barriers.

3. Methodology

The study focused on exporters and the sampling frame for this study was obtained from the Malaysian External Trade Development's (MATRADE) list of exporters' database. MATRADE is an agency under the Ministry of International Trade (MITI) and its role is to promote export. Among the activities conducted include organizing trade fairs, trade missions, provide information and assistance related to product, branding, packing, and designing. It also offers a grant for market development. Twelve industries have been identified in The Industrial Master Plan Three (IMP3) as critical industries. The Industrial Master Plan covers three stages and the current plan is in the third stage involving a period of fifteen years. The study used a random sampling method similar to Sousa and Bradley (2009).

Random sampling is suitable since only twelve industries are involved. Out of the twelve, seven industries have been chosen. The industries are food-related, machinery and equipment, pharmaceutical, textile and apparel, palm oil-related products, electronics, and medical products. The total number of firms or companies was one thousand four hundred and thirty-nine. Questionnaires were mailed to all the manufacturing companies in the industry selected. The response rate was 14.9%. This is acceptable since the data collection method is through mail similar to [Gursoy and Swanger \(2007\)](#) which is a common method used to collect data. Two hundred and twelve questionnaires were found to be usable. Only those executives who were responsible for the export business of these companies were required to respond to the questionnaire. This is to make sure the executives of the company have the relevant knowledge and experience in exporting. The questions for management and the firm's characteristics were based on previous literature. Similarly, the questions for barriers were mainly selected from [Ortega and Vera's \(2005\)](#) study who based on the studies of [Ramaswami and Yang \(1990\)](#), [Sharkey et al. \(1989\)](#), and [Bauerschmidt et al. \(1985\)](#). Others include [Katsikeas et al. \(1996\)](#), [Katsikeas and Morgan \(1994\)](#), and [Köksal \(2006\)](#). The questions have been validated and tested using a small sample of exporters. The research framework is presented in [Fig. 1](#). The data has been tested to ensure it fits the normality requirement and there are no outliers before further analysis was conducted. The data were tested using the SPSS software and the Pearson correlation analysis was used in analyzing the data. Pearson correlation analysis is suitable for identifying the relationship between any two factors studied.

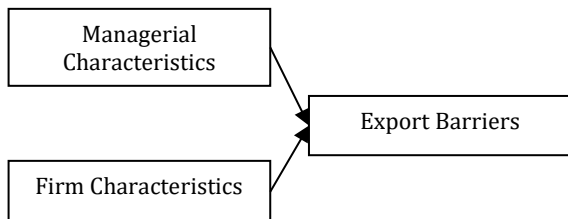


Fig. 1: Research framework

4. Results

Firstly, the descriptive analysis was carried out. More than 50% of the respondents consist of those whose age is more than 40 years. The majority of them have tertiary education and employment experience. Around 27% of the firms in this study have been in business for more than 15 years. Those who have been operating for more than 9 to 15 years consist of 44%. In terms of size, firms that have 51-150 employees accounted for 67.3%. Only 16.1% have employees above 150. Firms with an export experience of more than nine years accounted for 57% while those less than six years are around 19.4%. [Table 1](#) shows demographic characteristics.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics

Age	N	%
21-30	26	12.3
31-40	67	31.8
41-50	78	37.0
Above 50	40	19.0
Employment Experience		
With experience	185	87.7
Without experience	26	12.3
Business Age		
<6 years	26	12.2
>6-9 years	35	16.5
>9-12 years	46	21.7
>12-15 years	48	22.6
>15 years	57	26.9
Business Size		
<50	35	16.6
51-100	70	33.2
100-150	72	34.1
151-200	23	10.9
201-250	4	1.9
251-500	4	1.9
>500	3	1.4
Export Experience		
<6 years	41	19.4
>6-9 years	51	24.1
>9-12 years	49	23.1
>12-15 years	38	17.9
>15 years	33	15.6
Nature		
Palm oil-related products	12	5.7
Food-related products	109	51.4
Pharmaceutical	19	8.9
Electronics	12	5.7
Machinery and equipment	29	13.7
Textile and apparel	14	6.6
Medical products	9	4.2
Others	8	3.8

The factor analysis on the export barriers using the varimax rotation technique resulted in seven factors. They are referred to as external barriers, marketing barriers, financial barriers, production barriers, government barriers, informational barriers, and administrative barriers. The KMO value is 0.719. Next, correlation analysis was carried out to identify whether demographic factors (managerial and firm characteristics) influence export barriers.

[Table 2](#) presents the correlation results between managerial characteristics (age of executives and employment experience) and export barriers. It is found that age is negatively related to barriers. This result indicated that younger managers are more likely to face export barriers compared to older managers. Among the barriers faced are marketing barriers, financial barriers, government-related barriers, informational barriers, and administrative barriers. H1 is supported. Employment experience, however, is found not to have any impact on export barriers. This means that employment experience in terms of length has no influence on export barriers. Therefore, H2 is not supported.

[Table 3](#) presents the correlation results between firm characteristics and export barriers. Age of firms, size of firms, and export experience of firms are the factors tested. It is found younger firms faced more barriers compared to older firms. The barriers are in the areas of marketing, finance, government, informational and administrative aspects. In addition, smaller size firms are found to face a

barrier in the area of finance. Export experience also has a significant negative relationship with barriers, whereby firms with less export experience indicated barriers in the area of marketing, information, and administration. Therefore, H3, H4, and H5 are all supported.

Table 2: Correlation analysis between managerial characteristics and export barriers

Barriers	Age of Executives	Employment Experience
External Barrier	-.128	.012
Marketing Barriers	-.250**	-.112
Financial Barriers	-.151*	.128
Production Barrier	-.057	-.019
Government Barriers	-.216**	.026
Informational barriers	-.194**	.050
Administrative barriers	-.248**	-.046

**Significant correlation at 0.001

Table 3: Correlation analysis between firm characteristics and export barriers

	Age of firms	Size of firms	Export Experience of firms
External Barrier	-.102	-.056	-.087
Marketing Barriers	-.138*	-.110	-.142*
Financial Barriers	-.247**	-.173*	-.022
Production Barrier	-.004	-.034	-.067
Government Barriers	-.195**	-.104	-.052
Informational barriers	-.241**	.015	-.157*
Administrative barriers	-.331**	-.164	-.316**

*Significant correlation at 0.05; **Significant correlation at 0.001

5. Discussion and conclusion

Malaysia which is a developing country is focused on encouraging international business. Although there are several modes of entering the international business, exporting is the most frequently used mode in Malaysia. Many benefits can be obtained through exporting activities such as improvement in the trade balance, growth in the economy, increase in employment as well as standard of living (Lee and Habte-Giorgis, 2004). Firms get involved in exporting with the intention to grow their business. However, firms may face barriers in their exporting endeavors. It is critical to determine the factors that influence these barriers in order to ensure these barriers can be reduced. The purpose of the study is to identify the relationship between demographic factors and export barriers. This area of research is not much researched, thus indicating a research gap. The findings from the current study provided some insights from the perspective of demographic factors and how they affect the export barriers. The research objective of the study is achieved. Out of five hypotheses, four are supported while one is not supported. Table 4 presents the summary of the hypotheses results.

The export barriers that are tested range from external barriers, marketing barriers, financial barriers, production barriers, governmental barriers,

informational barriers, and administrative barriers. The results indicated that the age of executives has a negative relationship with export barriers such as marketing barriers, financial barriers, governmental barriers, informational barriers, and administrative barriers.

Table 4: Summary of results

	Results
H1: Age of executives has a negative relationship with export barriers.	Supported
H2: Employment experience has a negative relationship with export barriers.	Not Supported
H3: Age of firms has a negative relationship with export barriers.	Supported
H4: Size of firms has a negative relationship with export barriers.	Supported
H5: Export experience of firms has a negative relationship with export barriers.	Supported

Previous studies have not linked age with export barriers directly, however, studies have associated age with export performance, where younger managers are more internationally inclined. The result from this finding indicates that younger managers face export barriers. This is probably due to their age, where they would have limited knowledge and expertise to handle the challenges of exporting and thus, face such export barriers. Therefore, managers especially the young and those new to exporting activities may be inclined towards exporting but they may not have the experience to perform the exporting activity successfully. As such, they would benefit through attending training to equip them with the necessary skills to manage exporting activities more effectively.

Employment experience including international business is found not to have any relationship with export barriers. This result is supportive of the review made by Kahiya (2018) on export barrier studies. It is pointed out that management experience has generally weak or not linked with export barriers. Thus, even though studies such as Williams (2011) found previous international job experience provides information and challenges of foreign markets but it is not necessarily the case here.

The result indicates technical training especially in critical areas such as finance, market research, distribution, and market planning would be useful. In addition, specific skills such as communication, networking, presentation skills, and research skills need to be enhanced. These skills are necessary for exporting activities. This is because exporting involves dealing with partners from different countries, documentation, information acquisition, and assessment. Therefore, attending related technical training or workshop to learn the necessary skills is necessary. Attending trade conferences and participation especially at international trade fairs can be beneficial. This will further provide overseas exposure specifically in obtaining foreign market information and opportunities, foreign contacts, and experience in getting to know the foreign culture. Trade fair is

indicated to be a place for knowledge creation and dissemination (Maskell et al., 2006) as well as a good place for networking (Evers and Knight, 2008). The government through its relevant agencies should focus on both the technical and soft skills which are necessary to overcome exporting barriers. Demographic characteristics of executives should be one of the criteria to use in the selection for training. In addition, assistance should also be tailored based on needs whether it is marketing, financial, or informational.

In testing the firm's characteristics, it is found age, size, and export experience have a relationship with export barriers. Younger firms face barriers in areas such as marketing, finance, government, information, and administration. This result is similar to Ortiz et al. (2012) who found younger firms face export barriers specifically information barriers. The current study's result indicates that younger firms or those who have just entered into business do not have the means to handle the challenges of exporting effectively. That is why they face barriers in many areas. These firms should take proactive measures in identifying their weakness and possible areas where they might face export barriers. Through attending training and seminars provided by both the private and public agencies, firms may accumulate the necessary knowledge and skills. At the same time, the government needs to target these young firms especially those new to exporting for training purposes. Training needs analysis can identify the type of skills needed. Assistance in terms of finance, market information, and opportunity recognition would be of much help to these firms.

Smaller size firms need financial assistance more than larger size firms. This is because smaller size firms would not have adequate financial resources and also the means to get additional capital. This finding is in line with the study by Predrag et al. (2014).

Export experience is also valuable for firms that are involved in exporting. Those with less experience face marketing, informational and administrative barriers. The result is in line with a previous study by Ortiz et al. (2012) who found inexperienced firms face information-related export barriers. The current study's result indicates that firms without much experience need assistance in areas such as recognition of export market opportunities, foreign contacts, payments methods, skills training among others. They should be aware and take advantage of the available assistance and training provided by the government. Trade fairs provide an important platform to know about the industry players and obtain valuable market information in addition as a good source to obtain trade orders, foreign contacts, and networking possibilities. The government in providing assistance should also tailor it to firms who have less experience but have the potential to grow its export. The findings provide further support for RBV theory. Age (executives and firms), size of firms, and export experience of firms which are

related to knowledge, expertise, resources, and experience are found to influence export barriers. The finding is in accordance with Kahiya's (2018) study who pointed out firm age and firm size have a negative influence on export barriers and are supportive of RBV. This means that exporting firms will face fewer barriers if they have the necessary knowledge and expertise. Resources and experience will also lessen the barriers to exporting.

The study concentrated on the manufacturing sector which is important for Malaysia in terms of export contribution. In addition, only seven sectors are considered in this study. Therefore, these are the limitations of the study. Future studies may include other sectors that export as well. Another area of future study is in terms of comparison among different levels of internationalization.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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