ВНЕШНЕЭКОНОМИЧЕСКАЯ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬ

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Success Factors in the Internalisation of Export Companies in Colombia [1]

Export success is one of the key aspect of economic growth of a country because it is the principle means of specialising, developing economies of scale, accessing new technologies and attracting foreign investment. For this reason, the significance of this topic has encouraged scientists to investigate the main factors that play a part in the development and application of successful export strategies. This article analyses the export success of Colombian businesses from the behaviour of variables at the business and sectoral levels. The research aims to characterise the relevant conditions affecting the entry of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) into the foreign market, which can be useful for business owners who are in the process of internationalisation; they can also be considered as an instrument for developing policies promoting exports from Colombia. A multilevel model is estimated for a sample of Colombian businesses. We examined international experience, export commitment and export strategy as business factors that positively influence export success, as well as export assistance programmes, networks, tariff legislation, sector size and innovation as sectoral factors. It was concluded that the export destination, the country's conditions and regulations should be examined before the beginning of the export process. However, Colombian exporters usually choose international destinations without such an analysis. In addition, government support through programmes and tariff legislation leads to greater business dynamism, favours entry into new markets and helps compensate negative results of international destinations.

Keywords: export success, export assistance programmes, networks, SMEs, developing country, external resources, export commitment, international experience, export strategy, sector innovation, sector size

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ИССЛЕДОВАТЕЛЬСКАЯ СТАТЬЯ

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Факторы успеха в интернационализации экспортных компаний в Колумбии

Эффективность экспорта оказывает существенное влияние на экономический рост страны, поскольку ведет к развитию специализации и экономии за счет роста производства, обеспечивает доступ к новым технологиям и привлечение иностранных инвестиций. В связи с этим ученые уделяют особое внимание изучению факторов, определяющих разработку и реализацию успешных экспортных стратегий. В данной статье проводится анализ эффективности экспорта колумбийских предприятий с учетом экономических и отраслевых переменных. Цель исследования — рассмотреть условия, которые влияют на выход малых и средних предприятий (МСП) на зарубежный рынок и могут быть полезны для компаний, вовлеченных в процесс интернационализации. Данные факторы также можно учитывать при разработке экспортной политики Колумбии. При помощи многоуровневой модели была произведена оценка выборки колумбийских предприятий. К отраслевым факторам отнесены наличие программ содействия экспорту и корпоративных сетей, развитость таможенного законодательства, объем рынка отрасли и количество инноваций. Сделан вывод, что для организации экспортных поставок необходим предварительный анализ направлений экспорта, условий и нормативных документов стран, в которые планируется экспорт, в то время как колумбийские экспортеры обычно не проводят подобных исследований. Государственные программы поддержки и развитие таможенного законодательства приводят к увеличению динамичности бизнеса, способствуют выходу на новые рынки и помогают компенсировать потери.

Ключевые слова: эффективность экспорта, программы содействия экспорту, сети, МСП, развивающаяся страна, внешние ресурсы, обязательства по экспорту, международный опыт, экспортная стратегия, отраслевые инновации, объем сектора

Introduction

Export businesses in developing countries experience certain difficulties competing in the international market, especially due to the lack of resources that hinders the development of competitive advantages necessary for beginning to compete in an international setting [1]. Export success is one of the keys for the economic growth of a country because it is the principle means of specialising, developing economies of scale, accessing new technologies and attracting foreign investment [1]. For this reason, the significance of this topic has motivated academics to investigate the key factors that play a part in the development and application of successful export strategies [1, 2].

Álvarez [3] noted the following characteristics that determine the export success of a business: productivity, development of skills related to the quality of the workforce and use of export promotion strategies. Additionally, other studies have found that businesses with ongoing export processes are usually sustainable in the international market compared to enterprises that export sporadically. This finding demonstrates the importance of internationalisation as a determining element in export success [1, 3].

This study seeks to examine the export success of Colombian businesses as determined by the level of internationalisation, development of organisational capacities, experience in the export market and export strategies. The research aims to characterise the relevant conditions affecting the entry of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) into the foreign market, which can be useful for business owners who are in the process of internationalisation; they can also be considered as an instrument for developing policies promoting exports from Colombia.

Altogether, in this study we are interested in exploring how export firms achieve superior export success from internal and external perspectives. We thereby focus on examining export success and its relationship with internal and external drivers. Therefore, we respond to research calls by: 1) presenting reasons of how export firms are able to achieve internationalisation and superior export success [1, 3]; 2) exploring the consequences of variables related to the environment and internal context, especially, variables that other studies did not include (associated with international destination and its conditions); 3) contributing new evidence from the perspective of a developing country (Colombia).

Literature review

A literature review concerning exports indicates that there are various studies that have ad-

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dressed such topics as export stimulation [4, 5], export barriers [5, 6], export assistance programmes, the means of entering into international markets [7, 8] and internationalisation strategies [9, 10, 11]. There is no consensus in the literature on the explanatory factors of export behaviour [12], but it is possible to identify two main areas of research. The first direction aims to determine the characteristics that differentiate export and non-export companies, and the second area is focused solely on export companies, internal and external forces that ensure the success of export outcomes for companies.

Export success has been considered in terms of performance, export quantities, sales growth and profitability [5, 13]. It has also been suggested that successful export outcomes are derived from the ability of the company to respond to external surroundings by developing and implementing appropriate strategies [11]. Some authors affirm that in order to achieve international success, companies not only have to possess the appropriate capacities, but constantly update them in a way that can be easily adapted to their international surroundings and easily transferred as knowledge [14].

In the literature, a wide range of variables that influence export success are identified. These variables are distributed into three main areas: marketing elements, specific factors belonging to the company and factors of the external environment [14]. When referring to marketing variables, the selection of markets, prices, product development, promotion and distribution are recognised as the factors that can determine the success of exportations and include export marketing strategies [15].

Factors specific to the company are internal variables related to the export process such as technology, planning, management, quality of personnel, quality of products and financial conditions. As for external factors, designated variables associated with the destination countries include trade agreements, fiscal incentives, export tariffs, export subsidies, trade restrictions, regulations, economic stability and market potential [14, 15].

Export Success Factors

According to these aspects, the variables in this study have been re-categorised into two groups. The first are business factors, which include internal factors, and the three variables of marketing elements, namely, export commitment, international experience and export strategy. In this manner, we identified three key points of international business: management, capacities, finances and strategies.

The second group consists of sectoral factors highlighting external factors that affect the exports of a company, which include the following variables: export assistance programmes, business networks, tariff legislation, sector size and sector innovation.

Business Factors. The internal strengths of the organisation are the management decisions influenced by executives for dealing with existing changes in the market [15, 16, 17]. Specifically, in the context of the export sales strategy, [18] argue that marketing decisions and adaptation strategies are supported by management strengths, such as the international experience of a company and its participation in international business.

Export Commitment. Export commitment refers to the degree in which the company assigns organisational and management resources to its export activities [18, 19]. Increasing its commitment and the level of allocated resources, a company can improve its planning processes and apply more adaptive strategies.

When a company shows a strong commitment to export, managers are motivated to work harder to perform demanding work, such as adaptation strategies involving the necessary resources [11, 13, 15, 20]. The organisational skills that can drive export success include coordination mechanisms such as teamwork, communication and other forms of shared goal-oriented work [21, 22]. The more export commitment a company has, the more export success it has due to the involvement in planning and assigning financial and human resources to its export activity [19, 23]. The degree of the export success may change depending on the international involvement of business partners or export commitment, with highly involved companies focusing on advertising and communication strategies [23].

Export commitment is an important part of the export process. Export success relies on internal policies, which assign organisational and management resources for this activity. Budget allocation, advertising, context analysis, adaptation of products or other activities are evidences of export commitment that ensure effective relational exchange, including export success [19].

International Experience. Several authors have explained how knowledge, decision-making logic or network relationships affect export activities [24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30].

The experience of the company is key in the export process [25, 28, 29]. In general terms, international experience, whether by the trajectory of the business in the international market or due to executive experience, has a significant in-

fluence on the choice to enter into international markets in search of consolidating their organisation. Firms with less international experience tend to suffer difficulty competing in foreign market activities [26]. Therefore, previous international experience of a company and/or executive experience are among the characteristics that influence the decision to enter international markets and achieve export success [24, 29] and that direct a company's resources toward internationalisation strategies and reduction of the uncertainty of export activities, given that this organisation has the knowledge of international market dynamics [29, 31].

In general, international experience allows a firm to develop skills to face competitors, as well as a more exact perception of foreign risks of entering international markets to achieve export success. Therefore, the relationship between a firm's accumulative international and export success is positive [26, 29, 31]. This international experience is related to internationalisation knowledge (ability to detect new opportunities and new markets), experiential knowledge (cultural or institutional and network knowledge) and procedural knowledge (policies and process knowledge) [30].

Export Strategy. Export is a successful tool for expanding the internationalisation process. Firms improve export activities either after creating specific internal governance configurations or after increasing committed resources [26].

Business strategies represent the general direction of companies, and distinct types of business strategies affect the ways in which companies incorporate and articulate information from their environment [5, 32]. To identify different types of export strategies, the aspects that constitute such strategies must be established. Among different studies, strategy as a competitive dimension stands out [26, 33], as well as strategy related to elements of the marketing mix applied to foreign markets [2, 18]. To identify the export strategy that determines export success it is necessary to consider four marketing-mix variables: strategies per product, price, distribution and promotion [2, 26, 34]. These variables measure the degree to which companies adapt to different foreign markets.

In light of these business factors, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1a. Export commitment positively influences the export success of Colombian export businesses.

Hypothesis 1b. International experience positively influences the export success of Colombian export businesses.

Hypothesis 1c. Export strategy positively influences the export success of Colombian export businesses.

Sectoral Factors. External strengths are a result of management decisions influenced by the strengths of the market [16, 17]. Thus, the ability of a business to rapidly adapt to international markets is associated with its ability to learn from the market opportunities and changes in its surroundings [35]. These external forces include a group of factors affecting export outcomes of the business and, thus, export success according to the type of activity or industrial sector [36]. Economic sectors possess different characteristics; therefore, their business outcomes can vary. In this case, the possibilities for export companies to succeed are going to depend on the conditions of the sector to which they belong [37].

Export Assistance Programmes. Assistance programmes and promotion of exports include export service programmes such as seminars for potential exporters, export guidance, guides for financing exports and market development programmes [38]. According to [39], governments have improved their budgets on export assistance programmes; however, there is limited research in this area to justify this requirement. The use of export assistance programmes is a significant success factor for exports [38], given that these programmes allow executives to overcome export barriers, encourage positive attitudes among managers and improve their perception of exportation, thereby increasing company export activities [38].

Planned Export Assistance Programmes, provided to local exporting firms, allow them to exploit the market's full export potential [40]. Therefore, there are more options for achieving export success because firms are competent to obtain knowledge about markets, customers, regulatory agencies, local supplies, etc. [40, 41].

In general, there is a relationship between export assistance programmes and export success because those programmes are useful for creating value in chain networks such as chances for developing exports or international operations, obtaining more information about the environment, acquiring resources for improving production or distribution capabilities, etc.

Participating in Business Networks. Connections allow companies to develop network relationships with other businesses, essential for organisational operations, but this exchange should be useful for both parts, sharing relevant information [42, 43]. For this reason, researchers have developed the concept of 'coopetition' to ex-

plain the idea of the interchange between firms with similar products.

There is the capacity for developing relationships to create bonds with different partners around the world, for example, with other organisations and clients [43, 44]. Other kinds of relationship (economic, political, social, etc.) can be helpful for increasing export and their export success.

In their constant search for business opportunities and due to their proactive stance, export businesses connect with multiple organisations to acquire resources and complementary capacities, as well as access information and valuable knowledge of great use for their export markets [42, 43, 45]. Therefore, export success will depend on the way that the business organises its relationships in the business network to which it belongs [46].

Tariff Legislation. Trade barriers hinder the achievement of export success [47, 48]. This speaks to the importance of relying on skills to face tariffs and tariff restrictions imposed by governments [47]. In the same way, fiscal incentives and export subsidies influence export activity.

Governments are capable of imposing different tariffs and regulations to incentivise or limit the entry of products into their markets. This type of regulation can generate advantages or disadvantages for export companies that directly affect their export success [49, 50, 51].

Sector Size. In each economic sector, there are differences in demand, economies of scale, degrees of monopolisation and specific assets. These factors support the relationship between the sector activity and profitability of the businesses [1, 52]. The development of internationalisation processes requires the mobilisation of resources whose accessibility depends on the size of the sector to which the companies belong [1, 53]. Additionally, businesses whose structures are supported by a solid sector are able to better endure the commitment of resources involved in internationalisation and the search for success in their outcomes.

Sector Innovation. Some authors consider internationalisation to be a process of business innovation [1, 54, 55]. Alonso & Donoso [56] explain that the correspondence between internationalisation and innovation is based on a company's and/or sector's choice between increasing international commitment or developing innovations. These two decisions must be weighed within the framework imposed by the business sector and internal capacities of businesses; they are made under conditions of uncertainty. Alfranca & Juarez [57] state that business growth and export outcomes depend on

the ability to maintain innovative activities, given that innovation requires new products and production techniques. Innovation in the sector involves increasing research and development processes (R&D), thus improving the quality of products and services [1, 54, 55]. Positive empirical evidence shows a positive relationship between innovation and export success [1, 54, 55, 58].

Regarding these sectoral factors, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 2a. Export assistance programmes positively influence the export success of Colombian export businesses.

Hypothesis 2b. Participation in business networks positively influences the export success of Colombian export businesses.

Hypothesis 2c. Tariff legislation positively influences the export success of Colombian export businesses.

Hypothesis 2d. The size of the sector positively influences the export success of Colombian export businesses.

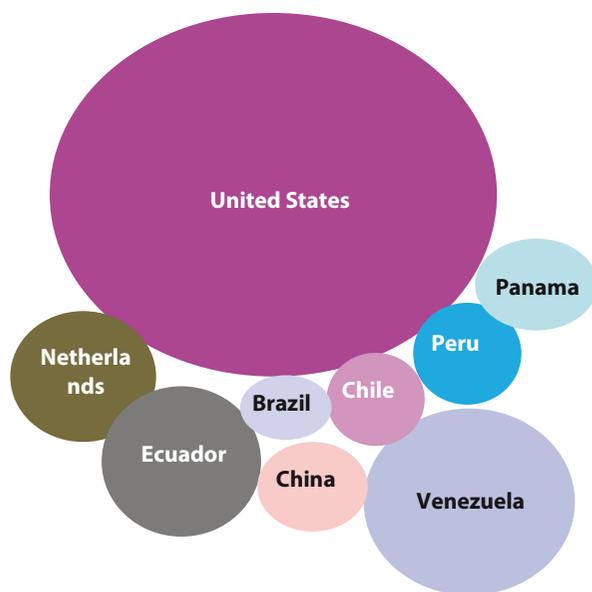*Hypothesis 2e.* Innovation in the sector positively influences the export success of Colombian export businesses.

Methodology

Export Dynamics in Colombia

Colombian export increased by approximately 25.9 % between 2003 and 2019 resulting from international sales of oil and its derivatives. The majority of flows are directed to the Andean region and the United States (USA) known for their market dynamics. The USA represent just over one quarter of total amount of exports in the overall period. Other relevant partner is Venezuela (one of the top five countries), whose share is around 9.3 % (Figure 1). This dynamic can be explained by the problem of choosing an export destination country for Colombia in the field of internationalisation of businesses. Companies seek to minimise labour, transport, tariff costs and eliminate other issues affecting their choice. However, transportation costs and logistics became a key aspect ensuring the enterprise's competitiveness and access to international markets.

Multilevel Models

Due to problems with the research and hypotheses proposed in this study, it is necessary to construct a model that incorporates both business and sectoral variables. Thus, a multilevel or hierarchical analysis was performed, which includes not only individuals but also groups [59]. This aggregation of different groups makes it possible to

It is important to note that due to the dependent variable not being continuous, a Multinomial Multilevel Logistic model was used to successfully describe the response options and the structure of two levels included in the model. In general terms, if the reference category of the dependent variable is g, the following is specified:

$$\pi_{ij(s)} = P\left(y_{ij} = 1\right), \qquad (1)$$

$$\log\frac{\pi_{ij(s)}}{\pi_{ij(g)}} = \beta_{0(s)} + \beta_{1(s)}X_{1j} + \beta_{2(s)}X_{ij} \ldots + u_{0(s)};$$

$$S = 1, 2, \ldots, g - 1, \qquad (2)$$

$$u_{o(s)j} \backsim N(0, \sigma^2_{u0(s)}), \qquad (3)$$

$$\sum_{g=1}^{h}\pi_{ij(h)} = 1. \qquad (4)$$

This study seeks the best fit model based on a theoretical model that contains the contrasted relationships [15, 62]. For this objective, we propose to perform four steps:

Model 1: A model with control variables is generated.

Model 2: A model with business variables is created.

Model 3: A model with sectoral variables is created.

Model 4: A model that includes both business and sectoral variables is created.

Data and Variables

To perform this study, information was collected through a questionnaire that contained variables at the business and sectoral levels. This questionnaire was applied to 270 export businesses in Colombia and was specifically directed toward their executives.

The variables used were divided into 3 groups: Control Variables, Business Variables and Sectoral Variables. These categories are described as follows:

Control Variables

Size. Measured by the number of employees in the company in the last year.

Age. Measured by the number of years since the establishment of the business until the time the sample was collected.

Gender. The gender of the funding business owner of the company: female or male.

Business Variables

International Experience. Measured by the average number of years that the business owners of each sector were involved in export activities.

Destination country	Share, % 2003/2012
United States	39.1
Venezuela	9.3
Ecuador	4.6
Netherlands	3.0
Peru	2.8
China	2.5
Chile	2.1
Panama	1.9
Switzerland	1.8
Brazil	1.5
Subtotal	68.7
Other	31.3
Total	100.0

Fig. 1. *Export dynamic in Colombia*
Source: DANE (Deparment of National Statistic in Colombia)

obtain better estimations of standard errors and differentiate the effects at the micro (business) or macro (sectoral) level and the relationships between these levels. Thus, the study uses a top-down approach [60] as a way to analyse the influences generated at the higher level over the lower level (Sector-Business).

Therefore, we chose these types of models because of the existence of possible differences in firm performance resulting from the use of variables related to various sectors of economic activity, as traditional techniques do not directly demonstrate their influence [61]. This means that such models are able to identify the differences associated with the individuals and groups to which they belong, avoiding the simple statistical aggregation of individuals and the resulting generalisations that assume all individuals interact with their context in the same way.

Export Commitment. There is no single measure of Export Commitment. However, one of the most used methods is to estimate financial and human resources that the business commits to its export activities [63].

Export Strategies. To measure the export strategy of the company, knowledge about competitors, price, distribution efficiency and product adaptation is used [2].

Sectoral Variable

Export Assistance Programmes. According to Lesch, Eshghi & Eshghi [64], these programmes are measured as the average number of times export service programmes of the "*x*" business in the "*n*" sector were accessed. The programmes include seminars for potential exporters, export orientation, guides for export financing and market development programmes.

Cooperative Networks. Measured by the average number of cooperative networks that the "*x*" business belongs to in the "*n*" sector in the last year.

Tariff Legislation. Measured by the tariff of the product "*j*" that the "*x*" business produces in the "*n*" sector. For this measurement, the Shared Tariff Nomenclature of the Andean Community (NANDINA, by its initials in Spanish) is used, including an appropriate division of the Andean Integrated Tariff (ARIAN, by its initials in Spanish) and the current tariff percentage to connect different ARIANs within different sectors.

Sector Size. The average of employees in the sector is taken as a parameter for measurement. Therefore, the total employees in the "*n*" sector is added and then divided by "*x*" businesses existing in the said sector.

Sector Innovation. Includes the changes generated in each sector regarding new products and production techniques. Therefore, its measurement is centred on the average of the volume of total innovations in the sector, making it possible to incorporate incremental as well as radical innovations. In this sense, the measurement is obtained by adding the innovations of the existing "*x*" businesses in "*n*" sectors.

Results

To confirm that there is no multicollinearity in the model, the individual reliability of each variable is evaluated. To this end, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is used, making it possible to rule out this problem before obtaining the levels in all variables under 5 [65].

The Cronbach's alpha value is 0.813, indicating that the level of reliability is acceptable. Concerning validity, indications show that the measurement method is appropriate and was previously used in literature. Additionally, the correlation coefficients of the total items were large and representative, revealing internal validity. The correlations of two items were representative in all cases (lowest correlation = 0.154; $p < 0.01$), which is a sign of the presence of convergent validity.

The variables were included step by step: first, the control variables in Model 1; then, the business variables in Model 2; and finally, the sectoral variables in Model 3 (Table 1).

Model 2 allowed us to test the first group of hypotheses. A positive relationship is observed between export commitment and the export success of Colombian export businesses (Beta: 6.7854; sig. = 0.001), proving the hypothesis stated. In the same manner, Hypothesis 1b is confirmed, showing that international experience positively influences the export success of Colombian businesses (Beta: 5.6581; sig. = 0.005). Finally, this study shows the positive relationship established in the literature between export strategy and the export success of Colombian export businesses (Beta: 4.4009; sig. = 0.005). After evaluating Model 2 and before moving to Model 3, the regression indicators obtained in Model 2 were analysed to confirm the explanation achieved by the business variables. This concluded that the variables were significant and relevant in the study. Afterwards, Model 3 was conducted in which the sector variables were incorporated, and the hypotheses set up on this level of analysis were shown. Hypothesis 2a was verified, affirming that the export assistance programmes had a positive influence on the export success of Colombian export businesses (Beta: 1.3880; sig. = 0.001). Consequently, this result is not odd, as shown by findings of selected studies stating that there is a direct effect connecting export assistance programmes and export success of these businesses (for example, [38]).

Further, it is proved that participation in business networks positively influences the export success of Colombian export businesses (Hypothesis 2b), according to the results of this study (Beta: 1.9977; sig. = 0.005).

Additionally, it is confirmed that the relationship between tariff legislation and the export success of Colombian export businesses (Hypothesis 2c) is positive (Beta: 0.8875; sig. = 0.005). Hypothesis 2d, regarding the positive relationship between the size of the sector and the export success of Colombian export businesses, is also proved (Beta: 6.7854; sig. = 0.001). Finally, evidence is generated concerning sector innova-

Results of the Regression Analysis

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Size	0.00456	0.00412	0.00363
Age	36.3431	34.6786	31.6864
Gender	1.678	1.534	1.232
Business Variables			
Export Commitment (Hypothesis 1a)		6.3244	6.7854
International Experience (Hypothesis 1b)		4.987	5.6581
Export Strategy (Hypothesis 1c)		4.5756	4.4009
Sectoral Variables			
Export Assistance Programmes (Hypothesis 2a)			1.3880
Cooperative networks (Hypothesis 2b)			1.9977
Tariff Legislation (Hypothesis 2c)			0.8875
Sector Size (Hypothesis 2d)			0.00043
Sector Innovation (Hypothesis 2e)			0.7681
Adjusted R^2	0.007	0.1317	0.2477
Change in R^2	—	0.1247	1.16
F	7.86	11.78	9.978

Source: compiled by the authors.

Results of the Multilevel Model

Variables	Estimate	*t*-statistic	*p* Value
Size	0.00363	4.75	0.001
Age	31.6864	3.54	0.001
Gender	1.232	12.47	0.001
Business Variables			
Export Commitment (Hypothesis 1a)	6.7854	10.65	0.001
International Experience (Hypothesis 1b)	5.6581	3.78	0.005
Export Strategy (Hypothesis 1c)	4.4009	30.44	0.005
Sectoral Variables			
Export Assistance Programmes (Hypothesis 2a)	1.3880	8.87	0.001
Cooperative Networks (Hypothesis 2b)	1.9977	37.09	0.005
Tariff Legislation (Hypothesis 2c)	0.8875	14.69	0.005
Sector Size (Hypothesis 2d)	0.00043	6.22	0.001
Sector Innovation (Hypothesis 2e)	0.7681	3.54	0.001
Adjusted R^2	0.2477		
Log Likelihood M. Null	−54.665		
Log Likelihood M. Complete	−42.433		

Source: compiled by the authors.

tion and its positive influence on the export success of Colombian export businesses (Hypothesis 2e: Beta: 0.7681; sig. = 0.001).

Once the different variables and two levels of the study were incorporated, the displayed variances (values of adjusted R2) of the models were compared through the *F*-test [66]. The increase that was generated in R2 between Models 2 and 3 is representative (∇F = 1.16; p < 0.001), confirming that Model 3 shows a higher variance percentage than Model 2, going from 0.1317 to 0.2477 (see Table 2).

Conclusions

The study aimed to empirically explain how export firms achieve superior export success based on various business factors (which include internal factors) and the three sectorial variables (export commitment, international experience and export strategy). We were particularly interested in the relationship between internal and external factors and their effects on export success.

Through the chosen theoretical model and the quantitative method, we contribute to the research on the phenomenon of export firms in a develop-

ing country. Firstly, there are few researchers using variables associated with the destination countries, such as trade agreements, fiscal incentives, export subsidies, trade restrictions, regulations, economic stability and market potential; we are the first to use export tariffs as a relevant quantitative variable. Therefore, we provide important explanations of how export firms are able to achieve superior export performance through particular resources and capabilities [1, 16, 17, 54, 55]. Secondly, we contribute to a better understanding of the effects of variables related to the environment in order to achieve great export outcomes [13, 11]. Thirdly, we focus on export firms from Colombia and therefore contribute to the research from a developing country perspective [19, 23].

Concerning the export success, the direct dependence of the variable on business factors is confirmed. This fact could indicate that companies that have greater business success are those having higher export level commitment, international experience, and an export strategy aimed at innovation or differentiation. Therefore, the company is able to demonstrate greater export commitment by applying more adaptive strategies and involving more resources for this activity [13, 11, 19, 23]. Moreover, international experience is consolidated into a highly relevant factor for achieving good international performance, and therefore, it is possible to infer that export outcomes are affected in businesses with little experience in the market or with executives who are not familiar with international dynamics. However, greater international experience should not be considered an indicator of the ability to overcome the obstacles that hinder the growth of export activity. In this sense, a test of the moderating effect of experience over that between barriers and export success found that while experience favours greater international sales, businesses with greater export experience as well as less export experience both show similar negative effects of obstacles on export success.

Regarding the export strategy, differences have been found between the types of export businesses. In this case, the businesses were categorised as businesses with high export levels and those with low export levels [26, 34]. This division was performed based on evidence and, upon finding a primary analysis of the data, different types of export strategies chosen by participating businesses were involved in this study. Thus, the businesses that reported high export levels and a high dynamic in recent years stood out mainly due to vertical differentiation in terms of the quality of their products and innovation. Meanwhile, the businesses with lower export levels and export dynamism were classified based on horizontal differentiation, i.e., according to price, distribution, and other factors.

As for the sectoral variables that ended up being highly relevant for export success, the export assistance programmes, networks, tariff legislation, size and innovation of the sector stood out. Export assistance represented a supporting factor for improving business outcomes as it demonstrates available service options to the companies that were linked to these activities and were unaware of parameters for increasing their performance, financing agencies and other services [26, 34, 64]. In the same way, business networks play an important role in ensuring good export outcomes, generating the need to rely on proactive managers suggesting integration with other organisations to improve the flow of information, address new market requirements, minimise the absence of resources in the organisation, and develop new skills within the network.

Within this study, tariff legislation played an important role, as an increase in these tariffs leads to a large barrier for export in the sector, directly affecting possible export outcomes [48]. In this sense, the need to rely on necessary information about tariff legislation in each destination country where the product is taken or is expected to be taken to is proposed. Additionally, in recent years, the tariff dynamic is considered a way to minimise the possible future effects or examine the probability of frequent changes in countries where the export products are sent to or expected to be taken from [54, 55].

The results obtained should motivate businesses to invest in research and development (R&D) activities to eliminate export barriers and improve export success. In the same manner, these types of sectoral innovation activities could generate or encourage networks with other businesses to strengthen business outcomes [1, 54, 55]. Likewise, it would be important to study whether there is a mediating role between innovation and the existing relationship between networks and export success.

Along the same lines, the surrounding or sectoral variables are considered to be highly influential in the outcomes leading to export success. In this manner, it is worth noting that the local context of the study generated some results that are in agreement with the existing literature. These findings should be carefully analysed; it should also be noted that even though the study was conducted for only a short amount of time, it still contributes to the knowledge in the field of business internationalisation.

However, it would be ideal to expand this investigation to other international areas or incorporate dynamic elements through time series instruments to include other factors that could be of great relevance or consolidate those factors presented in this study.

Concerning future research, it would be important to delve into how other socio-demographic, institutional and quality factors affect the possibility of attaining high export outcomes. In this sense, it will be necessary to observe the complementarity between those new and already analysed factors to verify the intensity of this synergistic effect on export success, even generating differentiation among destination countries chosen by the business owners.

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