

2021

## Export Success and Sustainable Strategies for Cameroonian Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

CHRISTIAN N. BIKAI  
*Walden University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Economics Commons](#), and the [Entrepreneurial and Small Business Operations Commons](#)

---

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu](mailto:ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu).

# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Christian N. Bikai

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

## Review Committee

Dr. Alexandre Lazo, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Lionel De Souza, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Ify Diala-Nettles, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Export Success and Sustainable Strategies for Cameroonian Small and Medium-Sized

Enterprises

by

Christian N. Bikai

MS, University of Côte d'Ivoire, 1993

BS, University of Côte d'Ivoire, 1992

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

November 2021

## Abstract

According to the Cameroon Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute 99.8% of companies, employ over 70% of the active population, and contribute significantly to economic growth and development. However, less than 25% of new SMEs in Cameroon survive beyond 3 years.

Sustainability is essential to small business owners in exporting coffee from Cameroon as an indicator of economic growth and job creation. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study guided by the transaction cost economics theory was to explore strategies owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. The participants included four small business owners in Cameroon exporting coffee from Cameroon who sustained businesses beyond 3 years. These small business owners participated in semistructured individual interviews conducted virtually. Yin's 5-step process for data analysis revealed four themes: control of the coffee production chain, partnership, trade agreements benefices, and lowering transaction costs. The key recommendations for small business owners exporting coffee from Cameroon include focusing on controlling the supply chain coffee production, creating and building solid partnerships, harnessing the benefits of trade agreements, and working on reducing transaction costs. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase the survival rate of SMEs, leading to job creation and improved living standards in local communities.

Export Success and Sustainable Strategies for Cameroonian Small and Medium-Sized

Enterprises

by

Christian N. Bikai

MS, University of Côte d'Ivoire, 1993

BS, University of Côte d'Ivoire, 1992

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

November 2021

## Dedication

I thank God for the grace and opportunity to complete this DBA journey. I dedicate this study to my wonderful daughter Ivanne P. Ngo Bikai for her unflinching support and picking me up when I was down; this would not have been completed without you. I dedicate this academic milestone to Jacques R. Bikai, Sara H. Ngo Bikai, and Samuella C. Ngo Bikai. One of the reasons why I enrolled in this doctoral program was to show you that there is no limit to what you can achieve if you put your mind to it. I also dedicate this academic milestone to my dear wife, Andree Sidonie, for her unending support, perseverance, prayers, especially for her endurance during moments of my unavoidable absences. I also dedicate this study to my father, my mentor, and to my late mother. How I wish you were here to see your little boy progress in life. Finally, I dedicate it to the Almighty, for I cannot mention all his spiritual direction and the strength and sound health that God blessed my family and me with to support me in completing this study with focus.

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my chair, Dr. Alexandre Lazo, for his mentorship, support, guidance, and understanding. Also, special thanks to Dr. Lionel de Souza for his feedback and support during this journey. I am very thankful and appreciative to Dr. Charles Needham and Dr. Ify Diala for their timely feedback. I am grateful to my Student Success Advisor Dr. Richard Hay for his encouragement, guidance, patience, dedication, and attention he provided to me through this journey. I like to thank my wonderful wife Andree Sidonie and my lovely daughter Ivanne Pierre for their moral and emotional support. I would also like to thank my friends, classmates, and other faculty members for sharing their knowledge and experiences. God bless you!

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....	1
Background of the Problem .....	2
Problem Statement .....	3
Purpose Statement.....	3
Nature of the Study .....	4
Research Question .....	5
Interview Questions .....	5
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Operational Definitions.....	7
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	8
Assumptions.....	8
Limitations .....	8
Delimitations.....	9
Significance of the Study .....	9
Contribution to Business Practice.....	10
Implications for Social Change.....	10
A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature.....	11
Transaction Cost Economics Theory .....	12
Evolution of the TCE Theory .....	16
Criticism of the TCE Theory .....	17



The TCE Theory Analyzed.....	19
Small and Medium Enterprises.....	23
The Role of Exports in the Sustainability of SMEs.....	24
International Support for Exports.....	27
Small Business Success and Failure.....	33
Supply Chain.....	39
Logistics Chain.....	42
Competitiveness.....	44
Transition.....	47
Section 2: The Project.....	48
Purpose Statement.....	48
Role of the Researcher.....	49
Participants.....	51
Research Method and Design.....	54
Research Method.....	54
Research Design.....	57
Population and Sampling.....	60
Ethical Research.....	62
Data Collection Instruments.....	65
Data Collection Technique.....	68
Data Organization Technique.....	73
Data Analysis.....	74

Compiling .....	75
Segmentation.....	76
Coding	76
Disassembling.....	77
Reassembling .....	77
Interpreting.....	77
Concluding.....	78
Reliability and Validity.....	78
Reliability.....	78
Validity .....	80
Transition and Summary.....	84
Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change.....	85
Introduction.....	85
Presentation of the Findings.....	86
Theme Identification and Analysis .....	87
Theme 1: Control of the Coffee Production Chain.....	89
Theme 2: Partnership .....	92
Theme 3: Trade Agreements Benefices.....	94
Theme 4: Lowering Transaction Costs.....	96
Applications to Professional Practice .....	98
Implications for Social Change.....	102
Recommendations for Action .....	103

Recommendations for Further Research.....	106
Reflections .....	107
Conclusion .....	109
References.....	112
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	165
Appendix B: List of the Interview Questions for the Study .....	166

## List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of Emergent Themes and Participant Acknowledgement ..... 88

Table 2. SMEs Owners' Responses to Researcher's Participation Request ..... 89

## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Exporting small business owners could benefit from an improved understanding of the importance of the transaction cost economics theory and effective strategies to improve small business sustainability. Small businesses play an essential role in the world economy and contribute to creating wealth, economic growth, and development worldwide (Blankson *et al.*, 2017). Small businesses constitute 99.8% of companies (Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises [MSME], 2019, p. 34) and employ more than 72% of the private-sector workforce in Cameroon (MSME, 2019, p. 35). According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2018), SMEs constitute over 95% of all businesses, account for 60% to 70% of employment globally and provide a significant share of new jobs in different countries. Less than 61.5% of SMEs survive beyond their first 3 years, while the survival rate of SMEs beyond the first 5 years remains below 42% (Gray & Saunders, 2016).

Researchers have identified internationalization as one of the solutions for the survival of small businesses (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2016). In this study, I identified the relevance of the transaction cost economics theory and the effective strategies that successful exporting small business owners use to remain sustainable beyond 3 years. This section includes subsections on (a) the background of the problem; (b) the problem and purpose statements; (c) the nature of the study; (d) the research and interview questions; (e) the conceptual framework; (f) operational definitions; (g) assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; (h) the significance of the study; and (i) a review of the academic and professional literature.

## **Background of the Problem**

The failure of small businesses might be one of the most salient factors in the Cameroonian economy's inability to modernize. In Cameroon, SMEs constitute 99.8% of companies (MSME, 2019, p. 34) and are the category of companies with the highest number of bankruptcies and closings (45% of closings in 2009, 69% in 2010, and 72% in 2016; Evou, 2020, p. 4). In the United States, less than 50% of SMEs survive beyond 5 years (Small Business and Entrepreneurial Council, 2016). Less than 25% of new SMEs in Cameroon survive beyond 3 years (National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon, 2015). The high failure rate of nascent SMEs is the result of a lack of management skills, strategic planning, education, and experience on the part of entrepreneurs (Purves *et al.*, 2016).

The internationalization of SMEs is a strategy of expansion of activities necessary when development and survival are no longer possible domestically (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2016). Exports of goods and services are an incentive for economic and social development that leverage the potential to increase economic growth and reduce poverty. On the other hand, exports are often also a source of foreign exchange outflows for transactions with imports (Bakari, 2017). In Cameroon, on average, new exporters have a 30% chance of continuing to export the following year, and this probability falls to about 12% by the third year (World Bank, 2016). Understanding the factors related to the sustainability of SMEs exporting coffee from Cameroon can offer new owners of exporting SMEs the necessary strategies to support their business for more than 3 years.

### **Problem Statement**

In Cameroon, SMEs constitute 99.8% of businesses (MSME, 2019, p. 34) and are the category of companies with the highest number of bankruptcies and closings (45% of closings in 2009, 69% in 2010, and 72% in 2016; Evou, 2020, p. 4). Of the 49,881 SMEs registered between 2010 and 2016 in Cameroon, fewer than 13,817 were operating at the end of 2016 because of factors such as lack of funding and access to markets (Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Regional Development [MINEPAT], 2016). The general business problem is that some small businesses in Cameroon are unsuccessful in sustaining businesses beyond 3 years. The specific business problem is that some owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon lack strategies to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon can use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. The sample comprised four owners of small businesses exporting coffee located in Cameroon who sustained their business beyond 3 years of operation. The implications for positive social change include the potential for Cameroonian small business owners to develop skills and strategies for successful export business operations, supporting the expansion and development of agriculture and industry, and possibly leading to the creation of new jobs and improved wages.

### **Nature of the Study**

When selecting a research method, the researcher may choose qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. I selected the qualitative research method to capture the human experience. Researchers in qualitative studies use open-ended questions to capture the human experience and explore a phenomenon (Athukorala et al., 2016; Graci & Fivush, 2017; Yin, 2018). In contrast, researchers use a quantitative research method to define and quantify a problem by using numerical results (Yin, 2018). The mixed methods research requires the researcher to spend more time analyzing both qualitative and quantitative research (Yin, 2018). To explore strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon can use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation, I did not test hypotheses, which are part of a quantitative method, or the quantitative portion of the mixed methods study.

I considered three research designs to explore the study on Cameroonian SMEs sustainability: (a) case study, (b) narrative, and (c) phenomenological. I selected a multiple case study design. A multiple case study is an appropriate design when a researcher is asking what, why, and how questions about a phenomenon under investigation in its natural context (Yin, 2018). Researchers use a case study design to explore a phenomenon using multiple data sources. In contrast to the case study, narrative design requires extensive information (Yin, 2018). When conducting the data collection and analysis, researchers may experience issues because the narrative must determine who owns the story, who will tell the story, and whose version will convince the audience of the story (Graci & Fivush, 2017). Phenomenology is a research design in which a



researcher seeks to identify single or several individuals' common human experiences with phenomena (Cibangu & Hepworth, 2016). Neither the narrative nor phenomenological design were appropriate for this study because I did not seek to explore the stories of the participants' lived experiences.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do SME owners exporting coffee from Cameroon use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What export strategies have you used to achieve success in your business?
2. What challenges have you encountered in developing and implementing export strategies to sustain your business?
3. What did you find worked best to overcome these challenges?
4. What did you find worked best to access the international market?
5. What did you find worked best to reduce transaction costs?
6. How did your business mission and vision influence the strategic process to sustain your exports during the first 3 years?
7. How did the provisions of the international and domestic trade agreements contribute to the success in your exporting business?
8. What additional information would you like to share regarding the strategies used to succeed and sustain exports under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the European Union and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (EU-ACP) Agreements?

9. What other information do you see pertinent that we did not discuss in this interview?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The transaction cost economics (TCE) theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Coase (1937) developed the TCE theory, and Williamson (1979) reintroduced and expounded the TCE theory during the 1970s. The TCE theory includes the transactions as the unit of analysis and has as its central concern to create value from the coordination of governance structures that, according to Williamson (1985), may occur through vertical integration, market, or contracts. Transaction costs are the trajectories of capability development that determine the nature of the knowledge acquisition process and, quite possibly, the kind of competition that may arise in an industry. Therefore, transaction costs determine the nature of the underlying features and capabilities that a business may leverage for competitive advantage (Augusto & de Souza, 2015). The TCE theory is a substantial approach to understand how transaction costs influence the profitability of business activities and organizational behavior (Anderson et al., 2014).

Using the TCE theory as the lens for this study enabled a deeper exploration of the strategies that some owners of small businesses exporting coffee located in Cameroon used to minimize their transaction costs to sustain their businesses. Companies have both direct and indirect costs associated with establishing contracts between firms and service providers (Williamson & Ghani, 2012). Researchers use the principles of the TCE theory to aid with the minimization of transaction costs. TCE is an optimization theory useful in the analysis process to help managers decide stratagems such as produce or buy choices

or insource or outsource decisions. Managers often make hierarchies vs. market decisions based on transaction costs when they use the TCE theory (Williamson & Ghani, 2012). The postulations of the TCE theory can serve to analyze each transaction, seeking the governance structure that minimizes transaction costs and thereby increases the efficiency of the firm in the short term (Neves et al., 2014). The goal of the TCE theory is to reduce transaction costs ultimately through efficiency, aiming to achieve sustainable competitive advantages (Augusto & de Souza, 2015).

### **Operational Definitions**

*Entrepreneurial success:* A concept that includes (a) financial success as a measure of earnings, sales, and net worth; (b) relative success as a measure of a firm's performance when compared to competitors in the same industry; and (c) personal success as measured through personal satisfaction, pride in the job, personal achievement, and lifestyle flexibility (Smith, 2015).

*Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs):* An SME represents a business employing up to 100 workers, with revenue below \$3 billion “Franc de la Communauté Financière Africaine” (francs CFA; African Financial Community Franc) or \$5 million (MSME, 2015).

*Small business:* A small business is the same as an SME, defined as any business employing up to 100 workers, with revenue below \$3 billion francs CFA or \$5 million (MSME, 2015).

*Sustainability*: The ability of an organization to respond to short-term financial needs without compromising the ability to meet future needs (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014).

*Transaction costs*: Resources or fees that must be expended when completing transactions (Hsieh et al., 2016).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are ideas that researchers believe to be true, often without adequate proof to support these beliefs (Schoenung & Dikova, 2016). An assumption is what is acceptably true about research work and how peers obtain and align information as influential factors to support truth and accuracy (Dinsmore, 2017). Assumptions are introspective beliefs a researcher maintains that influence research (Wolgemuth et al., 2017). The first assumption of this study was that the participants would answer questions truthfully and would provide accurate and comprehensive data. The second assumption was that selected participants would agree to participate voluntarily. The third assumption was that participants were able to provide useful information on the research topic.

#### **Limitations**

Limitations are restrictions beyond the researcher's control (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Limitations are weaknesses or areas of deficiencies of a study due to reasons beyond the control of the researcher (McCarthy & Muthuri, 2018). Three significant limitations were apparent. The first limitation was that the literature focused on the

strategies that SME owners used to sustain their businesses was relatively scarce, and the number of recently published studies examining SME strategies in Cameroon was low. The second limitation was that the sample size of four businesses might not represent other enterprises in Cameroon; therefore, the findings might not transfer to other SMEs. The third limitation was that participants may feel intimidated during the interview process and may not feel comfortable talking openly lest their identity and answers to questions not remain confidential.

### **Delimitations**

Research delimitations of a study are self-imposed limitations on the scope and design of the study (Snelson, 2016). Delimitations are choices that a researcher makes and must mention, representing the boundaries set for the study (Qiu & Gullett, 2017). Delimitations are situations within a researcher's control, such as addressing participants' comfort level during data collection by incorporating icebreakers before the interview (Yin, 2018). The number of participants was four Cameroonian owners of SMEs exporting coffee. The second delimitation of this study was that participant owners would have at least 3 years of experience exporting coffee. The third delimitation was that the study only included owners of SMEs who have implemented strategies to sustain businesses beyond the first 3 years of operation. Owners of SMEs who have failed were not eligible to participate in the study, only the owners of SMEs who have succeeded.

### **Significance of the Study**

The results of this study could include strategies that Cameroonian SME owners implement to succeed and sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. Because

the literature on Cameroonian SMEs exporting coffee appears limited, professional managers and small business owners in Cameroon would benefit from the strategies that could help to succeed and sustain activities beyond the first 3 years.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Cameroonian small business owners might use the results of this study to develop new business strategies. The improvement in strategic planning, programming, and knowledge of the international market, regarding requirements and regulations, could contribute to reducing the failures of Cameroonian SMEs. The findings from this study may contribute to improving business practice by providing information that can reduce the effects of the lack of strategies to sustain SMEs. Owners of SMEs in Cameroon may use the results of this study to prevent and mitigate the impact arising from the lack of strategic planning, programming, and knowledge of the international market regarding requirements and regulations to the survival of SMEs in Cameroon. The results, conclusions, and recommendations from this study may help SMEs owners in Cameroon to improve sustainability and minimize the impact of inventory shortages and disruptions in the coffee supply chain in the international market. Sub-Saharan African exporting SME owners could use the findings of this study to explore the potential causes of failure of SMEs and implement prevention and mitigation strategies.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications of positive social change include social issues that are of public concern and affect the welfare of individuals, communities, institutions, or society (O'Cass & Griffin, 2015). Knowing the level of development of Cameroon, positive

social change can improve the humanitarian and economic conditions. Successful businesses effectively contribute to improving the conditions by creating jobs, increasing participation in sustainable development programs, and contributing to economic growth (Polonsky et al., 2016). Export success and sustainability of SMEs exporting coffee from Cameroon could lead to increased coffee exports and, thus, to increased GDP. The increase in the production of coffee in Cameroon may lead to an increase in activities in the coffee distribution chain. Increased coffee production may reduce unemployment and poverty, especially in rural areas. Cameroonian's SME owners involved in exporting coffee could be able to pay more taxes. The Cameroonian government could use these taxes to improve infrastructure, building roads, bridges, schools, homes, and amenities.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon used to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. In the literature review, the researcher provides the basis of inquiry to the overall research question. Researchers review the literature to build a logical framework for the research and add support to the research topic (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In this literature review, the purpose was to discuss and analyze how TCE theory could be appropriate for SMEs as well as how some exporting coffee SME owners have used TCE to develop successful strategies for sustainability.

In this first section, I analyze the central concepts of the TCE in detail while addressing its relevance to this study and then discuss conditions relating to long-term sustainability, including specific issues associated with exporting SMEs in Cameroon.

The purpose of literature reviews is to present a summarized analysis and evaluation of the ideas of other authors and relate the study to the results of other studies and the wider body of knowledge (Wakefield, 2015). In this literature review, I have aligned the problem statement and research methodology with peer-reviewed and scholarly sources to support the research question. This literature review includes an analysis of the topics related to how owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon achieved sustainability and remained in business for longer than 3 years.

The search terms used in this review include *TCE*, *SMEs*, *small business success*, *small business failure*, *small business growth*, *sustainability*, *export support*, *supply chain*, *logistics chain*, and *competitiveness*. I used web pages and books from the search engine Google Scholar, the University research databases, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. These sources include peer-reviewed articles that helped me to explore this topic and contributed to critical synthesis in the literature review. The literature review includes 147 sources, all of which were peer-reviewed. Out of the 147 peer-reviewed sources, 125 had a publication date less than 5 years from the completion date, representing 85% of the total sources.

### **Transaction Cost Economics Theory**

TCE was the conceptual framework for this case study. The theories of economic exchange are under the significant influence of TCE (Remneland-Wikhamn & Knights, 2012). TCE is a fundamental method for analyzing how transaction costs affect the benefits of business operations as well as human and organizational behavior (Anderson et al., 2014). The TCE theory includes four elements that adversely impact transactions,



causing high-cost contracts and maximum marketplace frictions. The four components are uncertainty, unpredictability, limited bargaining power, and high-cost economic relationships. These factors also include the rationality that limits the opportunity to scan all choices to negotiate costs and the individuals' inherent opportunism that make the enforcement of contracts more complex and challenging (Williamson, 1985)

### ***Uncertainty and Unpredictability***

In being prepared to address the uncertainty involved in organizational activities, leaders can achieve the goals of profitability, growth, and sustainability. Both effective strategic planning methods and efficient financial information systems have a direct relationship with business success. The primary management function of strategic planning is to reduce uncertainty and unpredictability, which may lead to the reduction of high transaction costs. Contemporary planning and business management practices include the mechanisms of enforcement access to formal contracts as a complement to trading favors. Scoring possibility and incentive compatibility can work as fundamental components of the practice of trading favors (Verbeke & Kano, 2013). The hierarchical classification of trading favor applications should be based on their link to the formal contracting and should describe a range of likely effects (Verbeke & Kano, 2013).

### ***Limited Bargaining Power and Market Choices***

When corporate leaders have a smaller number of economizing choices, they might face difficulties to make effective and efficient decisions. When leaders have more options, they usually make better decisions. Managers can make more economized decisions when they have more organized choices (Coase, 1937). Trading favors in

emerging economies is a prevalent business practice, and researchers have used the TCE theory to analyze the advantages of trading systematically as an economizing practice to achieve their efficiency goals (Verbeke & Kano, 2013). Trading favors is a process of economizing with the goal of cost reduction and efficiency. Trading favors is an essential element of the relationship contract, is part of transaction control, and leads to minimizing the transition costs (Verbeke & Kano, 2013).

### ***Rationality***

Using the TCE theory as the lens for this study might lead to the implementation of new strategies to succeed and sustain small businesses. Rationality limits the ability to analyze all the choices to negotiate expenses; therefore, it leads to an increase in contracting costs and a reduction in the profitability of companies (Verbeke & Kano, 2013). Managers need to monitor and reduce transaction costs by focusing on control and rationality, which can lead to more opportunities for innovation (Remneland-Wikhamn & Knights, 2012). In TCE theory, trading favors is an essential element in the contracting portion of corporate governance and operations and leads to economizing bounded rationality and bounded reliability.

Under the TCE theory when rationality and opportunism are related, contractual problems occur often. Foss and Weber (2016) stated that the imbalance in contracting stems from the underdeveloped assumption of bounded rationality in TCE theory, which relies solely on the limit of processing capacity and leads to faulty contracting. Developing and maintaining buyer-supplier relationships is an essential premise for many business leaders who are developing channel initiatives. These relationships can lead to

significant performance improvement and competitive advantage. These connections may also lead to adverse events such as partnership opportunism (Wang et al., 2013). The critical behavioral assumptions that influence transactional challenges are bounded rationality and opportunism. Bounded rationality emphasizes decision-makers' difficulties in holding and evaluating all complexities relating to decisions. Opportunism refers to how decision-makers can act in self-interest and guile, often taking advantage of an emerging situation to suit their needs (Shi et al., 2017).

The environment, which involves stakeholders with a variety of perspectives on desirable outcomes, is causing more complications in the decision-making process of international managers (Huff et al., 2016). Because of the limits of rationality, multinational managers rely on heuristics or rules of thumb to guide the decision-making process. These heuristics are techniques that simplify the decision-making process, while managers from different cultures have different perceptions of the business world and differ in the way they clarify their facts (Huff et al., 2016).

### ***Individuals' Inherent Opportunism in Economic Relations***

In the TCE theory, the nature of human behavior is significant when adapting actions or making decisions regardless of the sacrifices of ethical principles (Coase, 1937). Human behavior is a complex and essential factor that managers must study to understand how it affects enterprises' organizational cooperation and social change with contractors (Laudon & Laudon, 2015). The opportunism inherent in human nature makes the enforcement of contracts more complicated and challenging, which leads to an

increase in economic relations costs, market frictions, and business relationship conflicts (Verbeke & Kano, 2013).

One ongoing goal for contractors and their corporations is to trade favors. The trading of favors is an ethical and fair process in a business that an individual could have peacefully rooted in social norms in which when these expectations are not met make trading favors difficult (Verbeke & Kano, 2013). The decision-making process of global managers relies on motivational biases based on diverse cultural values and definitions of self-interest (Thomas & Peterson, 2015). In traditional TCE theory, managers focus primarily on mitigating opportunism-based transaction costs (Foss & Weber, 2016).

### **Evolution of the TCE Theory**

The theory of transaction costs evolved for several years because of the costs of economic operations presented in commercial relations for centuries (Hardt, 2009). It rests, in its current developments, on specific hypotheses different from the neo-classical axiomatic, mainly a hypothesis of different rationality. Coase first introduced the notion of transaction cost in 1937. Coase, the founder of TCE theory, attributed the existence of the organization to the cost of using the price mechanism (Coase, 1937). The economics of transaction costs have a considerable influence on the theories of financial exchange (Remneland-Wikhamn & Knights, 2012).

Williamson completed the work initiated by Coase by adding to its heterodox hypotheses, in the sense that they differ from the neo-classical axiomatic to which Coase did not derogate in his works. With the evolution of information and technology, TCE theory is an essential method for determining the influence of transaction costs on the

profitability of the business process, as well as on the behavior of individuals and companies (Anderson et al., 2014). From this perspective, the transaction cost theory demonstrates that imperfect information enables parties of a contract to operate opportunistically by exploiting any information asymmetry (De Schepper et al., 2015).

Transaction cost theory, as developed by Williamson (1975), emphasizes the economic importance of constructing governance structures for individual transactions to reduce contractual hazards. The base of Williamson's early development of transaction cost theory was the idea of small number contracting under conditions of imperfect and asymmetrically distributed information (Williamson, 1999). A critical extension of Coase's theorem indicates that, if all transaction costs are zero, the use of resources will be similar regardless of the type of organization of production and exchange activities. Therefore, in the absence of transaction costs, other institutional or organizational arrangements would provide no basis for choice, and the interpretation of transactions by the TCE theory might not be possible (North, 2016).

### **Criticism of the TCE Theory**

The TCE theory experienced a significant evolution marked by controversy. TCE served as an essential anchor for analyzing a wide range of strategic and organizational issues. During the evolution of the TCE theory, studies have demonstrated that the requirements of the theory are probably not only wrong but also dangerous, because of the assumptions and logic on which they are based (Ghoshal & Moran, 1996). After testing the fundamental design goal, the philosophy and applicability of TCE theory,

researchers found that TCE theory could be useful in application to stakeholder theory (Ketokivi & Mahoney, 2016).

The stakeholder theory is an organizational management theory and business ethics that addresses the morals and values of the organizations' management (Freeman, 1984). The primary purpose of the business entities is to create value for the internal and external stakeholders. To achieve corporate goals of profitability and sustainability, leaders must keep their interests aligned with those of stakeholders (internal and external), including customers, suppliers, employees, communities, and shareholders (Freeman, 1984). Researchers who oppose TCE theory have made several criticisms, arguing that the theory lacks generality due to an ethnocentric bias and that it is ignorant of the contextual basis of human actions and, therefore, presents a sub-socialized vision of human motivation and a super-socialized vision of institutional control (Ghoshal & Moran, 1996).

Transaction costs are often difficult to measure and, as noted earlier, difficult to separate by type. However, to avoid the measurement problem, the researcher can specify how these costs vary under different observable circumstances, and their different types are separable if viewed in terms of changes at the margin. These two conditions are requisite in the derivation of testable implications for the interpretation of organizational behavior (North, 2016). The use of transaction costs to analyze organizational choice is superior to 3 other approaches, including incentives, risk, and the costs embodied in dishonesty, cheating, shirking, and opportunistic behavior.

The approach for incentives indicates that incentives are not in principle observable. Therefore, the researcher will do better in deriving testable propositions if the problem remains the same in terms of the costs of enforcing performance. The second approach adopting the risk demonstrates the difficulty to ascertain the alteration of risk under different circumstances. Many risk problems such as the uncertainty about the enforceability of contracts are also transaction costs problems. Finally, some recent advances in the transaction-cost analysis have called attention to the costs embodied in dishonesty, cheating, shirking, and opportunistic behavior. The subjective examination is the main limitation of this approach (North, 2016).

Several researchers have identified five criticisms of TCE as the dominating view of boundary decision as follows. First, Firm Failure is a counterpart to Market Failure. Second, real variance in opportunism (lack of trustworthiness) substitutes for TCE's assumption of universal marketplace opportunism. Third, transaction costs are included as a mediating variable to investigate the theory's alleged causal mechanism. Fourth, Firm Failure implies that internal to the firm transaction costs increase when Dynamic Capabilities (DC) are low for insourced activities and decrease when DC is high. Finally, the study of buyer-seller relationships indicates that TCE overemphasizes the role of marketplace transaction costs, and the impact of DC is much more significant on firm boundary decisions as TCE (Gulbrandsen, Jay Lambe, & Sandvik, 2017).

### **The TCE Theory Analyzed**

As a concept, researchers use transaction costs in numerous ways in economics, from merely referring to the fees charged by a financial broker to a much broader concept

encompassing the comparative efficiency of alternative modes of resource allocation and economic coordination. At the most general level, transaction costs are the costs that arise beyond the point of production of a good to affect its allocation (Klaes, 2016).

Researchers use TCE to understand how individuals and groups make (and should make) decisions to generate economically advantageous outcomes (Ketokivi & Mahoney, 2016).

The distinction between production and allocation may not be meaningful in all instances. Transaction costs may or may not include transport costs, may or may not refer only to market exchange, may or may not concern only a single alternative category such as information costs or the cost of time. Some authors measure transaction costs in monetary terms, others as departures from first-best outcomes, or just based on qualitative comparative rankings of feasible institutional alternatives (Klaes, 2016). The understanding of the TCE theory is possible with the analysis of complex contracting in its entirety, in which the contracting parties have the foresight to create safeguards to maintain the integrity of the exchange relationship (Ketokivi & Mahoney, 2016).

For many researchers, focusing on the existence of firms from a TCE perspective, opportunism is a necessary and sufficient condition for asset ownership. However, for Martynov and Schepker (2017), opportunism may not always be necessary to explain such decisions. Uncertainty bounded rationality, and risk aversion may contribute to integration decisions if the value of the assets that one party seeks to use may be affected (Martynov & Schepker, 2017). The TCE conventional solution to reduce transaction costs generally involves choosing a hierarchical governance structure and shifting from



market to contracting or contracting to vertical integration (Aleksandra et al., 2018). Transaction cost is defined by Williamson (1985) as all the ex-ante and ex-post contracting, monitoring and enforcement costs connected with conducting exchange activities between firms (Gulbrandsen et al., 2017). Minimizing transaction costs and maximizing relationship commitments have become the central research phenomena in inter-firm relationship management.

Firms' managers seeking transaction costs advantage should pay more attention to economic governance mechanisms, whereas managers with the intention of resolving a large number of conflicts informally and developing personal ties should refer more to sociological governance mechanisms (Shahzad et al., 2018). Transaction cost theory (TCT) indicates that the nature of transactions determines the selection of the most efficient contractual arrangements for governing economic activities. The markets are best suited to manage transactions characterized by low frequency, low uncertainty, and low asset specificity, while hierarchies are the most appropriate in the presence of high frequency, high uncertainty, and high specificity (Akbar & Tracogna, 2018). TCE theory focuses on a small number of transactions. The analysis of TCE theory shows that increased transaction costs cause opportunism.

The fundamental concepts of TCE theory are a) environmental uncertainty, b) specific assets, and c) opportunism. Environmental uncertainty and specific assets create exchange hazards that result in opportunism. Meanwhile, specific assets reduce coordination costs raised by environmental uncertainty (Huo et al., 2018). According to the results of the study of Huo et al., (2018), demand uncertainty decreases opportunism,

supply uncertainty increases opportunism, and technology uncertainty does not have a significant effect. User-specific assets increase opportunism, while provider-specific assets decrease opportunism (Huo et al., 2018). Transactions within the organization may include costs such as management and monitoring, procuring inputs, and capital equipment. Transactions outside the organization may include costs such as search and information costs, bargaining costs, and policing and enforcement costs (Sambasivan et al., 2017).

In terms of structure, firms are hierarchical entities based on authority relationships following the idea of private order. Authority is, therefore, the key to analyzing the employment relationship for decades after Williamson and Coase Knight. Consequently, authority resides at the heart of the study of institutions of capitalism and therefore of the firm. For Williamson, authority is a source of efficiency to minimize transaction costs and create value issued from coordination and cooperation (Baudry & Chassagnon, 2019).

Ronald Coase wrote in his seminal article about transaction costs that pervade the stages of deal-making: “operations are often extremely costly, sufficiently costly at any rate to prevent many transactions that business would carry out in a world in which the pricing system worked without cost.” During the three stages of pre-deal, deal-making, and post-deal, transaction costs include search costs, bargaining, and decision costs, and, finally, policing and enforcement costs. To reduce these costs, each stage depends on obtaining information. The digital platform has the potential to increase access to information by the application of advanced technology to every aspect of the deal. It

thereby impacts the relevant transaction costs at all three stages. As the platform grows, efficiency grows as well. In systemic ways, the market perfects itself (Lobel, 2018).

### **Small and Medium Enterprises**

To categorize businesses, researchers and organizations use various standards, mostly related to the number of employees and revenue to define and classify small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Lampadarios, 2017). In Cameroon, according to the Law No. 2010/001 of April 13, 2010, SMEs are subdivided into 3 groups: Very Small Enterprises (VSEs), Small-sized Enterprises (SEs) and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MEs). SMEs are categorized in the National SME file based on the number of permanent employees and turnover when they registered. A company is considered a VSE if it has no more than five employees and an annual revenue of no more than XAF 15 million (\$30,000). SEs are companies with six to 20 employees and an annual revenue ranging from XAF 15 million to XAF 100 million (\$30,000 to \$200,000).

An enterprise shall be considered a ME if it has 21 to 100 employees and an annual revenue of more than XAF 100 million and less than XAF 1 billion (\$200,000 to \$2 million), which was extended to XAF 3 billion (\$6 million) in 2015 (MSME, 2015). Meanwhile, in other countries, such as the United States, SMEs include businesses with fewer than 500 employees (Small Business Administration, 2015). In developing countries such as Cameroon, SMEs have enormous potential for job creation, entrepreneurship, and the creation of an industrial fabric that can adapt to the needs of large national companies (Tsambou & Kamga, 2017). In developing countries, staff characteristics in SMEs include a) personal relationships with the owner, part-time

workers, lack of skills, and low wages (Lampadarios, 2017). In developing countries, SMEs are the pillars and the lifeblood of modern economies and are the building blocks for the economy (Thelepis et al., 2016).

Hollender et al. (2017) analyzed the importance of the role of SMEs in growth at various stages of economic development, including the contribution to production, the achievement of social objectives, the attraction of foreign exchange reserves in a country and providing employment. In developing countries, SMEs can transform and develop communities (Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017). In rapidly changing and competitive business environments, SMEs have a strong influence on the economic development of developing and developed countries (Margaretha & Supartika, 2016). SMEs can promote local knowledge by using local raw materials (Peprah et al., 2016). In developing countries, SMEs can transform and develop communities (Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017). In rapidly changing and competitive business environments, SMEs have a strong influence on the economic development of developing and developed countries (Margaretha & Supartika, 2016). SMEs can promote local knowledge by using local raw materials (Peprah et al., 2016).

### **The Role of Exports in the Sustainability of SMEs**

Most national and local governments around the world have implemented trade support initiatives. Mainly offered by export promotion agencies, these programs can be defined as a set of activities aimed at helping firms to overcome internationalization obstacles (Van Biesebroeck et al., 2016). International trade research includes the mode of penetration of foreign markets as a critical element. Companies may choose to enter

foreign markets alone through direct exports, in partnership with other companies via contracts with distributors, or by making a direct investment in a foreign country (FDI) (Bruneel & De Cock, 2016). For SMEs, economic globalization has generated new competitors but also the opportunity to access new markets and to develop innovative strategies to enhance competitiveness.

Not only can SMEs' development considerably benefit from international activities, but also, the ability of SMEs to create, develop, and transfer knowledge on global markets is the essential source for competitiveness. Understanding competitive advantage requires a multidimensional framework (German & Boscoianu, 2016). Some studies demonstrated the evidence that exporting improves SMEs' growth, competitiveness, and survival through increasing their productivity, innovation, and performance, and the Government Export Promotion Programs (GEPPs) which has an indirect impact on export performance through the enhancement of SMEs' relationship quality (Haddoud et al., 2017). Exporting firms' managers need to recognize and understand their customers and foreign competitors, be able to improve or adjust their capabilities, target multiple segments of the export market, manage different partners, including international distributors, adapt their products according to the shifting needs and trends of their customers (Evangelista & Mac, 2016).

With low risk, less commitment and greater flexibility in adjusting the volume of goods to different export markets, export is a more attractive way to enter international markets, especially for SMEs, in comparison with other alternatives, such as joint ventures, which involve spending a large number of resources (Fuchs & Köstner, 2016).

Export activity fulfills specific business goals, which may be economical and strategic. Export motivation may result from proactive or reactive actions. Exporting firm's managers adopt proactive strategies when the goals are the advantage of profit, the introduction of a single product, technological advantage, exclusive information, the commitment of management, tax benefits and economies of scale. On the other hand, when the goals are identifying competitive pressures, excess production capacity, sales decrease or saturation in the domestic market and proximity of customers and landing ports, exporting firm's managers adopt reactive actions as a strategy (Stouraitis et al., 2017).

Challenges and opportunities confront SMEs in international markets. Together with large corporations, SMEs are among the key players in international trade. SMEs that belong to traditional (low-tech and labor-intensive) industries can find here the opportunity for growth or challenge their survival (Rua et al., 2018). SMEs play a fundamental role in the economic development and poverty reduction in many countries. With globalization, developing countries are becoming increasingly interdependent for the international exchange of goods and services, labor, innovation, and technology. Thus, the internationalization of SMEs can serve as an effective means for developing economies to become proactive, to identify opportunities that offer comparative advantages, and take innovative measures for economic growth, job creation, and prosperity (Igwe et al., 2018).

In a highly competitive global business environment, SMEs owners are seeking strategies to improve their performance specifically in terms of export contribution.

Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) is a managerial capability in which firms' managers embark on innovation, proactivity, and risk-taking initiatives to maintain their competitive advantage (Imran et al., 2018). Through small and medium businesses, owners, managers, customers, as well as countries have value, and researchers consider the crucial role of SMEs in the country's exports. To increase exports, every country relies on the participation of both small and large firms (Imran et al., 2018).

Country exports can be enhanced through substantial participation of SMEs because small businesses are relatively easy to start, require low capital investment, and are easy to manage (Dar et al., 2017). Due to their significance in spurring innovation, exports, and economic growth, many countries have focused on supporting the development of more and more SMEs (Rehman, 2016). The role of exports in every nation's economy is important, influencing the level of economic growth, employment, and the balance of payments (Ahmad et al., 2017; Fatemah & Qayyum, 2018). Regardless of the nature of the nation's economy, SMEs make a significant contribution to innovation, regional development, and social cohesion, which contribute significantly to GDP, employment, and exports (Rehman, 2016).

### **International Support for Exports**

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), and the European Union and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (EU-ACP) Agreements include tangible incentives for African countries to continue efforts to open their economies and build free markets (AGOA, 2016; Carbone, 2019). The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) is expected to help small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon to the United States

to be more competitive. The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) is unilateral trade legislation between the U.S. and eligible countries of sub-Saharan Africa that was enacted in May 2000 by President Clinton. The primary goal of AGOA is to expand trade with Africa by capitalizing on vast and diverse opportunities and incorporating the continent into the world economy (Lamprecht & Tolmay, 2017). Signed in 2000, it has helped increase trade, but it has not reached its full potential in enhancing the development of most African states. The act is designed to promote economic development in sub-Saharan Africa through privileged access of African goods into US markets and increased US investment flows into Africa.

AGOA is a non-reciprocal preferential trade program that the US offers to 49 sub-Saharan African countries. President Obama's decision to extend AGOA, which was set to expire at the end of September 2015, for another ten years (2015 to 2025), was highly controversial. The Extension and Enhancement of AGOA Act, signed into law by President Obama, on 29 June 2015, included many new provisions to incorporate the views of the US Congress on the implementation of the ten-year extension and the future trajectory of AGOA (Ismail, 2017). A core element of AGOA includes tangible incentives for African countries to continue their efforts to open their economies and build free markets, with the underlying presumption that open markets are the foundation for economic development (Babarinde & Wright, 2017).

SSA consists of countries that are geographically part of the South of the Sahara, except Ethiopia, South Africa, and South Sudan (Chukwuogor, 2016). AGOA is expected to boost exports of eligible products from eligible countries (Coulibaly, 2017). To be



eligible, SSA countries must comply with the set of conditions required for AGOA preferences contained in the AGOA legislation. Each SSA country must be working to improve its economy as well as some socio-political issues, including the rule of law, human rights, and respect for core labor standards (AGOA, 2016). Governments should put in place mechanisms to promote entrepreneurship initiatives aimed at creating and maintaining a favorable business environment, allowing SMEs owners to realize their full market potential (Cant & Wiid, 2016).

Nonreciprocal agreements have had an economically significant effect on exports not only for beneficiary countries but also for benefactor countries (Gil-pareja et al., 2017). With the AGOA, most of the exports from SSA countries can now enter the USA duty-free, which is expected to boost the exporting and manufacturing sectors in SSA. The impact of the economic vulnerability and implementation of good governance are estimated might help Sub-Saharan African countries to overcome poverty. Strong institutional integrity helps to reduce the negative effects of economic vulnerability on economic growth (Zaouali & Zaouali, 2015). From the perspective of Ee (2016), the export-oriented growth strategy is valid in SSA countries.

While U.S. tariff reductions allow a small but statistically significant increase in the probability of maintaining existing trade relationships, the magnitude of the impact on new exports is twice as large as the impact on continuously traded goods and the likelihood of disappearing products (Hejazi et al., 2017). Although non-oil African exports to the United States have not increased much under AGOA between 2001 and 2015, eligible countries' exports to the United States have become slightly more

diversified and industrialized. The most substantial increase in exports has been mainly in textiles and clothing, vehicles, and machinery (Davis, 2017). SSA is a competitive region to source from, because of cheap labor and the duty-free benefits through AGOA. However, several challenges hinder a significant increase in sourcing from SSA, including bureaucratic delays, lack of qualified personnel, constant breakdown of equipment, lack of advanced textile technology, low-quality standards, long lead times, bribery and corruption, logistical issues including poor logistics infrastructure and high inland transportation cost (Adikorley et al.,2017).

Substantial trade preferences and the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) are the basis of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which includes a wide range of products manufactured in qualified African countries with access to the American market. The eligibility of a country depends on the annual progress in improving institutional quality, eradicating poverty, encouraging trade and investment, increasing access to health services and education and strengthening the private sector (Mahabir et al. 2018). Two factors contributed to the underutilization of AGOA preferences: firstly, there was limited capacity, including limited productive capacity and infrastructure challenges in AGOA-eligible countries, limited the capacity of African countries to produce and sustain exports eligible products under AGOA preferences. Secondly, the requirements for U.S. market access (such as product standards, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and rules of origin) limit African exports to the United States under AGOA, as African countries find it difficult to ensure that their products meet those requirements (Davis, 2017). Local governments need to put in place loan

guarantee systems to promote and develop SMEs as a national investment initiative.

SMEs must be supported to produce higher returns to contribute to economic development (Crick *et al.* 2018).

To participate in AGOA, all forty-nine countries of sub-Saharan Africa must be prequalified by the US president as an eligible less developed country and must comply with stipulated preconditions of the trade legislation. More specifically, these countries must be a market-based economies, have removed barriers to trade and investment with the US, protect intellectual property rights, respect the rule of law, embrace political pluralism, implement anti-corruption policies, respect and protect fundamental human rights, as well as internationally recognized workers' rights and labor standards (including child labor), implement policies for reducing and eradicating poverty, eliminate support for all acts of terrorism, and eschew all activities that undermine the national interests of the US. In sum, an eligible African country must continuously implement reform policies that enhance its domestic business climate, integrate it into the global economy, and are not harmful or antithetical to American domestic and foreign interests (Babarinde & Wright, 2017).

The Lomé Africa-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP)/European Union (EU) convention offers the ACP nations various benefits, including tariff-free access to the EU market. The tariff-free access applies to all but a few of the ACP nations' goods, which are covered by the COMMON Agricultural Policy. The EU statistics demonstrate that 90% of ACP goods enter Europe tariff-free (Parfitt, 2016). For more than 50 years, the EU has offered various types of non-reciprocal trade preferences for developing countries. The

main direct goal of non-reciprocal trade preferences is to increase export earnings for developing countries. Export earnings are expected to increase both because exporters can charge a higher price than they would if they paid full Most Favored Nation (MFN) tariff, which is the lowest, and because the quantities of exports increased (Persson & Wilhelmsson, 2016).

Lowering the EU preferential tariffs contributes to the increase in the extensive margin of trade for agricultural products (Scoppola *et al.*, 2018). The Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) concluded between the EU, and the ACP include extensive trade liberalization, ranging from tariff reductions to the liberalization of services. EPAs are a crucial element in the EU-ACP relationship, supporting trade liberalization and the competitiveness of the private sector as essential components of poverty eradication (Langan & Price, 2015). Access to finance and SME export orientation is a new area of research because of the importance of SMEs in international business activities and their contribution to the countries' economic growth.

The results of these studies have shown that the export orientation of SMEs is an essential asset for competitiveness (Ključnikov & Popesko, 2017). However, the growth rate and export activities of SMEs are limited by the lack of financial support from banks and other financial institutions because of the perception of the SMEs' higher probability of default (Belás & Sopkova, 2016; Petr, 2016; Vojtovic, 2016; Ključnikov & Popesko, 2017). EPPs are essential governmental tools that motivate firms to consider exporting. EPPs used in both developed and developing countries are targeted explicitly to SMEs to support their entry and survival in international markets. The programs provide

knowledge on foreign markets, grant access to specific information, conduct trade missions abroad, and can be useful for participation in international trade fairs, among other benefits (Geldres-Weiss & Carrasco-Roa, 2016).

Because EPPs are set up to support SMEs in overcoming export barriers, including new market trends, different customers, regulations, and fierce competition, EPPs are inevitably useful for SMEs for sustaining their performance (Coudounaris, 2018). The problem for improving the export performance of SMEs for the national economy is that SMEs are constrained by a lack of experience and limited resources to acquire export related information. The kind of external assistance EPPs provide is needed for SMEs to overcome these constraints (Han & Park, 2019).

In African countries, EPPs are an effective way to lessen the reliance on natural resources and diversify their economy (Haddoud et al., 2018). Exports are essential for economic growth and the creation of wealth in developing countries (Haddoud et al., 2018; Gebrewahid & Wald, 2017), not only because most firms in developing countries are small- and medium-sized enterprises (Wilson, 2018). The internationalization of SMEs through exports could potentially improve efficiency and competitiveness and generate enormous benefits such as employment generation, poverty reduction, and foreign exchange earnings (Damoah, 2018; Babatunde, 2017; Dominguez & Mayrhofer, 2017).

### **Small Business Success and Failure**

The failure risk is higher with the lack of separation between ownership and control in the SMEs governance system (Süsi & Lukason, 2019). SMEs faced significant

constraints in developing their export potential, including operational problems such as scarcity of human and financial resources, lack of experienced staff, and difficulties in designing and implementing successful marketing strategies abroad; difficulties in obtaining valid and reliable information on external markets and developing contracts abroad; problems in identifying and selecting markets, and incorrectly matching products with demands; as well as inadequate knowledge of exportable products and little understanding of the factors underlying international competitiveness (e.g., packaging, quality norms and standards) (Garone *et al.*, 2017). Exporting firms also encountered other barriers specific to export activities, such as language, paperwork, invoicing, and sales management. Another major obstacle was the lack of technical assistance services appropriate to the needs of SMEs, particularly in the area of foreign-trade-specific non-financial services.

The failure of SMEs is related to the failure in meeting supplier performance standards. In turn, there are several factors that contribute to the failure of SMEs to meet supplier performance standards, including (a) unclear specifications and terms of references from suppliers; (b) insufficient information provided to SME suppliers to ensure understanding of requirements; (c) insufficient feedback and support; (d) no support of SME suppliers based on their Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) status; (e) limited or no use of business support programs by SME suppliers; and (f) external factors such as access to finance, changes in the economy, and location (Van Scheers, 2016). Access to external finance is necessary to reduce the impact of cash flow problems for SMEs (Sitharam & Hoque, 2016). In West Africa, SMEs are a mixture of self-

employment and dynamic businesses with a variety of activities, concentrated in urban areas. SMEs lack access to the financial resources necessary to expand, mature, and transform into higher size thresholds (Quartey et al., 2017).

The success of a business is not just a measure of financial performance (Kearney & Meynhardt 2016; Mazzei et al., 2016). However, financial success relies primarily on tangible resources for business continuity and growth (Bush, 2016; Mazzei et al., 2016). On the other hand, some small business owners consider their contribution to creating new jobs, maintaining productivity, and economic growth (Miller et al., 2016).

Szczepańska-Woszczyzna and Kurowska-Pysz (2016) found that the success or failure of an SME depends on the choices and behavior of owners. Practical strategies and behaviors used by small business owners can have a positive influence on the sustainability of the business, which can reduce the risk of business failure (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014). The success of SMEs depends on the efficiency of owners who can well formulate and communicate new strategic directions of the company and motivate the employees.

Governments' tax regimes and regulatory are conditions affecting the smooth operations, the development, and the growth of SMEs (Zvarivadza, 2018). In Ghana, SME owners generally have the impression that policies adopted or instituted by Parliament do not have a positive impact on the growth of their businesses. Because of this, the cost of tax compliance and corruption is one of the leading causes of the failure of small businesses in Cameroon (Akinboade, 2015). Corruption is a real social issue, and tax regulation is an instrument of government policy for revenue collection. However, the

owners of SMEs seem to have a negative view of the tax policies adopted. Small business owners believe that paying taxes puts the profitability of their businesses at risk and poses a threat to their day-to-day operations. Owners of SMEs should be informed about tax regulatory systems to dispel this misunderstanding. Specialists should explain tax regulatory systems to encourage SME owners to understand tax systems (Koranteng et al., 2017).

A good understanding of the owners of SMEs of the phenomenon of corruption and the system of taxation is necessary to mitigate the impact of these two elements on their performance (Borchers et al., 2016). Corruption and abuses by state agents are the consequence of the non-respect of the tax system by the owners of SMEs. SMEs can better control their spending if their managers understand and comply with regulations and avoid paying excessive charges in the form of penalties and bribes. Amankwah-Amoah and Antwi-Agyei (2018) emphasized the need for quality controls, financial controls, and the process of creating a niche market to prevent business failures. Pryor et al.(2016) also drew attention to the need to learn about the cognitive processes of a small business executive, calling for recognition of the factors influencing generation, growth, and the sustainability of income.

The identifying factors influencing business failures have been studied various times. For example, Johnson et al. (2016) surveyed 626 vendors to determine the absolute and relative causes of failure. The authors felt that organizational well-being, including job satisfaction, corporate commitment, and turnover intentions, was critical to failure. Purves et al. (2015) also completed a study to explore the relationship between non-



financial and financial factors and business survival in Australian organizations. The results of this study indicated that non-financial factors associated with the organizations studied influenced their success or failure. These factors included management involvement in the organizational strategy, board composition, decision-making approach, and management competencies.

Devece et al. (2016) used data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) to analyze the 2008 economic crisis in Spain, as well as the pre-crisis economic boom. The results of the study revealed that necessity-based entrepreneurship was not useful in times of recession; however, innovation and the recognition of opportunities are considered as factors of success. The results also show that an entrepreneur's perception of openings can be misleading in booming economies. Manufacturing organizations, especially MSMEs (Micro-small and Medium Enterprises), need to focus on essential enablers of innovation to sustain global competition (Gupta & Barua, 2016). Faced with the frequent changes that occur in the contemporary global environment, SMEs are more flexible and responsive than large companies (Musa and Chinniah, 2016).

Many researchers also recognize the importance of small businesses and their contribution to the economy. Recognizing the contribution of small businesses is important because small businesses play a crucial role in creating jobs, providing social stability, and promoting economic growth (Carbaugh, 2015). Some commercial failures are inevitable. However, strategic factors can increase the likelihood of sustainability and success (Bush, 2016). To be considered a success, the company must at least achieve average profits in the industry (Lun et al., 2016; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2016).

Entrepreneurs create changes in the economy and businesses by taking risks, taking advantage of opportunities, and making decisions about achievement and power (Karimi & Hamedi, 2016).

The failure of enterprises as an important driver and consequence of entrepreneurial activity has been neglected in scholarly discussions about how the entrepreneurial opportunity is exploited (Amankwah-Amoah, 2016). Business failure includes bankruptcy and discontinuity of the business or property (Hruza, 2016). Business bankruptcies include organizations involved in legal proceedings or voluntary actions resulting in losses for creditors.

Understanding the failure of a business is important because a potential failure could have a short and long-term influence on the strategies, processes, and routines adopted by entrepreneurs. Many researchers have different perceptions of the failure in export. The failure in internationalization encompasses making unsuccessful entry attempts and then partially or fully exiting one or more markets (Lukason & Vissak, 2017). The failure means a firm's unexpectedly decreased involvement in international business (Nummela et al., 2016). Both internal and external factors can trigger this process, and as a result, the firm may even exit the business (Francioni et al., 2017).

Researchers use economic and social factors to measure a country's sustainable development. SMEs have an essential role to play in the sustainable development of a country. The high failure rate of SMEs is an obstacle to the country's sustainable development. The sustainability of SMEs is essential for job creation, poverty reduction, and sustainable economic growth (Fatoki, 2018). Researchers classified factors that affect

SME borrowing into four groups: (a) relationship lending (number of relations with financial institutions or years in the relationship), (b) transaction-based lending (requirement for audited financial statements, average number of used services), (c) asset-based lending (total assets, fixed assets, equity, real estate, commercial paper, and inventory) and (d) other factors (characteristics of SMEs or the sector that SMEs operate in, distance between banks and clients) (Nguyen & Wolfe, 2016).

### **Supply Chain**

The supply chain is the network of organizations that are involved, through upstream and downstream linkages, in the different processes and activities that produce value in the form of products and services in the hands of the ultimate consumer, including all the steps involved, directly or indirectly, in the satisfaction of a customer request. The supply chain includes not only manufacturers and suppliers, but also transporters, warehouses, retailers, and customers themselves. Supply chain management involves coordinating production, inventory, location, and transportation between participants in a supply chain to obtain the right combination of responsiveness and efficiency to serve the market. One goal of supply chain management might be to reduce or eliminate the buffers of inventory that exist between organizations in a chain through the sharing of information on demand and current stock levels (Christopher, 2016). Efficient supply chains could enable Cameroonian small businesses exporting coffee owners to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation.

Companies can make decisions in five areas to define the capabilities of their supply chain: inventory; location; transport; and information (Hugos, 2018). The

management of the supply chain network, including a supplier, a manufacturer, and a vendor, is one of the most important management functions for achieving long-term competitive advantage (CA). This CA may be because supply chain management's primary goal is to maximize profit or minimize cost (Zhang et al., 2018). Modern supply chains are inherently complex, comprising geographically disjointed multi-level entities competing to serve consumers (Lambert & Enz 2017). A major strategic and competitive issue for sustainability in supply chains is confirmation and verification that the processes, products, and activities within the supply chain meet specific sustainability criteria and certifications. (Grimm et al., 2016).

Supply chain resilience refers to the firm's adaptive capability to prepare for unanticipated events as well as react and recover from disruptions to resume normal operations or even be in a stronger position after a disturbance has occurred (Assilah, et al., 2016). As firms' supply chains become more global, and organizations explore markets in Africa, China, and Asia, the logistics of bringing demand and supply closer to each other are becoming more challenging. It raises some structural and security issues within the global environment (Varzandeh et al., 2016).

Optimizing supply chain entity performance necessitates creating significant trust in relying on one single organization or broker for storing their sensitive and valuable information (Abeyratne & Monfared 2016). Blockchain technology is a distributed database of records or shared public/private ledgers of all digital events that have been executed and shared among blockchain participating agents (Crosby et al., 2016). Blockchains are potentially disruptive technology for the design, organization,

operations, and general management of supply chains. Blockchain's ability to guarantee the reliability, traceability, and authenticity of the information, along with smart contractual relationships for a trustless environment, all portend a major rethinking of supply chains and supply chain management (Saber *et al.*, 2019).

Kirchoff *et al.* (2016) stated that regional domestic supply chains are confined within a region while the global supply chains are across the globe. The global supply chain involves the organization's worldwide suppliers, astronomical geographical coordinates, higher transportation costs, and sophisticated logistics because of the increased lead time in the supply chain. The characteristics of the global supply chain include dissimilarities in culture, language, laws, and currency (Kirchoff *et al.*, 2016).

To design an efficient and responsive supply chain, Fisher suggested that to devise an ideal supply-chain strategy, companies should follow 3 steps (as cited in Trang, 2016). The first step is determining whether their products are functional or innovative. While the demand for functional products is predictable, companies cope with unpredictable demand for innovative products. Various aspects of demand including product life cycle, contribution margins, product variety, forecast errors, stock out rate, end-of-season markdown and lead time should be considered in realizing which type products belong to (Trang, 2016). Most West and Central Africa countries have been experiencing ramshackle in commodity stocks of some of their key export commodities and long dwell time, making Just-in-Time (JIT) delivery impossible in the supply chain as has been discussed (Fouda, 2014).

## **Logistics Chain**

Proper logistics chain management could help small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon to gain visibility into the companies' supply chains and to use freight movements on the appropriate modes of transportation, which can significantly reduce costs. The logistics industry is a key contributor to global economic growth for empowering human and goods movement. The growth of the logistics industry is growing exponentially as the global economy increases. Indeed, it is strategically prominent for meeting customer demands globally, fostering the right place at the right time with the right goods in the right quantity and the right package at the right cost. For instance, the increasing growth of online shopping and home delivery leads to the rapid growth in transport and traffic (Karia, 2020).

The scope of logistics spans the organization, from the management of raw materials through to the delivery of the final product. In addition, logistics and supply chain management can include a multitude of ways to increase efficiency and productivity and hence contribute significantly to reduced unit costs. Logistics is essentially a planning orientation and framework that seeks to create a single plan for the flow of products and information through a business (Christopher, 2016). Poor logistics management can result in higher logistics costs, for example, inventory, transportation, order processing, whereby firms handling the processes will suffer from the higher logistical costs, resulting in lower profitability and reduced competitiveness (Lai & Cheng, 2016). Time, effort, and cost considerations often dictate logistics decisions (Darma Wangsa & Wee, 2018).

The cost paid, which depends on the logistic level of a country, directly affects exports (Martí & Puertas, 2017). Reducing international trade logistics costs requires the coordination of logistical activities among importers/exporters, transportation carriers, freight intermediaries (e.g., freight forwarders, third-party logistics providers and customs brokers), and government agencies are required (Talley & Riggs, 2018). The key element in a logistics chain is the transportation system, which joins the separated activities.

Logistics management typically includes the following activities: inbound and outbound transportation management, warehousing, materials handling, order fulfillment, logistics network design, inventory management, supply/demand planning, and management of third-party logistics (3PL) service provider (Grant et al., 2017). Transport is an essential link in successful supply chains because of its crucial role in global economic development, improving quality of life and business success. Effective transport processes ensure the rapid flow of essential goods across global supply chains. Efficient transport operations affect delivery costs by ensuring that products are affordable in multiple markets (Novack et al., 2019).

Logistics activities are becoming more integrated as the management of foreign trade becomes a part of natural evolution (Kalinicheva et al., 2016). Logistics management is essentially an integrative process that seeks to optimize the flows of materials and supplies through the organization and its operations to the customer. In addition to all logistics management activities, Supply Chain Management encompasses manufacturing, coordinating processes and activities with and between marketing, sales,

product design, finance, and information technology (Grant et al., 2017). The logistics of physical items generally involve the integration of information flow, material handling, production, packaging, inventory, transportation, housing, and often security (Devine, 2020).

### **Competitiveness**

Competitive advantage is the basis for the success of any company in the market. Many companies with decades of history are in a dynamic race with their domestic and global rivals. In addition, competitive advantage is the ability of the company to make its offer more attractive than the competition in the eyes of the consumers (Blazeska & Ristoviska, 2016). Lower logistics costs reduce the cost of delivering products nationally and globally, thereby encouraging sales, increasing trade, opening new markets, and encouraging business, in general. In addition, an improved understanding of logistics costs is important not only to better evaluate and target policy efforts in the freight transport and logistics sector but also to facilitate competitiveness across industries (Rantasila & Ojala, 2015).

SMEs have many constraints on export fronts, due to lack of resources and poor innovative capabilities. To face global competition successfully and overcome the dynamic challenges of the market, SMEs have to break their isolation in the value chain and use supply chain management as a competitive tool (Kumar & Kumar Singh, 2017). Businesses face new customer needs and global competition leading to fundamental changes in today's industry (Winkelhaus & Grosse, 2020). Competitive advantage may be



the result of the ability of owners to manage timely unpredictability that had a more significant effect on the survival and growth of businesses (Dobni et al., 2016).

The mediating effects on responsible innovation in the relationship between corporate social responsibility, environmental management and the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises depend on the inclusion of stakeholders in the innovation process, the anticipation of future trends in terms of social responsibility innovation and responsiveness to potential risks (Hadj, 2020). Globalization, competitiveness, and development expenditures are useful in poverty alleviation (Hassan, et al., 2020). Minimizing system-wide costs while meeting service level requirements demands that supply chain and logistics management include the set of approaches used to integrate suppliers, manufacturers, warehouses, and stores so that a company can produce and distribute merchandise in the right quantities and places, at the right time (Ansari et al., 2018).

The collaborative approach of supply chain performance can include the following effects: (a) a general risk reduction and the achievement of competitive advantages, (b) inventory level reduction, (c) total cost reduction, (d) lower customer rotation and (e) reduction in delivery lead time and revenue enhancements (Fera et al., 2017). A cluster is a group of enterprises, institutions, and other types of interdependent organizations concentrated in the same field, and whose primary purpose is cooperation among the participants. By using shared resources, the participants can gain a competitive advantage in the market. Owners of SMEs participating in a cluster can

exploit opportunities resulting from sharing resources and exchanging experiences and knowledge (Havierníková et al., 2017).

The success of SMEs exposed to the competition may depend on a well-managed change. In this case, changes in organizational factors will increase the SMEs' competitiveness and decrease the firm's operating costs (Mustafa et al., 2019). Small firms with a strategic focus of low cost or differentiation are more likely to achieve success if accompanied by the development of strong internal managerial competences (Agyapong et al., 2016). Small enterprises which are highly innovative can implement differentiation as a competitive strategy (Agyapong et al., 2016). Yanah et al. (2018) demonstrated that partnerships have more influence on competitiveness than other variables such as financing, entrepreneurship training, and business assistance.

SMEs are the most responsive to market needs, adaptable to changes, and mobile with innovations in response to consumer demands, bringing significant improvements to the competitive environment. Drawing attention to the SMEs' performance is necessary to increase their competitiveness, which depends on having access to a large market such as that of European Union countries, increasing the volume of exports, and developing innovative entrepreneurship (Zugrav, 2018). Most owners of SMEs face resource constraints and need support to acquire the skills and compete successfully in the international market (Zugrav, 2018). Ogbari et al. (2018) conducted a comparative analysis of SMEs' strategic orientations based on the presence of aggressiveness, futurity, riskiness, proactiveness and analysis, and defensiveness for performance. The results of the analysis show that to bring out change, enhance operational efficiency, and contribute

to organizational performance and competitive advantage, SMEs need to be innovative, proactive, and to foster more strategic improvisational actions.

### **Transition**

Section 1 included a description of the conceptual context of the study. The key elements in this section include the background of the problem, problem statements, purpose statements, nature of the study, research, and interview questions. Other components of this section included details on (a) conceptual framework, (b) operational definitions, (c) assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, (d) significance of the study, and (e) review of the academic and professional literature. Section 2 includes discussion on the research method and design, my role as the researcher, participants, population and sampling techniques, ethical research issues, data collection and analysis, and reliability and validity. Section 3 covers the presentation of findings, discusses the results and implications for social change, and provides recommendations for action and future research studies.

## Section 2: The Project

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon can use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. The critical aspect of this section covers the techniques and methods applied, which enabled me to appropriately provide answers to the qualitative multiple case study research question. The main topics in this section include (a) the purpose statement, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) the participants, (d) the research method, (e) the research design, (f) population and sampling, (g) ethical research, (h) data collection, (i) data analysis, and (j) reliability and validity.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon used to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. The sample for this study comprised four owners of small enterprises exporting coffee located in Cameroon. The owners of small businesses exporting coffee selected have successfully developed and implemented strategies that sustained their business beyond the first 3 years of operation. The implications for positive social change include the potential for Cameroonian small business owners to develop skills and strategies for successful export business operations, support the expansion and development of agriculture and industry, lead to the creation of new jobs, and improve wages.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher is a key instrument, especially in qualitative research approaches, and thus, they must remain unbiased (Leedy et al., 2019; Twining et al., 2017; Yates & Leggett, 2016). In the qualitative research method, the researcher is the primary data collecting instrument who interacts with the participants and gains access to insightful data using interviews as a data collection method (Dikko, 2016). I served as the primary data collection instrument. The role of a qualitative case study researcher involves collecting, organizing, analyzing, and interpreting the data and presenting the results of the study (Bengtsson, 2016; Roulston, 2016; Yin, 2018). Furthermore, Sutton and Austin (2015) stated that the role of the researcher in qualitative research is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants. In addition to the primary data collection instrument role, I identified themes and meanings that might emerge from the dialog box.

The personal role in this qualitative case study was to explore strategies that small businesses used to sustain their business beyond the first 3 years of operation by gathering information from the interviews and secondary data materials. Sharing the connection to the research may serve researchers to decrease their personal bias (Birt et al., 2016; Loeb et al., 2017; Madill & Sullivan, 2017). The interest in this research is because of personal experience in international business. As a former sales manager in companies in Africa with international customers, assessing the impact of transportation costs on product prices was part of daily tasks. Thus, with the responsibilities in this position, I was exposed to the difficulties encountered by export managers. In this study, the role of the researcher was to understand the behaviors behind the phenomena of the

growing social activity of exporting and marketing products from Cameroon to the United States. The role of the researcher included the choice of study design, selection of participants and collection, organization, and analysis of data.

The 1979 Belmont Report serves as an ethical framework for researchers to avoid causing harm and maximize benefit, autonomy, and justice for all participants. The Belmont Report contains instructions for researchers to respect the people involved in the study, beneficence, and justice (Dasgupta, 2015). The Belmont Report also offers participants protection against the use of individuals or groups in research studies without prior consent. The use of research ethics serves to protect the rights of research participants, which included includes obtaining consent from the participant before the interview and maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of participants during the period of the research (Burdon & Harvey, 2016).

Researchers must identify and recognize the existence of bias in research (Malone et al., 2017). To mitigate bias, researchers should avoid including their viewpoints and instead view data through the selected participants' lens (Bell, 2014; Malone et al., 2017). My experience did not influence the data collection phase of this research process; furthermore, personal thoughts were put aside during the investigation. To avoid biased answers, responses that did not seem correct required clarification, and answers that seemed accurate were user-friendly challenges.

To avoid using a personal lens during the data collection process, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A). An interview protocol is a step-by-step plan that a qualitative researcher writes as a guide to help conduct in-depth qualitative interviews

and collect deep quality information for analysis by listing the main points of exploration, provisional questions and planned investigation, and transitions (Arsel, 2017). The interview protocol includes open-ended interview questions and a section at the top to enter information about the interviewee and the time and place I conducted the interview. The researcher should write a plan on how one would refrain from presenting one's perspective and represent the participants' perspective before carrying out any involvement with the participants (Yin, 2018). Using the interview protocol helped ensure that I asked the same open-ended questions to each participant while interviewing the participants.

### **Participants**

The choice of appropriate sample size in qualitative research is an area of conceptual debate and practical uncertainty (Vasileiou et al., 2018). To conduct qualitative interviews, a researcher must prepare, plan, listen intently, ensure interview accuracy using an audio recording, and take notes (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). A researcher might follow the eight principles or stages of motivational interviewing, which include choosing a framework that has a little distraction, explaining the reason for the interview, addressing confidentiality, and explaining the format of the interview (Yin, 2018). These principles could improve a good working relationship between participants and the researcher.

Qualitative methods serve researchers to provide readers with a view of participants' interpretation of their experiences, thoughts, and opinions about a phenomenon (Comert, 2018; Runfola et al., 2016; Sundar et al., 2018). In the qualitative

method, researchers select relevant study participants to improve data collection and answer the research question (Alexander et al., 2018; Allen et al., 2018; Saunders et al., 2016). All the participants were owners of small businesses located in Cameroon exporting coffee. Participants in this research were encouraged to share their experiences in maintaining their businesses.

The interview questions were the same and in the same order, open-ended for clarity, consistency, and minimum bias. Tunarosa and Glynn (2017) stated that the rationale for using an interview protocol is for consistency and for the restriction to stay within the designed research interview process. The interview protocol is helpful to avoid influencing the response of the participants (Edwards, 2017).

Experience and knowledge in the subject area should be the criteria to consider in selecting the participants for the multiple case study (Yin, 2018). Owners from exporting companies located in Cameroon were selected instead of other companies' owners in Africa because I aimed to identify the optimal strategy already put in place by those company owners. The participants of this study were owners of small businesses located in Cameroon exporting coffee who have successfully sustained business beyond the first 3 years of operation. The Chambers of Commerce in Cameroon, the United States, and the European Union publish business directories regularly. These directories contain contact information that served to contact potential candidates by phone or email to inquire about their interest in participating in the study. In Cameroon, the participating candidates were four owners of small businesses located in Cameroon, exporting coffee.



A small number of participants in qualitative studies are often selected because of the depth and variance of collected data as it pertains to how each participant experienced the phenomena in question (Roulston, 2016). Using many participants in qualitative studies is not practical or beneficial to the researcher as it is costly, time-consuming, and may not add value beyond the point of data saturation (Van Rijnsoever, 2017). The number of participants for the interviews was one participant per selected company. The qualifying criteria for being considered as study participants were (a) industry sector, (b) experience, and (c) location. Participants in this multiple case study were in Cameroon. They also needed to have at least 3 years' experience in exporting coffee.

Prior to conducting a research study, researchers must ensure that the participants agree to participate (Amundsen et al., 2017; Bronnenmayer et al., 2016; Porter et al., 2018). The four selected participants within each organization ensured the validity of the interview transcription because they were essential resources. Yin (2017) suggested that a researcher should indicate how long the interview would take. Participants received an explanation of the expected duration of an interview, about 30 to 45 minutes on the phone or in person.

Data collected from the interviews will remain secured in a personal safe for a maximum of 5 years and thereafter be shredded (see Rumbold & Pierscionek, 2017). Participants received the assurance that confidential information and personal data were used only for research purposes. A researcher should obtain a signed consent form from all participants in a study (Leedy et al., 2019; Lentz et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). All

participants were provided a signed consent form, which included information on participants' options.

### **Research Method and Design**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon used to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. Research involves details and analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). This section includes my approach for choosing the research method and the design of this study.

#### **Research Method**

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are the three types of common research methods (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). Researchers use qualitative research methods to develop new insights, explore new concepts, and gain a rich description of a phenomenon under study (Andrews et al., 2016; Athukorala et al., 2016; Cornelissen, 2017). The qualitative research method was suitable for this study. Researchers use qualitative methods to explore participants' experiences (Yin, 2018). Researchers have identified qualitative approaches as valuable research tools to make meaningful business decisions (Sukamolson, 2016; Taguchi, 2018). The knowledge obtained through social science begins at a qualitative level before moving to a quantitative level, and those qualitative data are more useful in clarifying unknown causal mechanisms (Gerring, 2017).

In the qualitative method, researchers select specific questions to ask during the interview process (Cummings et al., 2016). The researcher focuses on applied and

theoretical findings or discoveries based on the research questions through a field study in natural environments (Park & Park, 2016). Qualitative research method helps to adduce personal responses from the audience (Manhas & Oberle, 2015). Marshall and Rossman (2016) believed that qualitative research is advantageous when the researcher intends to capture the true meaning of an experience. The qualitative method may be ideal for exploring strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon can use to sustain their business beyond the first 3 years of operation.

Holloway and Galvin (2016) defined qualitative research as a form of social inquiry that is used by researchers to explore, understand, and describe participants' experiences and life world. The purpose of the qualitative research method is to discover and generate theory from data. In contrast, quantitative researchers use closed-ended questions to test hypotheses (Yin, 2018). The purpose of quantitative research is testing hypothesis, prediction, control, findings stated with a degree of statistical certainty (Holloway & Galvin, 2016).

Quantitative research is one of the types of research methods that is suitable for this business problem. In the quantitative research method, the researcher produces generalizable findings and tests the relationships and differences between variables and constructs (Yin, 2018). The examination of relationships or differences among variables was not the purpose of this study. Therefore, I rejected the quantitative method. To address the research question, quantitative researchers use experimental methods measured by statistical data (Counsell et al., 2016; Fàbregues & Molina-azorín, 2017).

Quantitative researchers rely on the capability to generalize from a sufficient sample (Leedy et al., 2019). The qualitative method was more appropriate than a quantitative method for the study because I explored the phenomenon in-depth by using a smaller number of participants. The quantitative research method was not appropriate for invoking personal responses from the audience (Manhas & Oberle, 2015) and focusing on applied and theoretical findings or discoveries based on the research questions through a field study in natural environments (Park & Park, 2016).

Exporting coffee from Cameroon is a social activity. Determining the relationship that might exist between exporting coffee and the sustainability of the business beyond the first 3 years of operation was better supported by the qualitative research method. The qualitative research approach is exploratory and is appropriate to define the problem or develop an approach to the problem when researchers do not know what to expect (Charmaz, 1999). Quantitative methods are useful for the researchers to support testing specific hypotheses about cause-and-effect relationships (Leedy et al., 2019).

Researchers use the mixed method to explore issues relating to organizational problem-solving, blending quantitative and qualitative elements (Fetters, 2016). The characteristics of qualitative methods are the relationship between data and theory, which is different from the hypothesis-testing quantitative approach (Lyall & King, 2016). Therefore, the qualitative method was suitable for this study because of the lack of testing hypotheses that are part of quantitative research or the quantitative portion of a mixed-methods study.

Compared to the mixed method, the qualitative research method consists in the analysis of any unstructured material, including customer feedback films, reports or media clips. Therefore, the qualitative technique served to probe deep into people's personalities, their needs and wants, use cases, habits, and practices. Qualitative research methods are more suitable when the study is on a small number of cases or events (Gerring, 2017).

When invoking a mixed method, researchers invariably gather distinct contributions from both the qualitative and quantitative research methodologies (Fetters, 2016). In the mixed method, the researcher opt-in exploring and examining quantitative and qualitative data to address the specific business problem and draw from the strengths and weaknesses of both research methods (Almalki, 2016; Maxwell, 2016; Molina-Azorin et al., 2017). The mixed method was not suitable for this study because the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was not helpful to conduct research. Qualitative research served to understand strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon used to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation.

### **Research Design**

The most common designs in qualitative research are case studies, phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative design (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I selected a multiple case study design for this study because it facilitated data collection from a small number of small business owners about their experiences using open-ended interview questions and provided an in-depth and meaningful understanding of successful

strategies used to enhance growth and sustainability of SMEs. A case study design provides researchers with the opportunity for detailed descriptions and investigation into new empirical phenomena and trends (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2018). Case studies are also appropriate for answering the research questions which can be useful for a more in-depth or broader view from the perspective of the participants themselves (Yin, 2018).

Phenomenological research is a design in which a researcher seeks to identify single or several individuals' common human experiences with phenomena (Gauche et al., 2017). Researchers use the phenomenology design to gain insights into participant attitudes, experiences, opinions, and processes under study (Dodgson, 2017; Ferreira & dos Santos, 2016; Gauche et al., 2017). Marshall and Rossman (2016) revealed that, for the study of the collective life experiences of more than one person, researchers prefer using a phenomenological design. However, a phenomenological approach was not valuable because few participants contributed to this study, and the purpose was not the study of the collective life experiences of more than one person.

Ethnography and narrative study designs were not appropriate for this study. Cappellaro (2017) believed that ethnographic design requires the immersion of the researcher in the group setting so the researcher can understand the lives and culture of a social group. Researchers use ethnographic design to follow the participants for a prolonged period and use a priori theory, which was not suitable for this study (Luborsky & Lysack, 2017). Hoolachan (2016) utilized ethnography to explore the beliefs, feelings, and meanings of relationships among people as they interacted within their culture. Ethnography involves learning from people about aspects of their lives or a framework

for a cultural study of specific groups (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I did not use ethnography for this study because the purpose was not to learn from people about aspects of their lives.

Researchers use narrative research design to analyze individuals and their experiences with a phenomenon (Kourti, 2016; Ross et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). From the perspective of Graci and Fivush (2017), narrative design is a description of an individual life story and chronological experiences. The narrative design was not appropriate for this study because the research did not include individual chronological experiences. Yin (2018) stated that multiple case studies including a small group of participants for periods of time can serve as a robust framework for data collection. It is a source of analytical data to feed subsequent generalizations. Beaudoin et al. (2015) posited that the use of multiple case study design ensures external validity and protects against researcher bias by providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Using a multiple case study design to examine the events associated with a complete variety of evidence, including documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations is necessary when unethical behaviors are difficult to minimize (Abdalla et al., 2018; Mauceri, 2016; Olivier, 2017). Yin (2017) stated that a case study design can be useful for a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by using multiple sources of evidence. Answering the how and why questions helped in understanding the real-life phenomenon and behaviors of owners of small businesses located in Cameroon compared to advantages such as the removal of customs duties on exports of AGOA country to the United States and EU-ACP Agreements.

A minimum of four participants is often sufficient to achieve data saturation (Yin, 2018), however, it depends on the quality and knowledge of participants. Data saturation occurs when the act of obtaining data becomes counterproductive and yields nothing new (Boddy, 2016; Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017; Jin et al., 2018). The four managers who were participants helped to achieve saturation in the data collected for this study. The realization of saturation of the data is when no new and substantive information is acquired, through the demonstration of the efforts made by the collection of evidence or the triangulation with other sources. I ensured that data saturation was achieved when no new data was available to collect.

### **Population and Sampling**

Purposive sampling was of use for this qualitative multiple-case study. Researchers use qualitative research to exploit participants' observations and in-depth interviews (Yin, 2018). Qualitative research may also serve to gain an in-depth understanding of strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon can use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation, and the reasons that govern such situations, and also to investigate the purpose and implementation of decision-making (Charmaz, 1999).

Purposeful sampling implies choosing a small number of information-rich cases most likely to produce the maximum amount of information needed while minimizing the time and cost necessary for the researcher to address the research question (Iqbal et al., 2017). A purposive sample has four components of research, including the location of activities, participants, actions to be observed, and the course of events shaped by the



engagement of the participants (Edwards, 2017). The location where the events took place is Cameroon; the participants were owners of small businesses exporting coffee and actions were the strategies owners of SMEs exporting coffee located in Cameroon used to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. The use of purposive sampling was for exploring strategies that small businesses used to sustain operations.

Using purposeful sampling is a way to obtain a representative sample of a larger population to serve a specific purpose (Benoot *et al.*, 2016). Boddy (2016) stated that purposive sampling methods are useful when identifying participants with specific knowledge and experiences of the phenomenon. Therefore, purposive sampling was ideal for this multiple-case study. Purposive sampling technique was of use for selecting owners of four coffee exporting SMEs with the necessary expertise and experience to contribute to this study.

Identifying the sample size of participants depends on the exploration of diversity rather than statistical significance (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). In the case study research, the researcher studies one or a few cases of a phenomenon in depth (Yin, 2018). Researchers use the concept of saturation to determine the qualitative sample size because analyzing a large sample is time-consuming and impractical (Boddy, 2016). The key characteristics for reaching data saturation include no new data, no new themes, no new coding, and the ability to replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used methodological triangulation and member checking with 4 participants to reach the data saturation.

The target population for this study included four owners of small businesses exporting coffee located in Cameroon. One or two other owners might participate in this

study, if necessary. Data saturation occurs when researchers do not obtain additional information, and when further coding is no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Wigren, 2016). The selection criteria included participants who are the owners of SME businesses, the SME's exporting coffee, SMEs that have been sustaining business beyond the first 3 years of operation, the owners of SMEs located in Cameroon, and the participants were over 18.

I plan to conduct each interview in a setting that is most comfortable for the participant and in an environment that can be of use to participants to respond with open and honest personal experiences. When the interview takes place in the comfort of their own environment, and at their convenience, participants are not likely to be distracted and are willing to share information (Wilson et al., 2016). Participants may be more willing to share sensitive information when they are in a comfortable setting (Yin, 2018). Participants were able to choose the setting that minimizes interruptions for interviews that have lasted from 30 to 45 minutes.

### **Ethical Research**

Informed consent was required to ensure that participants voluntarily study and understand the purpose, as recommended by the experts (Leedy et al., 2019; Lentz, Kennett, Perlmutter, & Forrest, 2016; Yin, 2018). Performing ethical research involves the use of informed consent. Walden IRB highlighted the importance of following ethical considerations and guidelines within the research process (University Walden, 2012). Before the interviews, participants received a letter of invitation. All participants were required to sign the informed consent form before the interview. The consent form

contains the following elements: (a) the name and phone number of the Walden University representative; (b) my name and contact information; (c) description of the study, the background, and purpose of the research; (d) the description of the participants to interview.

Researchers use the informed consent of participants as a critical process to ensure ethical standards in research involving human participants (Marrone, 2016). The use of informed consent demonstrates the legal responsibility of the researcher to participants involved in the study as prescribed by the US Office of Human Research Protections and as required by Walden University IRB (Sugarman, 2017). The fundamental elements of the informed consent process include participants' understanding of their responsibilities, the risks, and benefits of their participation (Kraft et al., 2017). Participants were able to ask questions about me during the research process.

Informing each participant of the study during the consent process of the unavailability of incentives is critical to avoid bias and clarity (Annas, 2017). Participants were free to respond or object to any question and may withdraw at any time without penalty. The incentive to participate in this research was participants' free access to the summary of the findings and the opportunity to benefit from the exchange with them during the interview and positively impact this research study through community development. Cash or any other compensation for participation were not part of incentives.

While conducting a study, the safety and confidentiality of the participants are essential (Ellis, 2016). Walden University's IRB guidelines serve to ensure that the ethical protection of participants is adequate. An IRB assessment is vital for approved research involving human participants (Yin, 2018). The ethical considerations regarding the protection of human research participants and a certificate issued by the National Institute of Health Office of Extramural Research demonstrated this competency. Parker and Northcott (2016) recommended that the researcher explain the purpose and benefits of the study to the participants.

The process of identifying the risks and benefits of any research study should be a two-way process involving the perspectives of the researcher and the participants. Therefore, participants received explanations about the risks and benefits of research before their participation, as a strategy to inspire confidence and openness during the interview process (Greenwood, 2016). Participants knew the precise purpose of the research, and what the research proposes to achieve, as well as their expectations in the study. Interviews on the premises of participants might make them more comfortable.

Too close relationship between the researcher and the participants (principle of justice), poor research design and any imposition of participants (principle of merit and integrity), and lack of knowledge about risk and benefits associated with the study (principle of respect) are cases in which researchers may violate ethical principles, thereby affecting credibility and validity (Leedy et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). The integrity of the researcher can ensure that the research will be well-supported (Leedy et al., 2019). Treating participants with respect could create a relationship of trust and ensure

trustworthiness, ethical protection, and privacy. Edwards (2017) stated that the role and responsibilities of a researcher are to protect the anonymity of the informants by assigning numbers or aliases to the participants to gain support from the participants.

The primary ethical issue is the confidentiality and privacy of the participants (Lancaster, 2017; Uneke et al., 2017). I did not include study participants' names or the name of their organization in the findings; of which, data protection measures were taken to identify study participants using designations such as P1; P2; P3; P4, where P stands for the participant. All the documents, including files, transcripts, interview recordings on a hard drive device, and information related to individuals or organizations participating in the study are stored in a personal locked home office cabinet to ensure the participants' privacy throughout the research process. The research will remain confidential and private for 5 years, and access is only available to the researcher. After 5 years from the study's completion date, programmable software will be useful for destroying information by shredding the paper documents and erasing any e-data.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

In the data collection process, researchers gather information to answer the research question (Van den Berg & Struwig, 2017). In qualitative research, the researcher is usually the primary instrument for gathering data (Yin, 2018). The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in the qualitative research method because the researcher hears, sees, and interprets the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Therefore, I was the primary data collection instrument in this study.

In the qualitative research method, the primary data collection sources include (a) focus groups, (b) personal interviews, (c) documentation, and (d) observation (Yin, 2018). Sekaran and Bougie (2016) stated that one method of collecting data is to interview respondents to obtain information on the issues of interest. Some researchers stated that interviews are a sufficient method for data collection (Awiagah et al., 2016). Semistructured interviews are a good way for researchers to focus on the details that answer the research question (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). I used semistructured interviews and documentation to collect data in this study.

Algozzine and Hancock (2016) stated that identifying and gaining access to interviewees is a critical step, and the selection of interviewees directly influences the quality of the information obtained. I used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to gain insight into the strategies needed by small business owners exporting coffee from Cameroon to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. Researchers should develop interview questions designed to obtain answers to the research question (Pomare & Berry, 2016). Semistructured interviews are useful during the research on a phenomenon when little information exists about the topic (Robinson et al., 2018). I increased the chances of reaching data saturation by conducting semistructured interviews.

The use of open-ended questions allows participants to share in-depth details on the subject and to contribute to problem-solving strategies (Levitt et al., 2017). Qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to allow participants to share their ideas and thoughts without limitations (Ip et al., 2016; Levitt et al., 2017). As a qualitative

researcher, I encouraged participants to share their perceptions and experiences to collect extensive data. I asked probing open-ended questions while carefully listening and recording participants.

The researcher's direct participation in data collection through interviews and other sources of information constitutes an essential part of the study (Yin, 2017). The data collection instruments of this study included semistructured interviews, interview protocol, and company sales and marketing documents. Semistructured interviews serve the researcher to lead the interview, support participants' flexibility to speak freely, provide insight into discussions and clarify responses with follow-up questions to obtain complete information in a qualitative case study (Yin, 2018). Researchers use semistructured interviews to conduct interviews with individuals and focus groups for 30 minutes to an hour (Jamshed, 2014). I asked nine interview questions. The duration of the interviews was 30 to 45 minutes. To answer the research question, I developed interview questions based on the overarching research question. The interview questions (Appendix B) served to collect data from the participants.

An interview protocol guides the researcher with a step-by-step approach through all phases of the investigative process, which maximizes the amount of information elicited from memory (Mwangi et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). Yin (2017) recommended the use of protocols as a data collection procedure. An interview protocol ensured consistency throughout the process of capturing small business exporting coffee owners' experiences and perceptions of their strategies for succeeding and sustaining business beyond the first 3 years of operation (see Appendix A).

Liao and Hitchcock (2018) defined member checking as a tool to assure credibility and validity. Member checking is a process in which the researcher provides participants with the opportunity to review their feedback in support of data and interpretation accuracy (Birt et al., 2016). To ensure the provision of reliable data and member checking for accuracy, the researchers provide the participant with the interview transcribed data and transcript (Burdon & Harvey, 2016). I incorporated member checking in this study to ensure the trustworthiness, validity, and reliability of research. After the transcription of the audio recordings, I sent my transcribed data to the participants to check for errors or missing information. The process included removing unwanted data and replacing them with relevant information.

Reviewing organizational documents may increase validity in qualitative studies (Olivier, 2017; Yin, 2018). Researchers using case studies should include company handbooks and annual reports to improve data reliability (Harrison et al., 2017). I requested company documentation, including company handbooks, archived documents, and company marketing materials from the participants who chose to participate.

### **Data Collection Technique**

To cover the complexity of a problem in-depth, a case study should be based on multiple data sources, which may include questionnaires, focus groups, archived documents, observations, and interviews (Birt et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). Providing participants with a choice to conduct interviews using multiple methods such as Skype or face-to-face may improve recruitment and response rate (Heath et al., 2018). The advantages encountered during the data collection process when using Skype and face-to-



face outweighed the limitations discussed in the literature (AlKhateeb, 2018). I provided participants with the option to conduct the interviews using Skype or face-to-face interviews to increase recruitment in this study. I used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions as a data collection technique.

Interviews are the primary source of data collection for qualitative case studies (Leedy et al., 2019). The advantages of in-depth interviews include (a) collecting rich data and detail, (b) exploring the topic in-depth, and (c) using member checking (Yin, 2018). The disadvantages of in-depth interviews are experiencing time-constraints and interviewee misrepresentation (Yin, 2018). To reduce time-constraints and interview misrepresentation, I set up a timeframe of 30 to 45 minutes for interviews and added member checking. The prerequisites for focusing on an efficient interview are communicating clearly with participants, ensuring confidentiality, and ensuring that all operating devices have a backup plan in case the researcher encounters technical problems (Fu et al., 2017).

After obtaining IRB approval, the appointments for the interviews with participants were set up by e-mail or telephone calls. Semistructured and in-depth interviews are appropriate for qualitative research method when: (a) the study is exploratory or incorporates an exploratory element, (b) the research tries to establish personal contact with the participants because managers readily accept participation in interviews related to their areas of activity and allowing them to discuss topics with less effort, and (c) when the nature of the interview questions is complex or open-ended

(Saunders et al., 2016). Semistructured, in-depth personal one-to-one interviews served to collect data.

Interviews included the views, experiences, feelings, and thoughts of the participants. Semistructured interviews and open-ended questions were useful to probe and encourage participants to talk at length (Tularosa & Glynn, 2017). In addition, face-to-face interviews require communication and listening skills of the interviewer such as when to pause, probe, or prompt appropriately, (Chao et al., 2016). A thorough exploration of all issues raised by the respondent was needed. In the data collection process, the data collection instruments of this study included semistructured interviews and reviewing company sales and marketing documents. I followed the interview protocol (Appendix A) to conduct semistructured interviews with the purposefully selected owners of SMEs in Cameroon.

To construct a relationship of trust with participants, researchers must be open and honest (Yallop & Mowatt, 2016). Enabling participants to communicate openly might establish a trustworthy environment and develop confidentiality between the interviewer and the interviewee (Connelly, 2016; Gibson, 2017; Yin, 2018). The interviewees' permission was helpful to record the interviews with a microphone and ensure them of the confidentiality of the data and information they did not like to see divulged. In addition to the audio recording of the interviews, respondents' body language, facial expressions, and voice inflections were subject to specific notes.

Getting additional information during interviews and avoiding forgetting the essential details of the interviews were ensured by keeping interview notes. The

maintenance of records of thoughts and feelings of participants throughout the interview process was necessary, but they did not affect the outcome of the study. The interview questions the researcher uses should contain procedural guidelines for novice qualitative researchers to follow (Edwards, 2017). Interview questions served to conduct interviews and served as a reference during the interview session (Saunders et al., 2016). I built an interview protocol to conduct qualitative interviews in which I highlighted the known and unknown issues in the research area or topic.

During the interview, the respondent exposes many things, but by using the interview protocol, I inquired about the issues he/she needs to explore. The use of interview protocol might be the best way to build a boundary around the research area. It is difficult to record everything in a qualitative interview. The use of an electronic device for voice recording might therefore be suitable for preventing the loss of information (Leedy et al., 2019; Kallio et al., 2016). After the interview, I asked the participants if they had questions, and then switched off the recorder and thanked them for their participation. I collected the company sales and marketing documents immediately after the interviews. Appendix B contains the list of interview questions for this study.

Member checking can be useful to the participants of the study to have the opportunity to rectify errors and critique interpretations (Edwards, 2017). Researchers using the member checking technique, return the participants with an interpretation of the responses to ensure the accuracy of the meaning (Burdon & Harvey, 2016; Fusch et al., 2016). After the interviews, each participant received a summary of a transcribed

interview to check and confirm for accuracy. Each member had 5 days to check and review, and all changes were helpful in the updates.

Member checking was useful to enable the participants to confirm the accuracy of the data provided. After transcribing the interview data, I emailed my analysis to the participants for member checks. I stopped reviewing and analyzing data when I reached data saturation.

Member checking increased the truthfulness and accuracy of the data collected (Patton, 2015). Member checking allows the participant to share additional information related to the study (Patton, 2015). I did not use a pilot study for the study. In the qualitative research method, researchers use member checking, documentation, and audio recordings for data collection (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). I searched on the websites of selected companies, archived documents, and business records, and requested information from participants.

Qualitative researchers use secondary data to increase reliability and validity (Harrison et al., 2017; Olivier, 2017; Yin, 2018). The combination of secondary data with interviews creates triangulation to gain insight into a phenomenon (Johnson et al., 2017). I used methodological triangulation to increase my understanding of the phenomenon. Methodological triangulation is an appropriate form of triangulation in qualitative studies (Cuervo-Cazurra et al., 2016). Triangulation increases the opportunity for a researcher to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Methodological triangulation: involves using more than one method to gather data, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires,

and documents. From field work experience: triangulation facilitates validation of data through cross verification from more than two source (Thomas, 2017)

Researchers should review the documentation for relevance and determine whether the information served to answer the research question and fit the conceptual framework of the study (Ridder, 2017). Hense and McFerran (2016) identified brochures, organizational and institutional reports, and public records as documentation. The use of secondary documentation in research includes advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages in using secondary documentation are (a) less time consuming, (b) nonreactive to the research process, and (c) broad coverage of the information (Watts et al., 2017). Drawbacks in using secondary documentation are (a) developing bias selectivity, (b) difficulty retrieving information, and (c) producing information for a purpose other than research (Watts et al., 2017). Some researchers have concluded that adding documentation as secondary data to research studies outweighs the disadvantages of including secondary data (Watts et al., 2017). I gathered and triangulated information from semistructured interviews, archived documents, company marketing materials, and public information regarding the participant businesses on government or company websites.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Soergel (2015) argued that the aim of organizing data is to (a) learn, (b) understand, (c) make inferences, (d) enable discovery, and (e) clarify results identified by computer programs. Research logs are a tool that can serve researchers to organize data and develop search patterns to manage time effectively (Yin, 2018). For this study,

research logs were the primary data organizing technique to collect, record, tag, track, and organize all interview information and other data collected during this study.

Data collected were segmented by case and information source. Interview transcripts were coded utilizing NVivo 12. Participants' files were labeled as P1, P2, P3, and P4 to ensure privacy, protect confidentiality and data tracking. Conceptual labels were created by the themes that emerge from the data within the software (Leedy et al., 2019; Woods et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). NVivo served as an organizing tool for the researcher to manage data and keep various types of documents in one place (Yin, 2018).

I store both printed and written data in a locked file cabinet for 5 years, from the date of CAO approval. Collected data are stored for 5 years to meet Walden University requirements. A password on the computer serves to secure electronic research data (Ellis, 2016). My personal computer serves to store all electronic data protected with a password. After 5 years from the date of CAO approval, I will delete all data from the computer memory or temporary storage devices and shred all papers and physical evidence related to the research.

### **Data Analysis**

In this qualitative multiple case study, I analyzed data using Yin's five-step cycle of data analysis, which included (a) compiling data, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting the information, and (e) concluding Yin (2018). I used the CAQDAS-NVivo 12 Pro software to sort, integrate, and synthesize the data collected. The advantages of using NVivo 12 Pro software include high compatibility with research designs and easy use (Damani et al., 2018).

## **Compiling**

Researchers use multiple data collection sources or triangulation for more comprehensiveness of case studies (Tunarosa & Glynn, 2017). Triangulation boosts confidence and strengthens the validity of the study by analyzing rich data and providing unbiased results (Joslin & Müller, 2016). Researchers use methodological triangulation because it suits the various stakeholder groups that may have a vested interest in the study (Mauceri, 2016; Olivier, 2017). Joslin and Müller (2016) identified four triangulation methods: (a) data source triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation. As recommended by Joslin and Müller (2016); and Dasgupta (2015), Methodological triangulation served for analysis by comparing the transcribed data from the interviews, documents, and archival sources to ensure the validity of the data collected.

Methodological triangulation was appropriate to conduct the data analysis process for this multiple case study. By triangulating, researchers can hope to overcome the weakness or inherent biases and the problems that stem from research designs using a single method, single observer, single data source, or single-theory studies (Joslin & Müller, 2016). Yin (2018) stated that data analysis is the logical review of the elements of data, which involves data interpretation to determine the meaning of the data. A researcher should use corroboratory strategies to triangulate data (Yin, 2018). Methodological triangulation served to triangulate and corroborate results, using peer-reviewed industry articles about SMEs in Cameroon, Cameroonian coffee export, the

responses from the interview, and export coffee procedure manuals for each selected SMEs in Cameroon.

### **Segmentation**

I segmented data by case and source of information, including the interview transcripts, using NVivo, which helped to organize, analyze, and find themes of the data collected. NVivo was used to discover the connections in the data and finding new insights to identify common patterns by looking at regularities, convergences, and divergences in data (Yin, 2018). An interview process was of use to code each interview separately and chose a common coding framework for all the data (Yin, 2018). Seidel and Kelle (1995) recommended that the researcher sort and organize the participant's responses into a chapter.

### **Coding**

Before analyzing the specific data, I coded the characteristics of each respondent, as well as identify and organize similar patterns and relationships within the information. I narrowed the organized and collected data into a summary of understanding. The following 3 steps were conducive to comply with this process: a) first, the reading of data and creation of a storyline; b) secondly, categorization of data into codes; and c) finally, the use of memos for clarification and interpretation. Data analysis was an essential part of the research process. Coding refers to the identification of topics, issues, similarities, and differences through the revelations of participants' narratives and the researcher's interpretation (Yin, 2018). Coding also involves memos to write ideas or thoughts of how



you arrived at the codes, and how you are using them to explain your storyline (Yin, 2018).

### **Disassembling**

Yin (2018) stated that the themes are recurring, unifying concepts, or statements about the investigation. Therefore, I started by dividing the transcription into small units, which is to say in expressions, sentences, and paragraphs. Then I assigned a label to each group. These labels came from the exact words of the participants.

### **Reassembling**

Finally, I designed a table with the themes in the left column and the codes in the right column. The data collected from respondents served to connect all aspects of this research study's inquiry, such as problem statement, purpose, theoretical framework, methodology, and literature review. Data integration involved the triangulation of data from various informants. Data integration can be useful for a better picture that each source could present alone (Yin, 2018).

### **Interpreting**

The conceptual framework, research questions, and data collection instruments were aligned to support data analysis and identification of patterns and themes regarding strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. The data interpretation technique involved identifying favorable and unfavorable responses from all participants and correlating key themes with current and past relevant literature to the conceptual framework of this study.

## **Concluding**

I identified patterns and relationships from the transcribed data collected and determined how they relate to strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. I performed a scan of the reassembled data from a broader perspective and narrowed down to align well with the objectives of my research to enable accurate interpretation. After interpreting the data, the final stage in Yin's five-step is a conclusion that ends the data analysis process.

## **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity are essential elements that researchers used to determine the quality of the qualitative study and are an integral part of this research (Saunders et al., 2016). Reliability and validity serve to improve the credibility of a qualitative study (Yin, 2018). Reliability refers to replication and consistency, while validity indicates how well the measure used is the accuracy of the analysis, of the results, and the extent of the generalization of the results (Saunders et al., 2016). In qualitative research, reliability implies ensuring that the data presented is accurate and inclusive, while validity means ensuring that the measured data effectively reflects the concept that it aims to measure (Fikkers et al., 2017).

## **Reliability**

Researchers use the following key strategies to achieve research reliability: (a) member checking, (b) triangulation, (c) prolonged engagement, (d) thick description or data saturation; (e) reducing researcher bias, (f) peer debriefing, and (g) external audits

(Morse & Coulehan, 2015). In this research study, I used member checking, methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement with participants, and clarifying researcher bias to achieve reliability. I performed member checking by taking back my interpretations to the participants for member checking meetings to gain the accuracy of their statements and ensure that the results represent their real experiences.

The use of the synthesized member checking as a strategy serves to enhance reliability (Birt et al., 2016). I used the synthesized result of the member check of the first two participants as a guide to modify the third and the fourth participant's interview. I carried-out methodological triangulation by comparing the data from the semistructured in-depth interviews with those from other sources, including documents and archival sources (Birt et al., 2016). Using NVivo software was found to promote the accuracy and reliability of results (Yin, 2018). Reducing the opportunity for errors or bias is an essential part of the research process (Leedy et al., 2019). I took into consideration the response bias and the detailed descriptions to ensure the reliability of this research when validating.

Reliability relies on consistency and care in the application of research practices, which the researcher demonstrates through the visibility of research practices, analysis, and conclusions, reflected in an open account that remains mindful of the partiality and limits of the research findings (Cypress, 2017). I used the standardized interview protocol (Appendix A) to ensure that all participants follow the same process during the interview to ensure internal consistency. To improve internal reliability, I followed the interview protocol (Appendix A) by asking the same questions to all participants.

**Validity**

Validity in a qualitative study refers to credibility, transferability, and confirmability of data and information (Noble & Smith, 2015). It concerns the integrity, the application of research methods, and the precision in which the findings accurately reflect the data, while reliability describes consistency within the analytical procedures (Noble & Smith, 2015). Validity is broadly defined as the state of being well-grounded or justifiable, relevant, meaningful, logical, conforming to accepted principles or the quality of being sound, just, and well-founded (Cypress, 2017).

To ensure validity, mitigate bias, and demonstrate reliability, a methodological triangulation was appropriate for the information collected until data saturation and to ensure that the findings accurately reflect the data collected. In order to validate the research, I relied on the following criteria (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) conformability of the data collected. I checked the collected data to verify that the study meets the validity and integrity. Just as the quantitative investigator must ensure the dependability, validity, reliability, and objectivity of the research design, so must the naturalistic inquirer arrange for credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Cypress, 2017), which will be addressed next.

***Credibility***

Credibility includes scrutinizing the findings of the information presented to assess whether the analysis and results are accurate (Birt et al., 2016). To enhance the credibility, the researcher can use member checking interview responses, data triangulation, following established interview protocols, participating in focus groups,

and observation of participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The credibility of this study involved explaining the purpose of the research to the participants from the beginning of the interviews, transcribing the interview responses to validate the accuracy of the interview results, and providing the responses to the participants via email for verification of their responses.

Member checks can serve to provide additional or clarifying information (Yin, 2018). I sent my interpretations to the participants to check for the accuracy of their statements and ensure that the results represent their real experiences. I achieved credibility through member checking, triangulation, and prolonged engagement. In this study, I got into participants' culture by dedicating sufficient time and using the triangulation technique member check to mitigate bias through a close cross-examination of the integrity of the participants' responses.

### ***Transferability***

Transferability refers to how the use of data collection, data analysis techniques, or the result of a study is applicable to other studies that are similar in context (Parker & Northcott, 2016). Moon et al. (2016) argued that the transferability requires the researchers to provide thorough explanations of all the research processes from data collection to the final report. The researcher can ensure the transferability of research by providing a detailed description of the research and the ability to transfer it into a different context to enable evaluation (Parker & Northcott, 2016). Rich research description enables other researchers to determine if the study is transferable to other studies and arrive at the same results (Iivari, 2018; Moon et al., 2016).

To attain transferability, a demonstration of how the findings of this study may be transferable was necessary, through explanations of data collection, analysis techniques for the research design, the interview protocol, reaching data saturation, and how to help future researchers to follow a similar framework to attain the same results. I applied the data collection and analysis techniques for the research design followed by the interview protocol guide (Appendix A) in conducting interviews with all the participants. I provided detailed descriptions of all processes, the context of the research, and a comprehensive report that meets all transferability requirements. I gathered detailed explanations of the phenomenon under investigation to provide an understanding of the issues surrounding the research question.

### ***Confirmability***

Confirmability is the ability to show how the study findings represent the responses of participants and not the biased opinions or perceptions of the researcher. Some researchers closely link confirmability to dependability in referring to the impartiality and truthfulness of the data (Bailey & Bailey, 2017; Hancock et al., 2016). Kallio et al. (2016) defined confirmability as the process where results can be confirmed or supported by others. The interview protocol was used as a guide to establish validity by reviewing transcribed interpretations, accurate definitions, and detailed explanations of experiential accounts of the phenomena with study participants. Furthermore, participants were probed during interviews and follow-up member checking interviews conducted to support confirmability.

For the confirmability of this study, I provided the participants enough time for the interviews and reached saturation when there is no more relevant new information. I established the frequencies of words and themes in NVivo 12 for precise analysis and sent my interpretation to the participants for member checking. Finally, I strengthened confirmability by keeping a comprehensive audit trail of member checking findings, data collection, analysis process, and conclusions.

### ***Data Saturation***

Saturation is the point at which the research data becomes repetitive and reveals no additional information (Boddy, 2016; Hammarberg et al., 2016; Jin et al., 2018). Saturation is important in qualitative research giving a full expression to the values animating the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Fusch and Ness (2015) implied that no new data, no new themes, or no new coding, are common characteristics used as a guide for reaching data saturation. In this qualitative multiple case study, NVivo was used to identify key themes and frequencies. In addition, member checking of data interpretation with participants was used to attain data saturation.

To achieve data saturation, I engaged four participants using a set of semistructured interviews and carried out repetitive interviews until the participants' responses no longer included any new information or themes. I attained data saturation by interviewing four participants, using semistructured interviews, and collecting detailed and comprehensive information from their perspectives until the responses no longer provide new information. I used a qualitative exploratory multiple case study design with

methodological triangulation to achieve data saturation and acknowledging any known research bias. I plan to conduct additional interviews if needed.

### **Transition and Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon use to sustain their business beyond the first 3 years of operation. The target population consisted of four owners or managers of SMEs exporting coffee located in Cameroon. Section 2 includes an outline of the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, population and sampling, participants, and eligibility criteria. Among the different research methods, the qualitative method is appropriate for this study. Although multiple research designs could be applicable, a multiple case study design meets the requirements and leads to acceptance in scholarly circles. Moreover, Section 2 includes a summary of the procedures used for data collection, data organization, data analysis, and reliability and validity for this doctoral study. Section 3 consists of the findings of the study with application to professional practice as well as implications for social change and recommendations for action and further research.



### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon can use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. SMEs play a critical role in sustaining many countries' economies (Anderson & Ronteau, 2017). Because SMEs play a pivotal role in any developing country through job creation and economic growth, gaining more profound insights into sustainability strategies for small businesses is essential for positive social change. In Cameroon, a general enterprise census carried out by the Cameroon's National Institute of Statistics (CNIS) in January 2018 revealed that small businesses in Cameroon employed 635,965 persons as of December 31, 2015, an increase of over 64.6% from 2008.

Data collection for this study involved virtual (video call) and phone meetings with four owners or managers of SMEs exporting coffee located in Cameroon. Conducting interviews via video call means participants are geographically difficult to access (Krouwel & Greenfield, 2019). I conducted member checking with the participants and reviewed company documents that were related to the study. I used methodological triangulation to analyze the collected data, the company documents, and the relevant existing scholarship.

I did not include the names of interviewees and their companies' names in data collection and analysis. Instead, I used coded pseudonyms (P1, P2, P3, and P4) to protect the interviewees' privacy. I used NVivo 12 software to categorize the data once I reached

saturation. Four themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) control of the coffee production chain, (b) partnership, (c) trade agreements benefices, and (d) lowering transaction costs.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

I used semistructured interviews in this multiple case study and used a Sony ICD UX560F audio recorder with an extended Sony noise cancellation microphone to record interviews. Both devices were tested and confirmed to be functional before each interview. I reviewed financial documents from the participants, which included income statements and statements of cash flow. I transcribed the data manually and used NVivo 12 for Windows to organize the data into manuscripts labeled P1, P2, P3, and P4.

I used Yin's 5 step analysis procedure and analyzed data via NVivo 12 for Windows. I assembled all the data collected from P1, P2, P3, and P4, including interview transcriptions, member checking, notes, secondary data, tax documents, company reports (sales and financial reports, sales forecasts), and marketing documents (brochures, posters, and flyers). Other data collected included online data (participants' websites and government's websites). I sent an interview transcription to each participant for validation as per the member checking procedure. The data that I collected from the interviews and the review of company documents contained rich information to answer the research question: What strategies do SME owners exporting coffee from Cameroon use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation?

Data collected mainly came from interviews with participants. I reached data saturation when the interviews and review of company documents started to produce

repetitive information. Data saturation occurs when the researcher begins to receive repetitive responses from the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). After member checking, I used NVivo 12 Windows software to sort, code, and categorize the data. During data analysis, I sorted and categorized codes to support the identification of four themes from the data: (a) control of the coffee production chain, (b) partnership, (c) trade agreements benefices, and (d) lowering transaction costs.

### **Theme Identification and Analysis**

The population for this study consisted of four owners of small businesses located in Cameroon that export coffee who have successfully implemented strategies to sustain their business beyond 3 years of operation. Participants identified barriers ranging from coffee production to international marketing. The barriers included product quality standards, the effect of the pandemic, market laws and rules, shipping time, and transportation costs. All participants, P1, P2, P3, and P4, emphasized the high transaction costs and trade agreements' benefits.

The existing literature relates an entrepreneur's characteristics to business success and the ability to sustain a business for an extended period. Specific characteristics may indicate whether entrepreneurs will succeed before they undertake their journey (Hadi & Abdullah, 2018; Hsieh et al., 2019; Mayr et al., 2017). All participants demonstrated that vision, mission, and personal involvement in the management were critical ingredients of their success recipe. Table 1 shows the emergent themes and participant acknowledgement.

**Table 1***Summary of Emergent Themes and Participant Acknowledgement*

Theme # and description	Occurrence
1. Control of the coffee production chain	P1, P2, P3, P4
2. Partnership	P1, P2, P4
3. Trade agreements benefices	P1, P2, P3, P4
4. Lowering transaction costs	P1, P2, P3, P4

*Note.* All the participants acknowledged each of the themes. However, the participants had different approaches to each of the strategies.

I contacted a total of 15 SME owners in Douala, Yaounde, Nkongsamba, and Bafoussam. Four respondents completed the interview process, including member checking, six respondents responded and rejected participation, and one respondent participated but was not available to complete member checking. All participants who did not meet or responded but dismissed participation came from Bafoussam and Yaoundé. To answer the primary research question, I interviewed four SME owners exporting coffee, all located in Cameroon: two SMEs located in Douala, one SME established in Nkongsamba, and another SME located in Bafoussam. All participants had a long relationship with coffee, and some of them, P1, P3, and P4, were also owners of the coffee plantations.

I used an interview protocol (Appendix A) as a guide before, during, and after the interviews. Each participant answered nine semistructured, open-ended interview questions during the interview session. After completing each interview, I thanked the participant, collected and reviewed company documents, and took note of essential

information relevant to the study. I coded the transcribed data and performed a member check with each participant. Birt et al. (2016) identified member checking as the most critical step in confirming data interpretation accuracy and ensuring a study's trustworthiness/validity. Table 2 shows the SME owners' responses to my participation request.

**Table 2**

*SMEs Owners' Responses to Researcher's Participation Request*

SME owners exporting coffee	Number of participants	Rate
Number of respondents who completed	4	27%
Number of respondents who rejected	6	40%
Number with no feedback on request	4	27%
Number withdrawn	1	6.00%
Total contacted	15	100%

**Theme 1: Control of the Coffee Production Chain**

The four participants identified control of the coffee production chain as the main driver of growth and survival. The control of the coffee production chain includes the entire coffee production process. Coffee production is a complex sequence of technological processes, including (a) planting, (b) harvesting the cherries, (c) processing the cherries, (d) drying the beans, (e) milling the beans, tasting the coffee, (f) roasting the coffee, (g) grinding coffee, brewing coffee, and (h) packaging (Blinová et al., 2017).

The status of farmer-owner retained by most participants makes the control of the coffee production chain possible, thus enabling and encouraging the participant to pursue

such goals. Jaskiewicz et al. (2015) demonstrated that through the study of ancestrally inherited, family-owned businesses, personal identification with a business could serve as a motivating and success factor for business owners. This type of personal identification improves self-efficacy in the entrepreneur and contributes to organizational growth (Zuhir et al., 2019).

Supporting this idea, P1 said, "We are farmers. We organize ourselves into small farmer groups, which all belong to a Cooperative. Only when we deliver superior quality coffee can we begin to ask for prices that will afford us a decent quality of life." In addition, P2 mentioned,

We are a group made up of small farmers from Cameroon's west region. Our father founded the group and wanted to help the farmers develop positive business practices that could help them overcome the poverty in which they were living.

Furthermore, P4 indicated,

We are farms' owners. According to an artisanal tradition, our farms produce exceptional Robusta and Arabica coffee that we roast with the most outstanding care. The modernity of our equipment is a significant advantage in combining artisanal know-how and the technique of preparing excellent coffee.

P1, P2, and P4 demonstrated that being a farmer, a farm's owner, and running a family business could serve as a motivational factor leading to personal identification to the company. To make coffee production sustainable, farmers should pay attention to improving the quality of coffee by engaging in sustainable, environmentally friendly cultivation practices, which can ultimately claim higher net returns (Krishnan, 2017). The

four participants indicated that the control of the coffee production chain is a critical element in the international development strategy.

P1, P2, and P4 stressed that controlling production from beginning to end, that is, the planting of seeds and all the sequential steps that culminate in the roasting of beans, is essential to ensure coffee quality. For these three participants, the excellent quality of their coffee is helpful, if not essential, to achieve export success and to resist international competition. P3 mentioned that controlling the supply chain of what eventually will eventually become roasted coffee, in other words the raw material, is helpful to highlight its products' organic aspect.

P1 discussed controlling the coffee production chain regarding its impact on export success. A successful export business, P1 explained, relies on control of production. As evidenced by the farms P1 has developed, successful control of production leads to a reduction in seasonal demand fluctuations, while simultaneously producing quality products tailored to customer needs. A third benefit arises as well: improved predictability, which then serves the business owner to set up shipping forecasts.

P2 emphasized the importance of controlling the coffee production chain when penetrating the international market. To be present on the international market, P2 manufactures products that comply with the destination markets' norms, standards, rules, laws, and regulations. Another concern presented by competition in the international market is one of product availability. By having control over the coffee production chain, P2 was able to increase the availability of products in customer stores throughout the year

and thus solve shipping delays that lead to stockouts. For P3, the control of the coffee supply chain is an integral part of the export strategy. To improve the quality of products, develop new products, and adapt products to consumers' needs in promising markets, maintaining control of raw material supply is critical.

P4 confirmed the importance of controlling the coffee production chain as it relates to the business owner's export strategy. By having full control of the coffee bean from farm to factory, P4 can, with consistency, ensure the superior quality of the product and in turn grow its international reputation. Moreover, in managing each aspect of the production chain, P4 can fully realize its production capacity and solve the difficulties of exporting several small orders by consolidating them to make large shipments.

## **Theme 2: Partnership**

Three of the four participants discussed the importance the role of partnerships have in accessing the international market. P1, P2, and P4 indicated that they used partnerships to develop their markets in Europe and the United States. A partnership is an element of business strategy that allies a business with another business in an agreement that is mutually beneficial to both parties. Often companies use partnerships to enter a new market and access new opportunities with limited risk (Gutiérrez, Márquez, & Reficco, 2016). P3, unlike the other three interviewees, indicated the business had developed its own distribution network.

P1, P2, and P4 underlined that, partnerships are helpful to increase the availability of their products in the international market, to have a deeper understanding of consumers and their buying habits, and to avoid all the problems related to administrative and fiscal



procedures. In P1's words, "We have a growing network of partners in Europe and the United States that brings our coffee even closer to consumers." P1 went on to say the business has maintained long-term relationships with most of the partners. The partners travel to Cameroon at least once a year for workshops on coffee-making processes, coffee quality, and sales and shipping plans. P1 indicated partnerships have been useful to solve payment problems, lack of knowledge of the markets, and avoid intermediaries.

P2 described partnership as the least risky way for a small business to enter the international market. Partnering with distributors, who ensure the local availability of products in target markets and reduce commercial and logistical requirements, has the added benefit of gaining access to the distributor's established local contacts and knowledge of the market. These factors, according to P2, have proven this type of partnership to be helpful in increasing sales and reducing stockouts.

P4 maintains business relationships with companies in local target markets. These partnerships are paramount to the success of P4's coffee exporting. Via various partnerships, P4 has gained access to European and North American markets, achieved scale efficiency, while reducing risks involved in significant investments or projects. Using partnerships, P4 has also seen a boost in sales by bringing together several orders to make large shipments.

P3 said, "Before making my first export to Europe, I adapted my business to this type of trading. I have put in place a good team that helps throughout the export process and limits all risks as much as possible." P3 developed a distribution network, without intermediaries, from production to the final consumer. P3 uses the same processes in all

the subsidiaries, the same production system in all the factories, and implements the same sales and marketing policies. P3 mentioned conducting market studies to understand consumers' needs and the functioning of supply systems in all target markets.

### **Theme 3: Trade Agreements Benefices**

A trade agreement should increase trade flows by reducing trade barriers and reducing competition for a specific product in each market (Brice, 2020). All the participants demonstrated the beneficial contribution of trade agreements in their success and sustainability in the export of coffee. P1, P2, P3, and P4 argued that removing tariffs through trade agreements is an essential element in the competitiveness of their products in target markets, namely Europe and the United States. Each participant emphasized the usefulness of collaboration with the European Union Commission within the ACP-EU framework and AGOA (Brice, 2020).

P1 identified international and national trade agreements free of customs duties as a critical element to be competitive in price. For P1, multilateral agreements create new business opportunities. P1 said,

With AGOA and the EU-ACP, we can export freely to the EU and the United States, with no tariffs to pay or quotas. We can also import the inputs we need, such as machines or components, at lower prices. On the other hand, the EU-ACP promotes and facilitates partnership agreements between companies from ACP countries and companies from European Union countries.

P2 declared that the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the European Union (E.U.) and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) reduce the coffee

export costs, and along with each EPA, the E.U. provides Aid for Trade. P2 indicated that the establishment of international trade agreements has led to less hassle for exporters, improved access to technical expertise, credit, and U.S. markets, and high-level dialogue on trade and investment. In addition, AGOA and EU-ACP encourage fair trade. For example, EPAs serve ACP countries to remove or reduce tariffs on sensitive goods, such as coffee. P2 said, "I got much help from organizations such as AGOA." For P2, international trade agreements are of great help in reducing costs and offering quality products at competitive prices. P2 emphasized that being a part of AGOA might avoid problems involving bad debts, mitigate any risks in advance, conduct credit checks, and use services such as the U.S. Commercial Service's International Company Profile, which conducts background checks on potential foreign partners.

P3 mentioned that the international trade agreements' role is the removal of artificial trade barriers such as tariffs, non-tariff barriers to trade, export licenses, and quotas. Economic integration agreements appear to be one of the key factors on trade duration at the firm and country level (Chacha and Edwards, 2017; Socrates, 2016). P3 pointed out that EPAs support ACP farmers in meeting the EU's high standards in food safety and plant health. P3 indicated being more competitive in the European market because the EPAs removed customs duty on Cameroon's goods, including coffee.

The probability of continuing to export in a given market improves when the two parties are engaged in a trade agreement because partners used trade agreements as an essential framework for trading cost reduction (Martuscelli & Varela, 2018). P4 said, "I received much help from AGOA and the European Trade Commission in finding good

partners. Those institutions helped me travel, meet with business partners, and even set up some commercial agreements." P4 underlined that international and national trade agreements are of great help in achieving economies of scale, increasing efficiency and competitiveness, and reducing the products' production resources. P4 pointed out that EU-ACP promotes partnership agreements between companies from ACP countries and companies from European Union countries. For P4, the benefits received from AGOA include access to technical expertise, credits, and US markets.

#### **Theme 4: Lowering Transaction Costs**

Transactions, the unit of analysis in transaction cost economics (TCE), are transfers of goods and services between buyers and sellers (Williamson, 1985). Transaction costs are the costs of finding, arranging, and making these transfers and are a market "friction" (Coase, 1937; Williamson, 1981). Transaction costs occur while participating in markets and are contrasted with the physical costs of goods and services (i.e., production costs; Hamet & Michel, 2018).

The four participants identified the reduction in transaction costs as a key factor for success in the exportation of coffee because of the competitive prices of coffee from the South American countries. Researchers have identified several transaction costs, including contact, contract, and control costs (Roundy & Fayard, 2020). In sum, transaction costs are the costs involved in finding, negotiating, and monitoring an agreement to exchange goods or services (Williamson, 1985). P1, P2, and P4 discussed the importance of partnership in reducing transaction costs. For these three participants, working with partners leads to substantial savings. P1, P2, and P4 argued that entrusting

part of the supply chain to a partner eliminates costs such as market research costs, transport costs within the market, marketing costs, taxes, and administrative procedures.

P1, P2, and P4 emphasized that having partners is helpful in avoiding middlemen and setting up a feasible shipping plan. Moreover, the coffee production chain's control, the existence of partners with well-developed shipping plans can lead to reductions in storage, handling, and transportation costs (domestic and international), as well as the costs of administrative procedures. When engaging in a business transaction, individuals seek to minimize transaction costs. Examining how individuals minimize transaction costs provides a better understanding of why firms exist as organizational forms, why the economy's organization is not with a single firm, and why firms vertically integrate (Williamson, 1981).

P1 reported, "Most of the biggest coffee consuming countries are on other continents (Europe and North American countries). Our essential partners are in those countries. One of the first export challenges we had to contend with is the distance (geography, transit time, and transport). We solved this problem by increasing the export quantities. " P2 indicated that working with distributors is just like integrating into global value chains. P2 increased the volume and improved exports with distributor partners without having to master every step required to supply our coffee. P4 said, "We established business relationships with companies in the local markets, which served us to take away a good part of some of our costs. Those costs are related to transport and logistics, onerous border procedures."

Entrepreneurs try to reduce transaction costs to improve their profit margins. One of the main activities of business owners is to find new ways to avoid or reduce transaction costs (Ahmad & Etudaiye-Muhtar, 2017). Researchers use the transaction cost economics lens to examine several phenomena, including entrepreneurs' appraisals of venture capitalists' external and internal support, decisions to ally with partners, and choices to outsource production (Halim *al.*, 2017; Khanin & Turel, 2016).

P3 emphasizes having developed a distribution network, without intermediaries, from production to the end consumer to reduce transaction costs. P3 demonstrated the importance of using the same processes in its subsidiaries in reducing transaction costs. P3 said, "the fact of producing locally and using the same strategies in our subsidiaries allows us to reduce the costs of studies and research and development, logistics and transport costs, and marketing costs. "

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The objective of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon can use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. The findings revealed four themes: (a) control of the coffee production chain, (b) partnership, (c) trade agreements benefices, and (d) lowering transaction costs. Owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon can apply the findings of this study in establishing strategies to sustain their business beyond the first 3 years of operation.

Implementing the emergent themes from this study can improve professional practice because the findings indicate how small businesses exporting coffee from

Cameroon improve their business's sustainability beyond the first 3 years of operation. The results revealed that without the ability to control the coffee production chain, establish partnerships, take advantage of trade agreements, and reduce transaction costs, small business owners exporting coffee from Cameroon could not maintain their business's sustainability beyond the first 3 years of operation. The SMEs, not having a high production volume, face difficulties negotiating raw materials prices, which determines a higher export price with a negative influence on competitiveness (Boşcor, 2017).

This study revealed that the control of the coffee production chain ensures control of quality and volumes, leading to the competitiveness of products on prices. The results of this study showed that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon could support their activities beyond the first 3 years of operation by being competitive in the international market. To be efficient, to position itself advantageously with the competition, and to increase the interest of the coffee consumer, small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon must take steps to control and ensure quality. Standards for coffee quality are available in ISO 10470 and ICS 67.140.20 certifications.

ISO 10470:2004 provides a chart that lists the main five categories of defects considered to be potentially present in green coffee as marketed throughout the world, whether its species, variety, and after-harvest processing (wet or dry). This chart shows the influence of such defects on the loss of mass and the sensorial concern by using coefficients. ISO 10470:1993 gives a listing in chart form of the main types of defects.

The chart gives definitions and characteristics of each defect and its cause and effect on the roasting and brew flavor of the roasted bean (Bicho et al., 2014).

Determination of required quality criteria for export following the standard of ISO 10470 certification includes: (a) be healthy, dry (the water content must be less than or equal to 13%), and without foul odor, (b) a defective value below 4%, cherry seeds without mixture, cupping score is 85, (c) the uniform size of coffee beans, (d) have not undergone any deterioration caused by mold or rot, (e) not contain any foreign bodies other than those described in the official list of defects established by the Order, (f) do not contain any black, semi-black, or cherry beans (Bicho et al., 2014).

The following elements are helpful to determine the quality of coffee: the aromatic appearance of dry coffee (fragrance) and brewed coffee (aroma), the acidity of the coffee, the sensation in the mouth, heavy or light (body), the flavor, full or spicy (sweetness), the absence of residues in the cup (transparency), the predominance of an element (balance), taste after consumption (after-notes). Two major categories of coffee are widely known, namely Arabica coffee and Robusta coffee (Bicho et al., 2014).

The SMEs should be offered more support in terms of access to export information, receive help to conduct research in foreign markets, and find business partners (Boşcor, 2017). Building partnerships, leveraging trade agreements, and reducing transaction costs can ensure the competitiveness of small business owners exporting coffee from Cameroon. A business partnership is critical in determining business success; both parties can further develop their respective businesses (Walean et al., 2021).



Small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon must pay attention to the Incoterms when establishing partnerships. The level of responsibility depends on the Incoterms in the contract. Incoterms are a set of terms that define the point where an exporter stop being responsible for the coffee, its quality, its transportation, its paperwork, and its marketing (Yi, 2021). Incoterms include FOB, EXW, CFR, CIF

- FOB – Free on Board : "The producer adheres to all export regulations and fees until coffee is loaded onboard the transporting vessel ; buyer pays for ocean freight and insurance."
- EXW – Ex Works : "The buyer takes ownership and assumes the movement and storage risk from (the moment that they take ownership)." EXW typically refers to overland shipping from a warehouse.
- CFR – Cost and Freight : "Producer/exporter delivers coffee, typically to its port of discharge ; buyer pays for insurance (the producer may be responsible for any spoilage and shortage arising from transportation if coffee is not properly packaged)."
- CIF – Cost Insurance Freight : "Producer/exporter pays for the product up to the port of discharge, including insurance ; the buyer is responsible for importation charges." (Yi, 2021).

The more responsibility a small business owner exporting coffee from Cameroon takes for exporting, the greater the risk, the greater the cost, and the more excellent the opportunity for profit. In theory, exporting coffee should lead to a higher income. So too, should FOB be compared to selling to an in-country buyer. However, this depends on

small business owners exporting coffee from Cameroon's strategies. Through partnerships, small business owners exporting coffee from Cameroon can improve coffee production and quality, increase tax payment, and reduce unemployment.

SME managers and owners, political economists, and academics can use the results of this study to develop strategies for the survival and growth of SMEs and improve regional, national, and global economies. The results can also guide struggling small business owners on how to improve their business practices and avoid setbacks. The findings of this study are helpful to improve business practices by providing information that can reduce the effects of the lack of strategies to support SMEs. SME owners in Cameroon can use this study's results to prevent and mitigate the impact of the lack of strategic planning, programming, and knowledge of the international market, in terms of requirements and regulations, on the survival of SMEs in Cameroon.

### **Implications for Social Change**

There has been an increase in the number of SME creations in Cameroon. The government of Cameroon has supported the creation of SMEs by putting in place stimulus policies, with the promulgation of the Center for Business Creation and Training. However, countrywide research has concluded that less than 27.7% of SMEs survived beyond the first 5 years (MINEPAT, 2016). More importantly, besides, 85% of SMEs are generally controlled by their owners (CNIS, 2018). More specifically, this research was carried out with owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon, which constitutes part of the agricultural sectors which employs over 70% of the active working population, provide over 42% of the country's GDP, as well as

contributes to 30% of export revenue (CNIS, 2010). Most families depend on subsistence farming as a lifeline; unfortunately, these families are unable to preserve their yields due to lack of food processing and preservation methods available to them, leading to wastage of food produce, economic hardship, and lack of food security for the families (Asogwa et al.,2017).

The findings may contribute to positive social change by improving communities and individuals' living standards in particular in the agricultural sector. Export success and sustainability of SMEs exporting coffee from Cameroon could increase coffee exports and, thus, increase GDP. The increase in the production of coffee in Cameroon may lead to an increase in activities in the coffee distribution chain. Increased coffee production may reduce unemployment and poverty, especially in rural areas. Cameroonian SMEs owners involved in exporting coffee could be able to pay more taxes. The Cameroonian government could use these taxes to improve infrastructure, building roads, bridges, schools, homes, and amenities.

### **Recommendations for Action**

This multiple case study attempted to answer the research question: What strategies do owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation? This study's findings may enlighten exporting small business owners about what strategies they need to implement to sustain their businesses and provide insights concerning how to diagnose and address the underlying causes of SMEs' high failure rate in Cameroon. One of the most attractive entry modes for SMEs is exporting because the exporter depends less on the home

market, has a lower risk than other entry options, has the opportunity to test the market, and can withdraw from risky markets with minimum losses (Boşcor, 2017).

In the process of this research, I identified the following four recommendations for small business owners exporting coffee from Cameroon to use to ensure the success and sustainability of their business: (a) focus on controlling the supply chain coffee production, (b) create and build a strong partnership, (c) harness the benefits of trade agreements and (d) work to reduce transaction costs. Focusing on these four pillars can be helpful to small business owners exporting coffee from Cameroon to be successful and maintain their business in highly volatile and uncertain international markets.

Owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon must focus on the control of the coffee production chain. The economics of coffee production has changed in recent years, with prices on the international market declining and the cost of inputs increasing. At the same time, the demand for specialty coffee is at an all-time high. For sustainable coffee production, all production chain actors should pay attention to improving the quality of coffee by engaging in sustainable, environmentally friendly cultivation practices, ultimately claiming higher net returns (Krishnan, 2017).

The data analysis for this study revealed that the control of the coffee production chain is a critical element in the international development strategy. The findings also show that better control of the coffee production chain is essential to ensure excellent coffee quality. The excellent quality of their coffee is helpful for export success and for competing internationally.

The second recommendation for small business owners is to develop strong partnerships. The findings of this study revealed that partnership plays an essential role in accessing the international market. The results of this study show that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon used the partnership to develop their markets in Europe and the United States without investing in market research, distribution, and marketing. With the partnership, owners of small businesses exporting coffee do not have to deal with taxes or administrative procedures.

A partnership is a system or tool used and based on an agreement or arrangement about objectives and sharing responsibilities, resources, risks, and benefits over a certain period. The private sector often uses the term 'joint venture' to describe two or more organizations working together to take advantage of efficiency and opportunity. They combine knowledge and resources to create added value for existing distribution channel products or services (Herawaty & Raharja, 2019). Owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon should consider partnership as a strategy for expansion into the international market and bringing their products to the consumers.

The third recommendation for small business owners is to take advantage of the benefits of trade agreements. Previous studies have shown that one of the goals of trade agreements, the African, Caribbean Pacific group of states - the European Union (ACP-UE) agreement and the African Growth Opportunity Act (henceforth AGOA) is to give preferential treatment to members by increasing exchanged volumes (Brice, 2020). The participants in this study confirmed the beneficial contribution of trade agreements to their success and sustainability in the export of coffee.

The fourth recommendation for owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon is to find ways to reduce their transaction costs. According to TCE theory, firms choose international market entry modes that minimize the transaction costs generated by the need to negotiate, monitor, and enforce transactions, thereby maximizing their net benefits (Sestu & Majocchi, 2020). This study shows that reducing transaction costs is a key success factor in the exportation of coffee because of the competitive prices of coffee from South American countries. Minimizing transaction costs and maximizing relationship commitment are essential in inter-firm relationship management (Shahzad *et al.*, 2018). This study's findings reveal that establishing business relationships with companies in the local markets was helpful to take away a good part of some costs related to transportation, logistics, and onerous border procedures.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings of this study add to the limited research available on the strategies used by some small businesses in Cameroon to be successful in sustaining businesses beyond 3 years. In this study, I used a multiple case study design to explore the strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon can use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. Like any other study, this study had assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

I identified two limitations to this study. First, the primary mode of data collection was through participant interviews. While I have tried to limit participant bias, unintended participant bias could still be a limiting factor to the findings' validity. The

study also depended on the participants' abilities to recall events from their experience accurately. Furthermore, participants may have felt uncomfortable disclosing critical information about the failures or successes of their businesses. To ensure that participants were comfortable, I gave them a sense of what the questions would entail a few days before the interview. As face-to-face meetings were not possible due to the COVID-19 related restrictions, I could not go to the small businesses' physical premises to collect evidence from some of the posters in the participants' offices. I am confident that this study's validity remains intact even without the benefit of posters because the participants answered all the questions during the interviews.

The second limitation was a methodological one, as the owners I interviewed operate in Cameroon's agriculture industry. The culture of the participants could have influenced their responses. I recommend that future researchers conduct further research on the strategies used by small businesses in other industries in Cameroon and other developing countries. There is a need to extend the research to include small businesses exporting coffee from other countries in Africa. A similar study conducted in other countries in Africa will make it possible to determine if the results have applicability elsewhere.

### **Reflections**

The Doctor of Business Administration program at Walden University has been full of challenges. Along the way, I worked with some outstanding faculty members and staff and classmates. There have been moments when I felt overwhelmed, frustrated, and doubted if I needed to continue; however, with support from my family, my business

partners, classmates, lecturers, and my chair, I have reached these final stages of my study.

Data collection was challenging because of the COVID-19 lockdown. Some participants withdrew at the last moment, and as a result, I had to look for other participants. Most of the participants contacted never responded, I used Skype and phone to conduct the interviews. Skype and phone use were challenging, as some participants were not familiar with those data collection modes. However, despite these challenges, I was able to get four participants to interview. At a challenging time, I am grateful to the participants who allowed me to interview them and advance my studies.

The use of the transaction cost economics (TCE) theory as the conceptual framework of this study was helpful to understand the strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon used to sustain business and the processes that underpin the development and the implementation of these strategies. Using the TCE has served to link strategies to companies' processes to create and deliver value to their customers. I used the TCE framework to explore the business models of small businesses and how some small business owners analyze each transaction, seeking the governance structure that minimizes transaction costs and thereby increases their business efficiency in the short term. The TCE theory's goal is to reduce transaction costs ultimately through efficiency, aiming to achieve sustainable competitive advantages (Augusto & de Souza, 2015). I intend to continue studying the TCE further. I found the TCE to be a compelling theory for organizational and business analysis.



## Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon can use to sustain business beyond the first 3 years of operation. Given that less than 25% of SMEs in Cameroon stay in business past the first three years, a success rate that sits well below those of SMEs in other countries, these findings may also be useful when applied more broadly to other fields in which Cameroonian SMEs engage. SMEs in Cameroon constitute 98.8% of companies in the country and employ over 70% of the active population. A rise in the percentage of SMEs that survive the first three years of operation would in turn not just benefit individual business owners but the population at large, resulting in GDP growth, improved economic stability and higher job retention.

The study's target population was owners of small businesses located in Cameroon that export coffee. Four owners of small businesses exporting coffee from Cameroon participated in the semistructured, open-ended interviews. The small sample size of four was appropriate to enable the researcher to reach data saturation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I used the TCE conceptual framework to undertake this study and followed an interview protocol to avoid bias.

To ensure data saturation, triangulation was employed as a method to compare data collected from interviews with existing documents and archival sources. In addition, member checking served to confirm interpretations of interviewee statements. I reviewed and analyzed over 200 sources to develop this study's themes, including information from semistructured interviews with small business owners, existing peer-reviewed literature,

and public information regarding company websites' participant businesses. From the data analysis, four themes emerged that are useful in answering the research question and understanding factors that influence the success and sustainability in this industry: (a) control of the coffee production chain, (b) partnership, (c) trade agreements benefices, and (d) lowering transaction costs. The themes that emerged support the TCE conceptual framework.

This study's findings revealed that owners of small businesses exporting coffee who control their production chain and in turn are able to lower their costs can develop and sustain a competitive advantage that ensures the success and sustainability of their business beyond the first 3 years of operation. Control of the production chain yields several overlapping operational benefits: higher quality products fashioned to meet destination market norms, a reduction in seasonal demand fluctuations and the ability to create accurate shipping forecasts. Owners of small businesses exporting coffee also greatly benefit from the successful implementation of partnership strategies. Partnerships provide access to new markets while mitigating risk and reducing commercial and logistical requirements.

Alongside the utilization of partnerships, taking full advantage of international and domestic trade agreements is essential to successfully sustaining a business beyond the first 3 years of operation. Such agreements encourage increased efficiency as well as the achievement of economies of scale, which lead to a more robust, profitable SME that is better equipped to survive in a competitive marketplace. Lowering transaction costs further this end. By selectively choosing entry points in the international market, a small

business exporting coffee can minimize transaction costs associated with trade negotiation, monitoring and enforcement. Having reduced these transaction costs and maximized net profit, the company is better situated to grow and compete in the international market.

## References

- Abdalla, M., Oliveira, L. G. L., Azevedo, C. E. F., & Gonzalez, R. K. (2018). Quality in qualitative organizational research: Types of triangulations as a methodological alternative. *Administration: Teaching and Research*, 19(1), 66-98.  
<https://doi.org/10.13058/raep.2018.v19n1.578>
- Abeyratne, S. A., & Monfared, R. P. (2016). Blockchain ready manufacturing supply chain using distributed ledger. *International Journal of Research in Engineering and Technology*, 5(9), 1-10.  
<https://ijret.org/volumes/2016v05/i09/IJRET20160509001.pdf>
- African Growth and Opportunity Act. (2016). *Disaggregated bilateral trade data*.  
<https://agoa.info/data/bilateral-trade-data.html>
- Agyapong, A., Ellis, F., & Domeher, D. (2016). Competitive strategy and performance of family businesses: Moderating effect of managerial and innovative capabilities. *Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship*, 28(6), 449-477.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08276331.2016.1217727>
- Ahmad, D., Afzal, M., & Khan, U. G. (2017). Impact of exports on economic growth empirical Evidence of Pakistan. *International Journal of Applied*, 5(2).  
<http://sijournals.com/IJAE/>
- Ahmad, R., & Etudaiye-Muhtar, O. F. (2017). Dynamic model of optimal capital structure: Evidence from Nigerian listed firms. *Global Business Review*, 18(3), 590-604. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972150917692068>

- Akbar, Y. H., & Tracogna, A. (2018). The sharing economy and the future of the hotel industry: Transaction cost theory and platform economics. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 71, 91–101.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2017.12.004>
- Akinboade, O. A. (2015). Determinants of SMEs growth and performance in Cameroon's central and littoral provinces' manufacturing and retail sectors. *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies*, 6(2), 183-196.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/AJEMS-03-2013-0033>
- Aleksandra, A., Nikola, M. T., & Dumitru, S. (2018). Transaction costs within the individual and cooperative apple producers in Prespa Region, the Republic of Macedonia. *Economy and Sociology*, 3, 45–54.  
[https://ince.md/uploads/files/1518168567\\_5-angeloska-a-p.-45-54.pdf](https://ince.md/uploads/files/1518168567_5-angeloska-a-p.-45-54.pdf)
- Alexander, G. L., Kiernan, M., Opezzo, M. A., & Resnicow, K. (2018). Effects of a methodological infographic on research participants' knowledge, transparency, and trust. *Health Psychology*, 37(8), 782-86. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hea0000631>
- Algozzine, B., & Hancock, D. (2016). *Doing case study research: A practical guide for beginning researchers*. Teachers College Press
- AlKhateeb, M. (2018). Using Skype as a qualitative interview medium within the context of Saudi Arabia: A research note. *Qualitative Report*, 23(10), 2253–2260.  
<https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/>

- Almalki, S. (2016). Integrating quantitative and qualitative data in mixed methods research—Challenges and benefits. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 5(3), 288–296. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v5n3p288>
- Allen, A., Barnard, E., Gillam, L., Guillemin, M., Rosenthal, D., Stewart, P., & Walker, H. (2018). Do research participants trust researchers or their institutions? *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 13(3), 285-294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1556264618763253>
- Amankwah-Amoah, J. (2016). An integrative process model of organizational failure. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(9), 3388-3397. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.02.005>
- Amankwah-Amoah, J., Boso, N., & Antwi-Agyei, I. (2018). The effects of business failure experience on successive entrepreneurial engagements: An evolutionary phase model. *Group & Organization Management*, 43(4), 648–682. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601116643447>
- Amundsen, D. D., Msoroka, M., & Findsen, B. (2017). “It’s a case of access”: The problematics of accessing research Participants. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 22(4), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v22i4.425>
- Anderson, A., & Ronteau, S. (2017). Towards an entrepreneurial theory of practice: Emerging ideas for emerging economies. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*, 9,(2) 110-120. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jeee-12-2016-0054>

- Anderson, S., Christ, M., Dekker, H., & Sedatole, K. (2014). The use of management controls to mitigate risk in strategic alliances: Field and survey evidence. *Journal of Management Accounting Research*, 26(1), 1-32. <https://doi.org/10.2308/jmar-50621>
- Andrews, D. R., No, S., Powell, K. K., Rey, M. P., & Yigletu, A. (2016). Historically black colleges and universities' institutional survival and sustainability: A view from the HBCU business deans' perspective. *Journal of Black Studies*, 47(2), 150- 168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934715622220>
- Ansari, S., Başdere, M., Li, X., Ouyang, Y., & Smilowitz, K. (2018). Advancements in continuous approximation models for logistics and transportation systems: 1996–2016. *Transportation Research Part B*, 107, 229–252. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1016/j.trb.2017.09.019>
- Arsel, Z. (2017). Asking questions with reflexive focus: A tutorial on designing and conducting interviews. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44, 939-948. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucx096>
- Asogwa, I.S., Okoye, J.I, & Oni, K. (2017). Promotion of indigenous food preservation and processing knowledge and the challenge of food security in Africa. *Journal of Food Security*, 5(3), 75-87. <https://doi.org/10.12691/jfs-5-3-3>
- Assilah Agigi, Wesley Niemann, & Theuns Kotzé. (2016). Supply chain design approaches for supply chain resilience: A qualitative study of South African fast-moving consumer goods grocery manufacturers. *Journal of Transport and Supply Chain Management*. 10(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.4102/jtscm.v10i1.253>

- Athukorala, K., Głowacka, D., Jacucci, G., Oulasvirta, A., & Vreeken, J. (2016). Is exploratory search different? A comparison of information search behavior for exploratory and lookup tasks. *Journal of the Association for Information Science & Technology*, 67(11), 2635–2651. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.23617>
- Augusto, C. A., & de Souza, J. P. (2015). Transaction cost economics and resources-based view: complementary aspects in the treatment of governance structures. *REBRAE*, 8(2), 173-193. <https://doi.org/10.7213/rebrae.08.002.AO04>
- Awiagah, R., Kang, J., & Lim, J. I. (2016). Factors affecting e-commerce adoption among SMEs in Ghana. *Information Development*, 32(4), 815–836. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666915571427>
- Babarinde, O., & Wright, S. (2017). Africa and the United States. *Africa Today*, 64(2), 22-47. <https://doi.org/10.2979/africatoday.64.2.02>
- Babatunde, M. A. (2017). Export propensity and intensity of Nigerian SMEs. *Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship*, 29(1), 25-55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08276331.2016.1248056>
- Bakari, S. (2017). The relationship between export, import, domestic investment and economic growth in Egypt: *Empirical Analysis. EuroEconomica*, 36(2). <http://www.journals.univ-danubius.ro/index.php/euroeconomica/article/view/4135>.



- Bamiatzi, V. C., & Kirchmaier, T. (2014). Strategies for superior performance under adverse conditions: A focus on small and medium-sized high-growth firms. *International Small Business Journal*, 32(3), 259-284.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242612459534>
- Bansal, P., & DesJardine, M. (2014a). Business sustainability: It is about time. *Strategic Organization*, 12(1), 70-78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127013520265>
- Baudry, B., & Chassagnon, V. (2019). The Williamsonian ambiguity on authority and power in transaction cost economics. *Journal of Economic Issues (Taylor & Francis Ltd)*, 53(1), 257–276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00213624.2019.1573094>
- Beaudoin, C., Cianci, A., & Tsakumis, G. (2015). The impact of CFOs' incentives and earnings management ethics on their financial reporting decisions: The mediating role of moral disengagement. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 128(3), 505-518.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2107-x>
- Belás, J., Sopkova, G. (2016). Significant determinants of the competitive environment for SMEs in the context of financial and credit risks. *Journal of International Studies*, 9(2), 139-149. <https://doi.org/10.14254/2071-8330.2016/9-2/10>
- Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *Nursing Plus Open*, 2, 8-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.npls.2016.01.001>
- Berko Obeng Damoah, O. (2018). A critical incident analysis of the export behavior of SMEs: evidence from an emerging market. *critical perspectives on international business*, 14(2/3), 309-334. <https://doi.org/10.1108/cpoib-11-2016-0061>

- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1802-1811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>
- Bicho, N. C. o, Leitão, A. nio E., Ramalho, J. C., & Lidon, F. C. (2014). Application of color parameters for assessing the quality of Arabica and Robusta green coffee. *Emirates Journal of Food & Agriculture (EJFA), 26*(1), 9–17. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.9755/ejfa.v26i1.17190>
- Blankson, C., Cowan, K., & Darley, W. K. (2017). Marketing practices of rural micro and small businesses in Ghana: The role of public policy. *Journal of Macromarketing, 38*(1), 29-56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146717741067>
- Blazeska, D., & Ristoviska, N (2016). The Product design as a significant element of differentiation for achieving market competitiveness. *Economic Development / Ekonomiski Razvoj, 18*(1/2), 41-57. <https://eds-b-ebsohost-com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org>.
- Boddy, C. R. (2016). Sample size for qualitative research. *Qualitative Market Research, 19*(4), 426-432. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-06-2016-0053>
- Booth, A., Sutton, A., & Papaioannou, D. (2016). *Systematic approaches to a successful literature review* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Borchers, E., Deskins, J., & Ross, A. (2016). Can state tax policies be used to grow small and large business? *Contemporary Economic Policy, 34*(2), 312-335. <https://doi.org/10.1111/coep.12149>

- Boşcor, D. (2017). Barriers faced by Romanian SMEs in exporting. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov. Economic Sciences. Series V*, 10(1), 203-208.  
[http://webbut.unitbv.ro/bu2016/series%20v/2017/BULETIN%20I%20PDF/21\\_B OSCOR.pdf](http://webbut.unitbv.ro/bu2016/series%20v/2017/BULETIN%20I%20PDF/21_B OSCOR.pdf).
- Brice, A. N. S. A. (2020). Export Duration in Western Africa: Effects of Different Economic Integration Agreements. <https://aercafricahub.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/D9Niango-Sika-Antoine-Brice-ADOU-%E2%80%93NP.pdf>.
- Bronnenmayer, M., Wirtz, B. W., & Göttel, V. (2016). Determinants of perceived success in management consulting: An empirical investigation from the consultant perspective. *Management Research Review*, 39(6), 706-738.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-014-0137-5>
- Bruneel, J., & De Cock, R. (2016). Entry mode research and SMEs: A review and future research agenda. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 54(S1), 135-167. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jsbm.12291>
- Burdon, W. M., & Harvey, J. (2016). A plea for adoption of ethical compliance. *Journal of Financial Crime*, 23(1), 187–200. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jfc-11-2014-0049>
- Bush, M. (2016). "Strategies Affecting the Sustainability of Small Businesses" Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. 1961.  
<https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/1961>

- Cameroon's National Institute of Statistics Cameroon (CNIS). (2018). General census of enterprises for 2016. Preliminary results. <http://www.statisticscameroon.org>
- Cameroon's National Institute of Statistics (CNIS). (2015). General census of enterprises. <http://www.statistics-cameroon.org>.
- Cant, M. C., & Wiid, J. A. (2016). The use of traditional marketing tools by SMEs in an emerging economy: A South African perspective. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 14(1), 64-70. [https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.14\(1\).2016.07](https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.14(1).2016.07)
- Cappellaro, G. (2017). Ethnography in public management research: A systematic review and future directions. *International Public Management Journal*, 20(1), 14-48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2016.1143423>
- Carbone, M. (2019). Purposefully triggering unintended consequences: the European Commission and the uncertain future of the EU-ACP Partnership. *International Spectator*, 54(1), 45–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2019.1559563>
- Carbaugh, R. (2015). *Contemporary economics: An applications approach* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Carmichael, T., & Cunningham, N. (2017). Theoretical data collection and data analysis with gerunds in a constructivist grounded theory study. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 15(2), 59-73. [www.ejbrm.com/](http://www.ejbrm.com/)
- Castillo-Montoya, M. (2016). Preparing for interview research: The interview protocol refinement framework. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(5), 811-831. <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss5/2>.

- Chacha, P. W., & Edwards, L. (2017). The Growth Dynamics of New Export Entrants in Kenya: A Survival Analysis. (September).  
[https://econrsa.org/system/files/publications/working\\_papers/working\\_paper\\_712.pdf](https://econrsa.org/system/files/publications/working_papers/working_paper_712.pdf).
- Charmaz, K. (1999). Context and method in qualitative research. *Contemporary Sociology*, 28(2), 247-248.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/233604965?accountid=14872>.
- Christopher, M. (2016). *Logistics & supply chain management*. Pearson UK.
- Chukwuogor, C. (2016). Public finance, micro finance and accelerated economic development for the eradication of extreme poverty in Sub Sahara Africa. *African Journal of Accounting, Economics, Finance & Banking Research*, 10(10), 1-17.  
<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2880394>
- Cibangu, S. K., & Hepworth, M. (2016). The uses of phenomenology and phenomenography: A critical review. *Library & Information Science Research*, 38(2), 148-160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2016.05.001>
- Coase, R. H. (1937). The nature of the firm. *Economica*, 4(16), 386-405.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2626876>
- Comert, M. (2018). A qualitative research on the contribution of in-service training to the vocational development of teachers. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 6(7), 114–129. <http://redfame.com/journal/index.php/jets>.

- Connelly, L. M. (2016). Understanding research. Trustworthiness in qualitative research. *MEDSURG Nursing*, 25(6), 435-436. <http://www.medsurnursing.net/cgi-bin/WebObjects/MSNJournal.woa>.
- Cornelissen, J. P. (2017). Preserving theoretical divergence in management research: Why the explanatory potential of qualitative research should be harnessed rather than suppressed. *Journal of Management Studies*, 54(3), 368-383. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12210>
- Coudounaris, D. N. (2018). Export promotion programs for assisting SMEs. *Review of International Business and Strategy*, 28(1), 77-110. <https://doi.org/10.1108/RIBS-06-2017-0050>
- Coulibaly, S. (2017). Differentiated impact of AGOA and EBA on West African Countries. *Manuscript. Africa Chief Economist Office, The World Bank*. <https://agoa.info/downloads/15376.html>.
- Counsell, A., Cribbie, R. A., & Harlow, L. L. (2016). Increasing literacy in quantitative methods: The key to the future of Canadian psychology. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne*, 57(3), 193-201. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000056>
- Crick, F., Eskander, S. M., Fankhauser, S., & Diop, M. (2018). How do African SMEs respond to climate risks? Evidence from Kenya and Senegal. *World Development*, 108, 157-168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.03.015>

- Crosby, M., Pattanayak, P., Verma, S., & Kalyanaraman, V. (2016). Blockchain technology: Beyond bitcoin. *Applied Innovation*, 2(6-10), 71. <https://j2-capital.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/AIR-2016-Blockchain.pdf>.
- Cummings, S., Bridgman, T., & Brown, K. G. (2016). Unfreezing change as three steps: Rethinking Kurt Lewin's legacy for change management. *Human Relation*, 69(1), 33-60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726715577707>
- Cypress, B. S. (2017). Rigor or reliability and validity in qualitative research: Perspectives, strategies, reconceptualization, and recommendations. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, 36(4), 253-263. <https://doi.org/10.1097/DCC.0000000000000253>
- Damani, Z., MacKean, G., Bohm, E., Noseworthy, T., Wang, J. H., DeMone, B., ... Marshall, D. A. (2018). Insights from the design and implementation of a single-entry model of referral for total joint replacement surgery: *Critical success factors and unanticipated consequences*. *Health Policy*, 122(2), 165-174. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthpol.2017.10.006>
- Damoah, O.B.O. (2018) "A critical incident analysis of the export behavior of SMEs: evidence from an emerging market", *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, 14(2/3), pp. 1742-2043. <https://doi.org/10.1108/cpoib-11-2016-0061>
- Dar, M. S., Ahmed, S., & Raziq, A. (2017). Small and medium-size enterprises in Pakistan: Definition and critical issues. *Pakistan Business Review*, 19(1), 46-70. <https://doi.org/10.22555/pbr.v19i1.1245>

- Darma Wangsa, I., & Wee, H. M. (2018). An integrated vendor–buyer inventory model with transportation cost and stochastic demand. *International Journal of Systems Science: Operations & Logistics*, 5(4), 295-309.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23302674.2017.1296601>
- Dasgupta, M. (2015). Exploring the relevance of case study research. *Vision*, 19(2), 147-160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972262915575661>
- Davis, W. (2017). The African growth and opportunity act and the African continental free trade area. *AJIL Unbound*, 111, 377-383. <https://doi.org/10.1017/aju.2017.92>
- Devece, C., Peris-Ortiz, M., & Rueda-Armengot, C. (2016). Entrepreneurship during economic crisis: Success factors and paths to failure. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(11), 5366-5370. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.139>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2017). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, 5th ed. Sage.
- De Schepper, S., Haezendonck, E., & Doooms, M. (2015). Understanding pre-contractual transaction costs for Public–Private Partnership infrastructure projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 33(4), 932–946.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2014.10.015>
- Dikko, M. (2016). Establishing construct validity and reliability: Pilot testing of a qualitative interview for research in Takaful (Islamic insurance). *The Qualitative Report*, 21(3), 521-528. <http://www.nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss3/6/>.



- Dinsmore, D. L. (2017). Examining the ontological and epistemic assumptions of research on metacognition, self-regulation and self-regulated learning. *Educational Psychology, 37*(9), 1125-1153.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2017.1333575>
- Devine, T. J. (2020). Mobile Simulation Logistics. In *Comprehensive Healthcare Simulation: Mobile Medical Simulation* (pp. 77-91). Springer, Cham.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33660-8\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33660-8_6)
- Dobni, C. B., Klassen, M., & Sands, D. (2016). Getting to clarity: New ways to think about strategy. *Journal of Business Strategy, 37*(5), 12-21.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-08-2015-0084>
- Dodgson, J. E. (2017). About research: Qualitative methodologies. *Journal of Human Lactation, 33*(2), 355–358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890334417698693>
- Dominguez, N., & Mayrhofer, U. (2017). Internationalization stages of traditional SMEs: Increasing, decreasing and re-increasing commitment to foreign markets. *International Business Review, 26*(6), 1051-1063.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2017.03.010>
- Edwards, G. (2017). Big ideas in social science. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education, 40*(2), 221–222.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727x.2016.1275277>
- Ee, C. Y. (2016). Export-led growth hypothesis: empirical evidence from selected Sub-Saharan African countries. *Procedia Economics and Finance, 35*, 232-240.  
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671\(16\)00029-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(16)00029-0)

- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Evangelista, F., & Mac, L. (2016). The influence of experience and deliberate learning on SME export performance. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 22(6), 860-879. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-12-2015-0300>
- Evou, J. (2020). Durée de vie et chances de survie des PME au Cameroun [Lifespan and chances of survival of SMEs in Cameroon]. *Revue Economie, Gestion et Société / Economy, Management and Society Review*, 1(22).  
<https://revues.imist.ma/index.php?journal=REGS&page=article&op=view&path%5B%5D=19706&path%5B%5D=10722>.
- Fàbregues, S., & Molina-azorín, J. F. (2017). Addressing quality in mixed methods research: A review and recommendations for a future agenda. *Quality and Quantity*, 5(6)1, 2847-2863. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-016-0449-4>
- Fatemah, A., & Qayyum, A. (2018). Modeling the impact of exports on the economic growth of Pakistan. *Turkish Economic Review*, 5(1), 56-64.  
<http://www.kspjournals.org/index.php/TER/article/viewFile/1584/1624>.
- Fatoki, O. (2018). The impact of entrepreneurial resilience on the success of small and medium enterprises in South Africa. *Sustainability*, 10(7), 2527.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su10072527>

- Fera, M., Fruggiero, F., Lambiase, A., Macchiaroli, R., & Miranda, S. (2017). The role of uncertainty in supply chains under dynamic modeling. *International Journal of Industrial Engineering Computations*, 8(1), 119-140.  
<https://doi.org/10.5267/j.ijiec.2016.6.003>
- Ferreira, F. A., & dos Santos, C. C. (2016). Possibilities of the phenomenological approach and of philosophical hermeneutics in type search state of art. *Philosophy of Mathematics Education Journal*, 2016 (31), 1-4. [www.philmath-europe.org](http://www.philmath-europe.org).
- Fetters, M. D. (2016). Haven't we always been doing mixed methods research? Lessons learned from the development of the horseless carriage. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 10(1), 3-11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689815620883>
- Fikkers, K. M., Piotrowski, J. T., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2017). Assessing the reliability and validity of television and game violence exposure measures. *Communication Research*, 44(1), 117-143. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650215573863>
- Foss, N. J., & Weber, L. (2016). Moving opportunism to the back seat: Bounded rationality, costly conflict, and hierarchical forms. *Academy of Management Review*, 41(1), 61-79. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2014.0105>
- Francioni, B., Vissak, T., & Musso, F. (2017). Small Italian wine producers' internationalization: The role of network relationships in the emergence of late starters. *International Business Review*, 26(1), 12-22.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2016.05.003>
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Boston, MA: Pitman

- Fu, Z., Huang, F., Ren, K., Weng, J., & Wang, C. (2017). Privacy-preserving smart semantic search based on conceptual graphs over encrypted outsourced data. *IEEE Transactions on Information Forensics and Security*, *12*(8), 1874-1884. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TIFS.2017.2692728>
- Fusch, P. I., Fusch, G. E., & Ness, L. R. (2016). How to conduct a mini-ethnographic case study: A guide for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, *22*(3), 923-941. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu>.
- Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, *20*(9), 1408-1416. <http://tqr.nova.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/fusch1.pdf>.
- Fuchs, M., & Köstner, M. (2016). Antecedents and consequences of firm's export marketing strategy. *Management Research Review*, *39*(3), 329-355. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-07-2014-0158>
- Gauche, C., de Beer, L. T., & Brink, L. (2017). Managing employee well-being: A qualitative study exploring job and personal resources of at-risk employees. *South African Journal of Human Resource Management*, *15*(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v15i0.957>
- Garone, L. F., Bernini, F., Castillo, V., & Maffioli, A. (2017). Supporting SMEs to export: The importance of the dynamics and sequence of the effects. *Lacer. Lacea. Org.* [https://lacer.lacea.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/64628/lacea2017\\_supporting\\_SMEs\\_export.pdf?sequence=1](https://lacer.lacea.org/bitstream/handle/123456789/64628/lacea2017_supporting_SMEs_export.pdf?sequence=1)

- Gebrewahid, G. G., & Wald, A. (2017). Export barriers and competitiveness of developing economies: The case of the Ethiopian leather footwear industry. *Journal of African Business, 18*(4), 396-416.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15228916.2017.1329475>
- Geldres-Weiss, V. V., & Carrasco-Roa, J. A. (2016). Impact evaluation of national export promotion programs on export firms using contrast groups. *International Journal of Export Marketing, 1*(1), 77-95.  
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301495797>.
- German, A. M., & Boscoianu, M. (2016). Gaining competitive advantage in a global Business environment—the case of SMEs in emerging markets. *Strategic approaches in economy, governance and business, 57*.  
<http://elibrary.snsa.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Strategic-approaches-in-economy.pdf#page=57>.
- Gerring, J. (2017). Qualitative methods. *The Annual Review of Political Science, 20*(1), 15-36. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-092415-024158>
- Ghoshal, S., & Moran, P. (1996). Bad for practice: A critique of the transaction cost theory. *Academy of Management Review, 21*(1), 13-47.  
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1996.9602161563>
- Gibson, C. B. (2017). Elaboration, generalization, triangulation, and interpretation: On enhancing the value of mixed method research. *Organizational Research Methods, 20*(2), 193-223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428116639133>

- Gil-Pareja, S., Llorca-Vivero, R., & Martínez-Serrano, J. A. (2017). The effect of nonreciprocal preferential trade agreements on benefactors' exports. *Empirical economics*, 52(1), 143-154. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00181-016-1071-y>
- Graci, M. E., & Fivush, R. (2017). Narrative meaning-making, attachment, and psychological growth and stress. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 34(4), 486-509. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407516644066>
- Grant, D. B., Trautrim, A., & Wong, C. Y. (2017). *Sustainable logistics and supply chain management: principles and practices for sustainable operations and management*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Gray, D. E., & Saunders, M. K. (2016). Beyond survival: How do SMEs win new business and prosper? *Annual International Conference on Business Strategy & Organizational Behaviour (Bizstrategy)*, 11-15. [https://doi.org/10.5176/2251-1970\\_BizStrategy16.10](https://doi.org/10.5176/2251-1970_BizStrategy16.10)
- Grimm, J. H., Hofstetter, J. S., & Sarkis, J. (2016). Exploring sub-suppliers' compliance with corporate sustainability standards. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 112, 1971-1984. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.11.036>
- Gulbrandsen, B., Lambe, C. J., & Sandvik, K. (2017). Firm boundaries and transaction costs: The complementary role of capabilities. *Journal of Business Research*, 78, 193-203. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.12.015>

- Gupta, H., & Barua, M. K. (2016). Identifying enablers of technological innovation for Indian MSMEs using best–worst multi-criteria decision-making method. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *107*, 69-79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2016.03.028>
- Gutiérrez, R., Márquez, P., & Reficco, E. (2016). Configuration and development of alliance portfolios: A comparison of same-sector and cross-sector partnerships: JBE. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *135*(1), 55-69. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2729-7>
- Haddoud, M. Y., Jones, P., & Newbery, R. (2017). Export promotion programs and SMEs' performance: Exploring the network promotion role. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, *24*(1), 68-87. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSBED-07-2016-0116>
- Haddoud, M. Y., Adah-Kole, O., Jones, P., & Newbery, R. (2018). Investigating the moderating role of export promotion programs using evidence from North-Africa. *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, *14*(2), 282-308. <https://doi.org/10.1108/cpoib-11-2016-0059>
- Hadi, N. U., & Abdullah, N. (2018). The leverage of entrepreneur skills and entrepreneur traits to business success: A case study of Pakistan's marble industry. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, *33*(3), 315-328. <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijesb.2018.090216>

- Hadj, T. B. (2020). Effects of corporate social responsibility towards stakeholders and environmental management on responsible innovation and competitiveness. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 250, 119490. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.119490>
- Halim, H. A., Ahmad, N. H., Ho, T. C., & Ramayah, T. (2017). The outsourcing dilemma on decision to outsource among small and medium enterprises in Malaysia. *Global Business Review*, 18(2), 348-364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972150916668603>
- Hamet, J. and Michel, S. (2018), Rigor, relevance, and the knowledge “market”, *European Business Review*, 30(2), 183–201. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-01-2017-0025>
- Hammarberg, K., Kirkman, M., & de Lacey, S. (2016). Qualitative research methods: When to use them and how to judge them. *Human Reproduction*, 31(3), 498–501. <https://doi.org/10.1093/humrep/dev334>
- Han, J. H., & Park, H. Y. (2019). Sustaining small exporters’ performance: capturing heterogeneous effects of government export assistance programs on global value chain informedness. *Sustainability*, 11(8), 2380. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11082380>
- Hancock, M. E., Amankwaa, L., Revell, M. A., & Mueller, D. (2016). Focus group data saturation: A new approach to data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(11), 2124-2130. <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss11/13>



- Hardt, L., (2009). The history of transaction cost economics and its recent developments. *Erasmus Journal for Economics and Philosophy*, 2(1), 29-51.  
<http://ssrn.com/abstract=1491752>.
- Harrison, J. S., Banks, G. C., Pollack, J. M., O'Boyle, E. H., & Short, J. (2017). Publication bias in strategic management research. *Journal of Management*, 43(2), 400–425. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206314535438>
- Hassan, M. S., Bukhari, S., & Arshed, N. (2020). Competitiveness, governance and globalization: What matters for poverty alleviation? *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 22(4), 3491-3518. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-019-00355-y>
- Havierníková, K., Lemańska-Majdzik, A., & Mura, L. (2017). Advantages and disadvantages of the participation of SMEs in tourism clusters. *Journal of Environmental Management & Tourism*, 8(6), 1205-1215.  
[https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v8.6\(22\).07](https://doi.org/10.14505/jemt.v8.6(22).07)
- Heath, J., Williamson, H., Williams, L., & Harcourt, D. (2018). “It's just more personal”: Using multiple methods of qualitative data collection to facilitate participation in research focusing on sensitive subjects. *Applied Nursing Research*, 43, 30–35.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnr.2018.06.015>
- Hejazi, M., Grant, J. H., & Peterson, E. (2017). Tariff changes and the margins of trade: A case study of U.S. agri-food imports. *Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*, 42(1), 68-89. <http://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/1892735676?accountid=14872>.

- Hense, C., & McFerran, K. S. (2016). A critical grounded theory. *Qualitative Research Journal, 16*(4), 75-101. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-08-2015-0073>
- Herawaty, T., & Raharja, S. J. (2019). Analysis of partnership to achieve competitive advantage: A study on creative industries in bandung city, indonesia. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research, 8*(3), 61-70.  
<https://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fanalysis-partnership-achieve-competitive%2Fdocview%2F2236127596%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D14872>.
- Hollender, L. G., Zapkau, F. B., & Schwens, C. (2017). SME foreign market entry mode choice and foreign venture performance: The moderating effect of international experience and product adaptation. *International Business Review, 26*(2), 250-263. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2016.07.003>
- Holloway, I., & Galvin, K. (2016). *Qualitative research in nursing and healthcare*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Hoolachan, J. (2016). Ethnography and homelessness research. *International Journal of Housing Policy, 16*(1), 31-49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616718.2015.1076625>
- Hruza, F. (2016). Municipal bankruptcy: Pilot experience from Czech Republic. *Rev. Eur. Stud., 8*(1), 87. <https://doi.org/10.5539/res.v8n1p87>
- Hsieh, C., Huang, H., & Lee, W. (2016). Using transaction cost economics to explain open innovation in start-ups. *Management Decision, 54*(9), 2133-2156.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-01-2016-0012>

- Hsieh, L., Child, J., Narooz, R., Elbanna, S., Karmowska, J., Marinova, S., Puthuserry, P., Tsai, T., Zhang, Y. (2019). A multidimensional perspective of SME internationalization speed: The influence of entrepreneurial characteristics. *International Business Review*, 28(2), 268-283. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2018.09.004>
- Hugos, M. H. (2018). *Essentials of supply chain management*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Huff, A. S., Milliken, F. J., Hodgkinson, G. P., Galavan, R. J., & Sund, K. J. (2016). *A Conversation on Uncertainty in Managerial and Organizational Cognition*, *Uncertainty and Strategic Decision Making* (pp. 1-31). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2397-52102016017>
- Ibrahim, Z., Abdullah, F., & Ismail, A. (2016). International business competence and small and medium enterprises. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 224, 393-400. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.05.402>
- Igwe, P. A., Ogundana, A. N. A. O. M., Egere, O. M., & Anigbo, J. A. (2018). Factors affecting the investment climate, SMEs productivity and entrepreneurship in Nigeria. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, 7(1), 182-200. <https://doi.org/10.14207/ejsd.2018.v7n1p182>
- Iivari, N. (2018). Using member checking in interpretive research practice. *Information Technology & People*, 31(1), 111-133. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-07-2016-0168>

- Imran, M., Hamid, S., & Aziz, A. (2018). The influence of TQM on export performance of SMEs: Empirical evidence from manufacturing sector in Pakistan using PLS-SEM. *Management Science Letters*, 8(5), 483-496.  
<https://doi.org/10.5267/j.msl.2018.3.003>
- Imran, M., Aziz, A., Hamid, S., Shabbir, M., Salman, R., & Jian, Z. (2018). The mediating role of total quality management between entrepreneurial orientation and SMEs export performance. *Management Science Letters*, 8(6), 519-532.  
<https://doi.org/10.5267/j.msl.2018.5.003>
- Ip, F. C. F., Zhao, Y. M., Chan, K. W., Cheng, E. Y. L., Tong, E. P. S., Chandrashekar, O., ... & Ip, N. Y. Y. (2016). Neuroprotective effect of a novel Chinese herbal decoction on cultured neurons and cerebral ischemic rats. *BMC complementary and alternative medicine*, 16(1), 437. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12906-016-1417-1>
- Ismail, F. (2017). The AGOA Extension and Enhancement Act of 2015, the SA-US AGOA negotiations, and the Future of AGOA. *World Trade Review*, 16(3), 527-544. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S147474561600063X>
- Jamshed, S. (2014). Qualitative research method interviewing and observation. *Journal of Basic and Clinical Pharmacy*, 5(4), 87-88. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0976-0105.141942>
- Jaskiewicz, P., Combs, J. G., & Rau, S. B. (2015). Entrepreneurial legacy: Toward a theory of how some family firms nurture transgenerational entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 3(1)0, 29-49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2014.07.001>

- Jin, Y., Pang, A., & Smith, J. (2018). Crisis communication and ethics: The role of public relations. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 39(1), 43-52. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-09-2016-0095>
- Johnson, J. S., Friend, S. B., Rutherford, B. N., & Hamwi, G. A. (2016). Absolute versus relative sales failure. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(2), 596-603. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.05.015>
- Kalinicheva, V., Dmitriev, S., Drigo, M., Kazimirova, N., Nikitina, A., & Igolnikova, I. (2016). Feature's logistics customs warehouses in the integration of the world economy and the globalization of business. *International Review of Management and Marketing*, 6(1), 148-152. <http://www.econjournals.com/index.php/irmm/article/view/1895>
- Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 72(12), 2954-2965. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031>
- Karia, N. (2020). Green Logistics Practices and Sustainable Business Model. In *Handbook of Research on the Applications of International Transportation and Logistics for World Trade* (pp. 354-366). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-1397-2.ch019>
- Karimi, O., & Hamedi, R. (2016). Identification of effective factors of individual entrepreneurship in carpet exporter manufacturing unites. *International Business Management*, 10, 2994-2998. <http://docsdrive.com/>

- Kearney, C., & Meynhardt, T. (2016). Directing corporate entrepreneurship strategy in the public sector to public value: Antecedents, components, and outcomes. *International Public Management Journal*, 19(4), 543-572.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2016.1160013>
- Ketokivi, M., & Mahoney, J. T. (2016). Transaction cost economics as a constructive stakeholder theory. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 15(1), 123-138. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2015.0133>
- Khanin, D., & Turel, O. (2016). CEOs' appraisals of venture capitalists' external and internal support: a transaction cost economics perspective. *Venture Capital*, 18(4), 297-320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691066.2016.1225774>
- Kirchoff, J. F., Tate, W. L., & Mollenkopf, D. A. (2016). The impact of strategic organizational orientations on green supply chain management and firm performance. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*, 46(3), 269-292. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13598540810882206>
- Klaes, M. (2016). Transaction costs, history of. *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, 1-7. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95121-5\\_2826-1](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95121-5_2826-1)
- Ključnikov, A., & Popesko, B. (2017). Export and its financing in the SME segment. Case study from Slovakia. *Journal of Competitiveness*, 9(1).  
<https://doi.org/10.7441/joc.2017.01.02>

- Koranteng, E. O., Osei-Bonsu, E., Ameyaw, F., Ameyaw, B., Agyeman, J. K., & Dankwa, R. A. (2017). The effects of compliance and growth opinions on SMEs compliance decisions: An Empirical evidence from Ghana. *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 5(02), 230. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojbm.2017.52021>
- Kourti, I. (2016). Using personal narratives to explore multiple identities in organizational contexts. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, 11(3), 169-188. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-02-2015-1274>
- Krishnan, S. (2017). Sustainable Coffee Production. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Environmental Science*, 10.1093. <https://doi.org/9780199389414.013.224>
- Krouwel, M., Jolly, K., & Greenfield, S. (2019). Comparing Skype (video calling) and in-person qualitative interview modes in a study of people with irritable bowel syndrome—an exploratory comparative analysis. *BMC medical research methodology*, 19(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-019-0867-9>
- Kumar, R., & Kumar Singh, R. (2017). Coordination and responsiveness issues in SME supply chains: a review. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, 24(3), 635-650. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BIJ-03-2016-0041>
- Lai, K. H., & Cheng, T. E. (2016). *Just-in-time logistics*. Routledge.
- Lambert, D. M., & Enz, M. G. (2017). Issues in Supply Chain Management: Progress and potential. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 62, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2016.12.002>

- Lampadarijos, E. (2017). A qualitative perspective of enterprise success factors for SMEs: A case study in the UK chemical distribution industry. *Case Studies in Business and Management*, 4(1), 1258-1270. <https://doi.org/10.5296/csbn.v4i1.10359>
- Lamprecht, N., & Tolmay, A. S. (2017). Performance of south African automotive exports under the African growth and opportunity act from 2001 to 2015. *The International Business & Economics Research Journal (Online)*, 16(2), 131-142. <https://doi.org/10.19030/iber.v16i2.9927>
- Lancaster, K. (2017). Confidentiality, anonymity, and power relations in elite interviewing: Conducting qualitative policy research in a politicized domain. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(1), 93-103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2015.1123555>
- Langan, M., & Price, S. (2015). Extraversion and the west African EPA development program: Realizing the development dimension of ACP-EU trade? *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 53(3), 263-287. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X15000579>
- Laudon, K. C., & Laudon, J. P. (2015). *Management information systems* (p. 143). Upper Saddle River: Pearson.
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2016). *Practical research: Planning and design* (10th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Leedy, P. D., Ormrod, J. E., & Johnson, L. R. (2019). *Practical research: Planning and design* (12th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.



- Lentz, J., Kennett, M., Perlmutter, J., & Forrest, A. (2016). Paving the way to a more effective informed consent process: Recommendations from the clinical trials transformation initiative. *Contemporary Clinical Trials, 49*, 65-69.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cct.2016.06.005>
- Levitt, H. M., Pomerville, A., Surace, F. I., & Grabowski, L. M. (2017). Metamethod study of qualitative psychotherapy research on clients' experiences: Review and recommendations. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 64*(6), 626-644.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000222>
- Liao, H., & Hitchcock, J. (2018). Reported credibility techniques in higher education evaluation studies that use qualitative methods: A research synthesis. *Evaluation & Program Planning, 68*, 157-165.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2018.03.005>
- Lobel, O. (2018). Coase and the platform economy. Forthcoming in *Sharing Economy Handbook. San Diego Legal Studies Paper No. 17-318*, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3083764>
- Loeb, S., Dynarski, S., McFarland, D., Morris, P., Reardon, S., & Reber, S. (2017). *Descriptive analysis in education: A guide for researchers* (NCEE 2017- 4023).  
<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/>
- Luborsky, M. R., & Lysack, C. (2017). *Design considerations in qualitative research*. In R. R. Taylor (Ed.), *Kielhofner's research in occupational therapy: Methods of inquiry for enhancing practice* (2nd ed., pp. 180-195). Philadelphia, PA: F. A. Davis.

- Lukason, O., & Vissak, T. (2017). Failure processes of exporting firms: Evidence from France. *Review of International Business and Strategy*, 27(3), 322-334.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/RIBS-03-2017-0020>
- Lun, Y. V., Shang, K. C., Lai, K. H., & Cheng, T. C. E. (2016). Examining the influence of organizational capability in innovative business operations and the mediation of profitability on customer satisfaction: An application in intermodal transport operators in Taiwan. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 171(2), 179- 188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpe.2015.02.019>
- Lyall, C., & King, E. (2016). Using qualitative research methods in biomedical innovation: the case of cultured red blood cells for transfusion. *BMC Research Notes*, 9(1), 267. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13104-016-2077-4>
- Machi, L. A., & McEvoy, B. T. (2016). *The literature review: Six steps to success*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Madill, A., & Sullivan, P. (2017). Mirrors, portraits, and member checking: Managing difficult moments of knowledge exchange in the social sciences. *Qualitative Psychology*, 5(3), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000089>
- Mahabir, A., Fan, J., & Mullings, R. (2018). *Does the African growth and opportunity act (AGOA) impact EU-15's imports of apparel from Africa?* London: Centre for Business & Economic Research. <http://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/35358>.

- Makrakis, V., & Kostoulas-Makrakis, N. (2016). Bridging the qualitative–quantitative divide: Experiences from conducting a mixed methods evaluation in the RUCAS program. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 54*, 144–151.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2015.07.008>
- Malone, H., Nicholl, H., & Tracey, C. (2017). Awareness and minimization of systematic bias in research. *British Journal of Nursing, 23*(5), 279-282.  
<http://www.markallengroup.com/ma-healthcare>
- Manhas, K. P., & Oberle, K. (2015). The ethics of metaphor as a research tool. *Research Ethics, 1*(1), 42-51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1747016114523421>
- Margaretha, F., & Supartika, N. (2016). Factors affecting profitability of small-medium enterprises (SMEs) firm listed in Indonesia stock exchange. *Journal of Economics, Business, and Management, 4*(2), 132-137.  
<https://doi.org/10.7763/joebm.2016.v4.379>
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Martí, L., & Puertas, R. (2017). The importance of export logistics and trade costs in emerging economies. *Maritime Economics & Logistics, 19*(2), 315-333.  
<https://doi.org/10.1057/mel.2015.31>
- Martuscelli, A., & Varela, G. (2018). Survival is for the fittest: Export survival patterns in Georgia. *Economic Systems, 42*(3), 397-413.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecosys.2017.10.002>

- Martynov, A., & Schepker, D. J. (2017). Risk preferences and asset ownership: Integrating prospect theory and transaction cost economics. *Managerial & Decision Economics*, 38(2), 125–143. doi:10.1002/mde.2746
- Mauceri, S. (2016). Integrating quality into quantity: Survey research in the era of mixed methods. *Quality and Quantity*, 50(3), 1213-1231.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-015-0199-8>
- Maxwell, J. A. (2016). Expanding the history and range of mixed methods research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 10(1), 12-27.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689815571132>
- Mayr, S., Mitter, C., & Aichmayr, A. (2017). Corporate crisis and sustainable reorganization: Evidence from bankrupt Austrian SMEs. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 55(1), 108-127. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jsbm.12248>
- Mazzei, M. J., Flynn, C. B., & Haynie, J. J. (2016). Moving beyond initial success: Promoting innovation in small businesses through high-performance work practices. *Business Horizons*, 59(1), 51-60.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2015.08.004>
- McCarthy, L., & Muthuri, J. N. (2018). Engaging fringe stakeholders in business and society research: Applying visual participatory research methods. *Business & Society*, 57(1), 131-173. [http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/39111/1/BAS-15-0190.R3-Engaging-fringestakeholders% 20\(McCarthy%20%20Muthuri\).pdf](http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/39111/1/BAS-15-0190.R3-Engaging-fringestakeholders%20(McCarthy%20%20Muthuri).pdf)

- Miller, M., Hoffer, A., & Wille, D. (2016). Small-business financing after the financial crisis: Lessons from the literature. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy*, 6(3), 315-339. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEPP-D-17-00005>
- Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Regional Development (MINEPAT), Cameroon Policy Analysis and Research Center. (2016). *Monitoring the demography of small and medium-sized enterprises in Cameroon: Dispositif de suivi de la mortalite des PME /Monitoring the mortality of SMEs. CAMERCAP-PARC 2(1)*. [http://camercapparc.org/download/Etude.Demo\\_PME.vol2.pdf](http://camercapparc.org/download/Etude.Demo_PME.vol2.pdf)
- Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts (MSME). (2019). "Annuaire statistique des PMEESA 2018" [PMEESA 2018 statistical directory]. <http://www.minpmeesa.gov.cm/site/inhoud/uploads/2019/05/ANN-STAT-PMEESA-2018.pdf>.
- Ministry of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Social Economy, and Handicraft (MSME). (2015). Law No. 2015/010, 07/16/2015. Modification and completion of law No. 2010/001, 04/13/2010. Promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises in Cameroon. [http://minpmeesa.gov.cm/images/loipme\\_2015.pdf](http://minpmeesa.gov.cm/images/loipme_2015.pdf).
- Molina-Azorin, J. F., Bergh, D. D., Corley, K. G., & Ketchen, D. J. (2017). Mixed methods in the organizational sciences. *Organizational Research Methods*, 20(2), 179-192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109442811668702>

- Moon, K., Brewer, T., Januchowski-Hartley, S., Adams, V., & Blackman, D. (2016). A guideline to improve qualitative social science publishing in ecology and conservation journals. *Ecology and Society*, 21(3), 17–36.  
<https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-08663-210317>
- Morse, J. M., & Coulehan, J. (2015). Maintaining confidentiality in qualitative publications. *Qualitative Health Research*, 25(2), 151-152.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732314563489>
- Musa, H., & Chinniah, M. (2016). Malaysian SMEs development: Future and challenges on going green. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 224, 254-262.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.05.457>
- Mustafa, N., Nakov, L., & Islami, X. (2019). The Impact of organizational changes on increasing SMEs Competitiveness. *Acta Universitatis Danubius: Oeconomica*, 15(2), 93–114. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3351243>
- Mwangi, G., Chrystal, A., & Bettencourt, G. M. (2017). A qualitative toolkit for institutional research. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2017(174), 11-23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.20217>
- Neves, L. W. D. A., Hamacher, S., & Scavarda, L. F. (2014). Outsourcing from the perspectives of TCE and RBV: A multiple case study. *Production*, 24(3), 687-699. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0103-65132013005000082>
- Nguyen, S., & Wolfe, S. (2016). Determinants of successful access to bank loans by Vietnamese SMEs: new evidence from the red river delta. *The Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.4172/1204-5357.1000162>

- North, D. C. (2016). Institutions and economic theory. *The American economist*, 61(1), 72-76. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95121-5\\_375-1](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95121-5_375-1)
- Novack, R. A., Gibson, B. J., Suzuki, Y., & Coyle, J. J. (2019). *Transportation: A Global Supply Chain Perspective*. Supply Chain and Information Systems Books. 1. [https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/scm\\_books/1](https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/scm_books/1)
- Nummela, N., Saarenketo, S., & Loane, S. (2016). The dynamics of failure in international new ventures: A case study of Finnish and Irish software companies. *International Small Business Journal*, 34(1), 51-69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242614539363>
- OECD. (2018), Fostering greater SME participation in a globally integrated economy. Discussion Paper for Plenary Session 3, the OECD 2018 SME Ministerial Conference, 22-23 February 2018, Mexico City, Mexico. <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/smes/ministerial/documents/2018-SME-Ministerial-Conference-Plenary-Session-3.pdf>
- O'Cass, A., & Griffin, D. (2015). Eliciting positive social change: Marketing's capacity to drive pro-social behaviors. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 33(5), 826-843. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-02-2014-0027>
- Ogbari, M. E., Ibidunni, O. S., Ogunnaike, O. O., Olokundun, A. M., & Amaihian, A. B. (2018). A comparative analysis of small business strategic orientation: Implications for performance. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, 17(1), 1-15. <http://eprints.covenantuniversity.edu.ng/id/eprint/10289>.

- Olivier, B. H. (2017). The use of mixed-methods research to diagnose the organizational performance of a local government. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology, 43*(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v43i0.1453>
- Olufemi Babarinde, & Stephen Wright. (2017). Africa and the United States: Assessing AGOA. *Africa Today, 64*(2), 23-47.  
[www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/africatoday.64.2.02](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/africatoday.64.2.02).
- Parfitt, T. W. (2016). Structural Adjustment'. *Development Perspectives for the 1990s*, 17. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, Inc.
- Park, J., & Park, M. (2016). Qualitative versus quantitative research methods: Discover or justification? *Journal of Marketing Thought, 3*(1), 1-7.  
<https://doi.org/10.15577/jmt.2016.03.01.1>
- Parker, L. D., & Northcott, D. (2016). Qualitative generalizing in accounting research: Concepts and strategies. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 29*(6), 1100-1131. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-04-2015-2026>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). USA : Sage Publications, Inc.
- Peprah, J. A., Mensah, A. O., & Akosah, N. B. (2016). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) accessibility to public procurement: SMEs entity perspective in Ghana. *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences, 4*(11), 25-40.  
<https://doi.org/10.21859/eulawrev08033>



- Persson, M., & Wilhelmsson, F. (2016). EU trade preferences and export diversification. *The World Economy*, 39(1), 16-53.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/twec.12354>
- Polonsky, M. J., Grau, S. L., & McDonald, S. (2016). Perspectives on social impact measurement and non-profit organizations. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 34(1), 80- 98. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-11-2014-0221>
- Pomare, C. and Berry, A. (2016), "Integrative contingency-based framework of MCS: the case of post-secondary education", *Journal of Accounting & Organizational Change*, 12(3), pp. 351-385. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JAOC-02-2014-0013>
- Porter, K., Wilfond, B., Danis, M., Taylor, H., & Cho, M. (2018). The emergence of clinical research ethics consultation: Insights from a national collaborative. *American Journal of Bioethics*, 18(1), 39-45.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2017.1401156>
- Pradhan, J. and Das, K. (2015), "Regional export advantage of rising power SMEs", *critical perspectives on international business*, 11(3/4), pp. 236-258.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/cpoib-10-2013-0040>
- Pryor, C., Webb, J. W., Ireland, R. D., & Ketchen, Jr., D. J. (2016). Toward an integration of the behavioral and cognitive influences on the entrepreneurship process. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, 10(1), 21-42.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/sej.1204>

- Purves, N., Niblock, S., & Sloan, K. (2016). Are organizations destined to fail? *Management Research Review*, 39(1), 62-81. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-07-2014-0153>
- Purves, N., Niblock, S. J., & Sloan, K. (2015). On the relationship between financial and non-financial factors. *Agricultural Finance Review*, 75(2), 282-300. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AFR-04-2014-0007>
- Qiu, W., & Gullett, W. (2017). Quantitative analysis for maritime delimitation: Reassessing the Bay of Bengal delimitation between Bangladesh and Myanmar. *Marine Policy*, 78, 45-54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2017.01.011>
- Quartey, P., Turkson, E., Abor, J. Y., & Iddrisu, A. M. (2017). Financing the growth of SMEs in Africa: What are the constraints to SME financing within ECOWAS? *Review of development finance*, 7(1), 18-28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rdf.2017.03.001>
- Rajendran, R. (2015). Influence of Information Systems Strategic Orientation on SMEs' Perception of Export Barriers. *South Asian Journal of Management*, 22(2), 119–143. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-6298-8\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-6298-8_7)
- Rantasila, K., & Ojala, L. (2015). National-level logistics costs: an overview of extant research. *International Journal of Logistics Research and Applications*, 18(4), 313-324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13675567.2015.1016413>
- Rehman, N. U. (2016). Network alliances and firms' performance: a panel data analysis of Pakistani SMEs. *Eurasian Business Review*, 6(1), 37-52. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40821-015-0033-1>

- Remneland-Wikhamn, B., & Knights, D. (2012). Transaction cost economics and open innovation: Implications for theory and practice. *Creativity and Innovation Management, 21*(3), 277-289. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8691.2012.00639>.
- Ribeiro-Soriano, D. (2017). Small business and entrepreneurship: their role in economic and social development. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development, 29*(2), 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2016.1255438>
- Ridder, H. (2017). The theory contribution of case study research designs. *Business Research, 10*(2), 281-305. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40685-017-0045-z>
- Robinson, M., Ford, S. L., & Goodman, L. B. (2018). An exploration of osteopaths' views and experiences regarding the identification of, and provision of advice for, urinary incontinence in women: A qualitative study using framework analysis. *International Journal of Osteopathic Medicine, 28*(2018), 20-29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijosm.2018.03.004>
- Ross, M. W., Iguchi, M. Y., & Panicker, S. (2018). Ethical aspects of data sharing and research participant protections. *American Psychologist, 73*(2), 138-145. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000240>
- Roulston, K. (2016). Issues involved in methodological analyses of research interviews. *Qualitative Research Journal, 16*, 68-79. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-02-2015-0015>

- Roundy, P. T., & Fayard, D. (2020). Place-Based Advantages in Entrepreneurship: How Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Coordination Reduces Transaction Costs. *Journal of Behavioral & Applied Management*, 20(2), 115–136. <https://eds-a-ebshost-com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&sid=f7e022cf-bf13-4174-a4fe-72e1590b96ae%40sessionmgr4006>.
- Rua, O., França, A., & Rubén Fernández Ortiz. (2018). Key drivers of SMEs export performance: The mediating effect of competitive advantage. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 22(2), 257-279. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-07-2017-0267>
- Rumbold, J. M. M., & Pierscionek, B. K. (2017). A critique of the regulation of data science in healthcare research in the European union. *BMC Medical Ethic*, 18(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-017-0184-y>
- Runfola, A., Perna, A., Baraldi, E., & Gregori, G. L. (2016). The use of qualitative case studies in top business and management journals: A quantitative analysis of recent patterns. *European Management Journal*, 35(1), 116-127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2016.04.001>
- Saberi, S., Kouhizadeh, M., Sarkis, J., & Shen, L. (2019). Blockchain technology and its relationships to sustainable supply chain management. *International Journal of Production Research*, 57(7), 2117-2135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207543.2018.1533261>

- Sambasivan, M., Deepak, T. J., Salim, A. N., & Ponniah, V. (2017). Analysis of delays in Tanzanian construction industry: Transaction cost economics (TCE) and structural equation modeling (SEM) approach. *Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management*, 24(2), 308-325. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ECAM-09-2015-0145>
- Sánchez-Hernández, M. I., Gallardo-Vázquez, D., Barcik, A., & Dziwiński, P. (2016). The effect of the internal side of social responsibility on firm competitive success in the business services industry. *Sustainability*, 8(2), 179. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su8020179>
- Saunders, M. N., & Townsend, K. (2016). Reporting and justifying the number of interview participants in organization and workplace research. *British Journal of Management*, 27(4), 836–852. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12182>
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thomhill, A. (2016). *Research methods for business students*. Essex, UK: Pearson Education Limited.
- Schoenung, B., & Dikova, D. (2016). Reflections on organizational team diversity research: In search of a logical support to an assumption. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: *An International Journal*, 35(3), 221-231. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-11-2015-0095>
- Scoppola, M., Raimondi, V., & Olper, A. (2018). The impact of EU trade preferences on the extensive and intensive margins of agricultural and food products. *Agricultural economics*, 49(2), 251-263. <https://doi.org/10.1111/agec.12413>

- Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. (2016). *Research methods for business: A skill building approach*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Sestu, M. C., & Majocchi, A. (2020). Family Firms and the Choice Between Wholly Owned Subsidiaries and Joint Ventures: A Transaction Costs Perspective. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 44(2), 211–232. doi: 10.1177/1042258718797925
- Shahzad, K., Ali, T., Takala, J., Helo, P., & Zaefarian, G. (2018). The varying roles of governance mechanisms on ex-post transaction costs and relationship commitment in buyer-supplier relationships. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 71, 135–146. doi:10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.12.012
- Shi, Y., Arthanari, T., & Wood, L. (2017). Developing third-party purchase (3PP) services: New Zealand third-party logistics providers' perspectives. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, 22(1), 40-57. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SCM-06-2016-0189>
- Sitharam, S., & Hoque, M. (2016). Factors affecting the performance of small and medium enterprises in KwaZulu-Natal, south Africa. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 14(2), 277-288. [https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.14\(2-2\).2016.03](https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.14(2-2).2016.03)
- Small Business Administration. (2015). *Small business profile*. <http://www.sba.gov>.
- Small Business and Entrepreneurial Council. (2016). *Small business facts and data*. <http://sbecouncil.org/about-us/facts-and-data/>.

- Smith, K. T., Jones, A., Johnson, L., & Smith, L. M. (2019). Examination of cybercrime and its effects on corporate stock value. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*, 17(1), 42-60. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JICES-02-2018-0010>
- Smith, S. P. (2015b). *Southern California small business leaders and emotional intelligence: Exploring perceptions of effect and value in the workplace*. (Doctoral dissertation) ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global database. (Order No. 3722893)
- Snelson, C. L. (2016). Qualitative and mixed methods social media research. A review of the literature. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 15(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406915624574>.
- Socrates, M. K. (2016). A Discrete Time Analysis of Export Duration in Kenya: 1995-2014. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2736831>
- Stephen, L., Olsen, K. B., Ian, S. L., & Hasle, P. (2015). Managing safety in small and medium enterprises. *Safety Science*, 71, 189-196. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2014.11.007>
- Stouraitis, V., Harris, M., Harun, M. and Kyritsis, M. (2017), “Motivators of SME initial export choice and the European Union regional effect in manufacturing”, *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 23 No. 1, pp. 35-55. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3563\(2012\)000012B005](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3563(2012)000012B005)

- Suárez-Ortega, S. M., García-Cabrera, A. M., & Knight, G. A. (2016). Knowledge acquisition for SMEs first entering developing economies: Evidence from Senegal. *European Journal of Management and Business Economics*, 25(1), 22-35. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.redee.2015.10.002>
- Sukamolson, S. (2016). *Fundamentals of quantitative research*. EJTR. <https://independent.academia.edu/SSukamolson>.
- Sundar, T. K. B., Løndal, K., Lagerløv, P., Glavin, K., & Helseth, S. (2018). Overweight adolescents' views on physical activity: Experiences of participants in an Internet-based intervention: A qualitative study. *BMC Public Health*, 18(1), 448. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5324-x>
- Süsi, V., & Lukason, O. (2019). Corporate governance and failure risk: evidence from Estonian SME population. *Management Research Review*, 42(6), 703–720. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-03-2018-0105>
- Sutton, J., & Austin, Z. (2015). Qualitative Research: Data Collection, Analysis, and Management. *The Canadian journal of hospital pharmacy*, 68(3), 226–231. <https://doi.org/10.4212/cjhp.v68i3.1456>
- Szczepańska-Woszczyna, K., & Kurowska-Pysz, J. (2016). Sustainable business development through leadership in SMEs. *Ekonomia i Zarządzanie*, 8(3), 57-69. <https://doi.org/10.1515/emj-2016-0024>
- Talley, W. K., & Riggs, S. R. (2018). 13. Trade logistics and seaborne transportation. *Handbook of International Trade and Transportation*, 409. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc



- Taguchi, N. (2018). Description and explanation of pragmatic development: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research. *Systems, 75*, 23-32.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.03.010>
- Tavana, M., Zareinejad, M., Santos-Arteaga, F. J., & Kaviani, M. A. (2016). A conceptual analytic network model for evaluating and selecting third-party reverse logistics providers. *The International Journal of Advanced Manufacturing Technology, 86*(5-8), 1705-1721. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00170-015-8208-6>
- Thomas, D.C., & Peterson, M. F. (2015). Cross-cultural management: *Essential concepts*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Thomas, D. R. (2017). Feedback from research participants: are member checks useful in qualitative research? *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 14*(1), 23–41.  
[https://doi: 10.1080/14780887.2016.1219435](https://doi:10.1080/14780887.2016.1219435)
- Thelepis, T. J., Mastamet-Mason, A., & Antonites, A. J. (2016). Collaborating to compete: The role of collective creativity in a South African clothing design small business. *Southern African Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management, 8*(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajesbm.v8i1.58>
- Trang, N. T. X. (2016). Review paper: Design an ideal supply chain strategy. *Advances in Management, 9*(4), 20-27.  
<http://search.proquest.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/1778674546?accountid=14872>.

- Tsambou, A. D., & Kamga, B. F. (2017). Performance perspectives for small and medium enterprises in Cameroon: innovation and ICTs. *Timisoara Journal of Economics and Business*, *10*(1), 68-87. <https://doi.org/10.1515/tjeb-2017-0005>
- Tunarosa, A., & Glynn, M. A. (2017). Strategies of Integration in Mixed Methods Research. *Organizational Research Methods*, *20*(2), 224–242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428116637197>
- Twining, P., Heller, R. S., Nussbaum, M., & Tsai, C. (2017). Some guidance on conducting and reporting qualitative studies. *Computers & Education*, *106* A1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2016.12.002>
- Uneke, C. J., Sombie, I., Lokossou, V., Johnson, E., & Ongolo-Zogo, P. (2017). An assessment of national maternal and child health policy-makers' knowledge and capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in Nigeria. *International Journal of Health Policy & Management*, *6*(6), 309-316. <https://doi.org/10.15171/ijhpm.2016.132>
- Van Biesebroeck, J., Konings, J., & Volpe Martincus, C. (2016). Did export promotion help firms weather the crisis? *Economic Policy*, *31*(88), 653-702. <https://doi.org/10.1093/epolic/eiw01>
- Van den Berg, A., & Struwig, M. (2017). Guidelines for researchers using an adapted consensual qualitative research approach in management research. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, *15*(2). 109–119. <http://www.ejbrm.com/main.html>.

- Van Rijnsoever, F. J. (2017). (I can't get no) saturation: a simulation and guidelines for sample sizes in qualitative research. *PloS one*, *12*(7), e0181689.  
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0181689>
- Van Scheers, L. (2016). Factors contributing to SMEs failure in meeting supplier performance standards. *Foundations of Management*, *8*(1), 43-52.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/fman-2016-0004>
- Varzandeh, J., Farahbod, K., & Jake Zhu, J. (2016). Global logistics and supply chain risk management. *Journal of Business & Behavioral Sciences*, *28*(1), 124-130.  
[http://asbbs.org/files/2016/JBBS\\_28.1\\_Spring\\_2016.pdf#page=125](http://asbbs.org/files/2016/JBBS_28.1_Spring_2016.pdf#page=125).
- Vasileiou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S., & Young, T. (2018). Characterizing and justifying sample size sufficiency in interview-based studies: Systematic analysis of qualitative health research over a 15-year period. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *18*(148). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0594-7>
- Verbeke, A., & Kano, L. (2013). The transaction cost economics (TCE) theory of trading favors. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, *30*(2), 409-431.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-012-9324-6>.
- Vojtovic, S., Belas, J., Habanik, J. (2016). Microenterprises' entrepreneurs' attitudes to managing financial risks. *Actual Problems of Economics*, *186*(12), 120-129.  
<http://publikace.k.utb.cz/handle/10563/1006953>.
- Wakefield, A. (2015). Synthesizing the literature as part of a literature review. *Nursing Standard*, *29*(29), 44. <https://doi.org/10.7748/ns.29.29.44.e8957>

- Walean, E. E., Saerang, D. P., & Wangke, S. J. (2021). Implication of Business Partnership on the Improvement of Local Business in Manado. *Jurnal EMBA: Jurnal Riset Ekonomi, Manajemen, Bisnis dan Akuntansi*, 9(2).
- Wang, Q., Li, J., Ross, W., & Craighead, C. (2013). The interplay of drivers and deterrents of opportunism in buyer-supplier relationships. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 41(1), 111-131. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-012-0310-9>.
- Watts, L. L., Todd, E. M., Mulhearn, T. J., Medeiros, K. E., Mumford, M. D., & Connelly, S. (2017). Qualitative evaluation methods in ethics education: A systematic review and analysis of best practices. *Accountability in Research: Policies & Quality Assurance*, 24(4), 225-242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989621.2016.1274975>
- Williamson, O. E. (1975). *Markets and hierarchies*. New York, 2630.
- Williamson, O. E. (1979). Transaction-cost economics: The governance of contractual relations. *Journal of Law and Economics*, 22, 233-261. <https://doi.org/10.1086/466942>
- Williamson, O. E. (1985). *The economic institutions of capitalism*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster
- Williamson, O. E. (1999). Public and private bureaucracies: a transaction cost economics perspective. *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*, 15(1), 306-342. doi:10.1093/jleo/15.1.306

- Williamson, O., & Ghani, T. (2012). Transaction cost economics and its uses in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 40(1), 74-85.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-011-0268-z>
- Wilson, S. (2018). Assessing export competitiveness of food manufacturers in SIDS. *Competitiveness Review: An International Business Journal*, 28(4), 408-432. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CR-07-2016-0038>
- Wilson, R., Slaughter, S. E., Forbes, D., Hanson, H. M., & Khadaroo, R. G. (2016). Experiences of a novice researcher conducting focus group interviews. *International Journal of Nursing Student Scholarship*, 3, 1-11.  
<http://ijnss.journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/>.
- Winkelhaus, S., & Grosse, E. H. (2020). Logistics 4.0: a systematic review towards a new logistics system. *International Journal of Production Research*, 58(1), 18-43.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00207543.2019.1612964>
- Wolgemuth, J. R., Hicks, T., & Agosto, V. (2017). Unpacking assumptions in research synthesis: a critical construct synthesis approach. *Educational Researcher*, 46(3), 131-139. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X17703946>
- Woods, M., Paulus, T., Atkins, D. P., & Macklin, R. (2016). Advancing qualitative research using qualitative data analysis software (QDAS)? Reviewing potential versus practice in published studies using ATLAS. ti and NVivo, 1994–2013. *Social Science Computer Review*, 34(5), 597–617.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439315596311>

- World Bank (2016). Cameroon country economic memorandum markets, government, and growth.  
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/981281491336365033/pdf/110907-WP-PUBLIC-ENGLISH-CEM-Final-US.pdf>.
- The World Bank (2019). Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Finance. Improving SMEs' access to finance and finding innovative solutions to unlock sources of capital. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/smefinance>.
- Yallop, A. C., & Mowatt, S. (2016). Investigating market research ethics. *International Journal of Market Research*, 58(3), 381-400. <https://doi.org/10.2501/IJMR-2016-011>
- Yanah, Haulah Nakhwatunnisa, & Tri Amalia Sukarno. (2018). Strategy to Increase the Competitiveness of SME's Entreprises. JEJAK: *Jurnal Ekonomi Dan Kebijakan*, 11(1), 138. <https://doi.org/10.15294/jejak.v11i1.11705>
- Yates, J., & Leggett, T. (2016). Qualitative research: An introduction. *Radiologic Technology*, 88(2), 225-231.  
<http://www.radiologictechnology.org/content/88/2/225.extract>.
- Yi, B. (2021). Application of Incoterms in International Engineering Based on Information Platform. *In The Sixth International Conference on Information Management and Technology* 7(pp. 1-4).  
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3465631.3465638>.

- Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research: Designs and methods (6th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Zaouali, S., & Zaouali, A. (2015). Terms of trade instability, economic vulnerability and economic growth: The role of institutions in sub-Saharan Africa. *Asian Economic and Financial Review*, 5(4), 579-590.  
<https://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/1688645769?accountid=14872>.
- Zhang, D., Sun, X., Liu, Y., Zhou, S., & Zhang, H. (2018). The Effects of Integrative Leadership on the Enterprise Synergy Innovation Performance in a Supply Chain Cooperative Network. *Sustainability*, 10(7). <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.3390/su10072342>
- Zugrav, I. (2018). Increasing SME competitiveness by implementing the evaluation mechanism of the financial performance. *Economy Transdisciplinary Cognition*, 21(1), 99-104.  
[http://www.ugb.ro/Downloads/Info%20Studenti/20172018/etc2018no1/14\\_Zugrav.pdf](http://www.ugb.ro/Downloads/Info%20Studenti/20172018/etc2018no1/14_Zugrav.pdf).
- Zuhir, N. N., Surin, E. F., & Rahim, H. L. (2019). Human capital and firm performance: The mediating role of self-efficacy. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 3(4), 17-22. <https://doi.org/10.26666/rmp.ijbm.2019.4.4>

Zvarivadza, T. (2018). Artisanal and small-scale mining as a challenge and possible contributor to sustainable development. *Resources Policy*, 56, 49-58.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resourpol.2018.01.009>



## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

During the interviews, I will respect the following steps of the Interview protocol:

1. Introduce myself to the participants as a Walden University DBA doctoral candidate.
2. Remind of the purpose of the interview.
3. Present and explain the contents of the consent form with the participants.
4. Emphasize to participants the importance given to the confidentiality of information, answers to questions, and their concerns.
5. Ask permission to record the interview digitally.
6. Turn on the audio recorder and begin recording.
7. Note the date, time, and place of the interview.
8. Start the interview with the first question and continue through to the last question. Take notes of critical information during the interview process. Ask follow-up questions to clarify any unclear response.
9. End the interview by expressing my appreciation to the participants for participating in the study and seek the exchange of contact information for any questions or follow-up questions that participants may have.
10. Turn off the recording device and end the protocol.

## Appendix B: List of the Interview Questions for the Study

1. What export strategies have you used to achieve success in your business?
2. What challenges have you encountered in developing and implementing your export strategies to sustain your business?
3. What did you find worked best to overcome these challenges?
4. What did you find worked best to access the international market?
5. What did you find worked best to reduce transaction costs?
6. How did your business mission and vision influence the strategic process to sustain your exports during the first 3 years?
7. How do the provisions of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the European Union and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (EU-ACP) Agreements contribute to the success in your exporting business?
8. What additional information would you like to share regarding the strategies used to succeed and sustain exports under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the European Union and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (EU-ACP) Agreements?
9. What other information do you see pertinent that we did not discuss in this interview?