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DISCUSSION PAPER

**EXPORT ASSISTANCE: A LITERATURE REVIEW
AND CHALLENGES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

**Flávia de Holanda Schmidt
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EXPORT ASSISTANCE: A LITERATURE REVIEW AND CHALLENGES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH^{*,}**

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ABSTRACT

Strengthening commitments for export assistance and establishing comprehensive programs to expand export activities of firms are part of the public policies in almost all developed and developing countries. Not only have governments increased the amounts devoted to these actions in recent decades, but the number of support agencies for export has tripled in the context of developing national strategies for global exports. Despite the fact that contributions on the subject have been on the agenda of many authors for over thirty years, conceptual and methodological disagreement persists as to the effects and impacts of the adoption of export programs on the performance of the recipient firms. Considering (i) that government resources are scarce and require a major effort for optimal allocative efficiency, and (ii) that, as such, public policies must be strongly grounded on the evidence, a significant body of empirical studies devoted to the understanding of export support has recently been developed in the area of International Business. The aim of this paper is to assess the current status of issues related to the promotion of exports and to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, based on a survey of the empirical studies on the subject published between 1992 and 2011. All 25 identified articles were coded according to the same method of analysis, based on objective criteria. The analysis indicates that the production has evolved between the two subperiods surveyed, both in quantity and quality, and evidences an evolution over the period analyzed, especially in relation to the diversification of the loci of research, the adoption of more robust statistical techniques, and the advent of longitudinal studies. Certain limitations, however, were still observed, even in more recent studies, and in these cases, several recommendations for researchers are made.

Keywords: internationalization; export assistance; export performance.

SINOPSE

O fortalecimento do compromisso com a assistência à exportação e o estabelecimento de programas completos para aumentar a atividade exportadora das firmas são parte das políticas públicas de quase todos os países desenvolvidos e em desenvolvimento. Nas últimas décadas, não apenas houve aumento dos valores dedicados pelos governos a essas ações como o número de agências de apoio à exportação triplicou no contexto do desenvolvimento de estratégias nacionais de exportações em todo o mundo. Apesar de contribuição sobre o tema já estar presente na agenda de muitos autores há mais de trinta anos, aspectos metodológicos e conceituais contribuíram para que, ainda na atualidade, persistam divergências sobre os efeitos e impactos da adoção de programas de apoio à exportação no desempenho exportador das firmas apoiadas. Considerando que os recursos governamentais são escassos e exigem o máximo de esforços para a melhor eficiência alocativa e que, dessa forma, políticas públicas precisam ser fortemente baseadas em evidências, quantidade significativa de estudos empíricos dedicados ao entendimento do apoio à exportação foi desenvolvida recentemente na área de Negócios Internacionais. Este trabalho tem como objetivo contemplar o estado atual das questões ligadas à promoção de exportações e contribuir para o desenvolvimento de maior entendimento sobre o fenômeno, a partir de uma revisão dos trabalhos empíricos sobre o tema publicados entre 1992 e 2011. O ano de 1992 foi estabelecido como referência para o início do período porque o trabalho de Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch e Tse (1993), última revisão sobre o tema identificada, englobou o período compreendido entre 1971 e 1991. Todos os 25 artigos identificados foram codificados de acordo com um mesmo método de análise, baseado em critérios objetivos. A análise feita indica que a produção evoluiu entre os dois subperíodos analisados em quantidade e em qualidade, e evidencia progresso ao longo do período total, especialmente em relação à diversificação dos *loci* de pesquisa, à adoção de técnicas estatísticas mais robustas e ao advento de estudos longitudinais. Algumas limitações, entretanto, ainda foram constatadas mesmo em estudos mais recentes e, nesses casos, algumas recomendações para os pesquisadores são feitas. Considerando que o apoio à exportação é uma das áreas em que a pesquisa em Negócios Internacionais pode gerar maiores contribuições simultaneamente úteis para os gestores de políticas públicas e para os *practitioners*, espera-se que as questões apontadas sejam úteis para o desenvolvimento de melhores investigações empíricas sobre o tema no futuro.

Palavras-chave: internacionalização de empresas; apoio à exportação; desempenho exportador.

1 INTRODUCTION

Fostering the competitiveness of domestic firms is a necessary step towards the construction of a country's economic and social development project. The task is, however, a complex one, given the major challenges that companies and governments have faced since the early 1990s. The increasing globalization of markets and industries has radically changed the competitive conditions in which firms operate, and, while such globalization often brings opportunities for firms, it also poses a host of challenges for contemporary organizations (Freixanet, 2011). In this context, the identification of factors critical to the export performance of firms has been a subject of increasing attention (Haahti, Madupu, Yavas, & Babakus, 2005).

To the extent that it is understood that not all factors that bear on export performance are controllable by governments, the literature reports discernible impacts resulting of government policies, especially through programs to support exports. Apart from the debate as to the merits of government intervention on the economic activities of firms, almost all developed and developing countries have strengthened their commitment to export assistance, have established comprehensive programs to increase the export activity of firms under their jurisdiction (Ahmed, Julian, & Majar, 2006; Gençtürk & Kotabe, 2001; Volpe Martincus & Carballo, 2010a), and have increased the amounts devoted by governments to these actions (Freixanet, 2011). In recent decades, the number of support agencies for export has tripled in the context of the development of national strategies for global exports (Lederman, Olarreaga, & Payton, 2010).

Although contributions on the subject have been on the agenda of many authors for over thirty years, conceptual and methodological issues have contributed so that, even today, disagreement persists as to the effects and impacts of the adoption of programs to support the export performance of supported firms.

Considering that (i) government resources are scarce and require a major effort for optimal allocative efficiency, and (ii) that, as such, public policies must be strongly grounded on the evidence, a significant body of empirical studies devoted

to the understanding of export support¹ has recently been developed in the area of International Business. Nevertheless, after Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch and Tse (1993), who summarized the work on the subject published between 1971 and 1991, no systematic review of the empirical literature on the subject could be encountered. In this sense, to contemplate the current state of issues related to the promotion of exports¹ and develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, the objectives of this study are threefold:

- Review the empirical loci, research designs, and techniques for collecting and processing data adopted by the empirical work in the last twenty years (1992-2011);
- Critically assess the evolution of the scope and research methodology adopted by the authors;
- Identify issues and methodological options that still require greater effort on the part of researchers.

By aligning under the same analytic lens different articles produced with very similar goals, this work provides not only an understanding of the connections between the previous studies, but also proposes a definition of conceptual, methodological and empirical trends in the research over time. It is also hoped that the work may serve as a stimulus for further theoretical and empirical developments among academics and professionals interested in the subject.

This paper is organized into five sections, the first of which is this introduction. Following is a section devoted to understanding the role of support for exportation as an important factor in export performance. The third section presents the investigation method used to identify the articles revisited, while the fourth section presents and discusses the descriptive results. There follows a discussion as well as some recommendations for future research, and, finally, several conclusions are drawn.

1. In line with traditional authors on the subject, such as Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch and Tse (1993), the terms 'promotion,' 'support' or 'assistance' to exports, as well as 'programs,' 'services' and 'instruments' will be used interchangeably in this paper, and are understood as referring only to public activities for the support of exportation.

2 THE ROLE OF EXPORT ASSISTANCE

Export assistance can be offered to firms indirectly through elimination of bureaucracy, financing of production, and policies to support innovation, as shown by Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch and Tse (1993) and Lages & Montgomery (2005). In the survey of the literature which is the basis for this work, however, we revisited studies that are concerned with programs designed specifically to encourage commercial exports. An additional limitation of the scope adopted refers to the possible different configurations of the support activities previously reported by the research on the subject. While in some countries the programs are supported by private and quasi-governmental agencies (Ahmed, Mohamed, Johnson, & Meng, 2002), as well as public bodies geared to promoting exports and investment, this study confines itself to the study of public measures for export support. As such, this study will adopt the definition of export support proposed by Seringhaus (1986): “all public policy measures that actually or potentially enhance exporting activity either from a firm, industry or national perspective,” an option also adopted by other researchers, for example, Ahmed, Julian, & Majar (2006); Cramer & Williamson (2009); Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch and Tse (1993); Geldres Weiss, Etchebarne López, & Medina (2011) and Lages & Montgomery (2005).

The promotion of exports has taken place in industrialized countries since the early twentieth century (Seringhaus & Botschen, 1991). Naidu, Cavusgil, Murthy, & Sarkar (1997) point out that countries that became industrialized in the decades ending the last century, such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea, similarly demonstrated the power that such policies can afford. If the discussion of the rationale for government intervention in support for exportation goes beyond the scope of this text—given that the colloquium on the subject is vast and involves economists of different persuasions—at this point it is pertinent to briefly revisit the rationales already presented in the literature.

If, in theory, the role of governments should be to facilitate the effective functioning of markets, thereby ensuring a favorable macroeconomic environment, an effective framework of corporate governance and commercial law, and, at the micro level, flexibility on the supply side, Alexander & Warwick (2007) show that, considering the possibility of market failures, government intervention may in fact be

useful. One caveat: the benefit of intervention occurs only under certain conditions, such as when faced with a problem that government can address better than can private actors, or when the benefits of such action outweigh the costs.

The authors note that the government alone must perform certain functions, for example, setting system-wide rules (structures, laws) so that international markets can function effectively. Government agencies may also have access to their foreign counterparts, thereby affording domestic firms access to information that otherwise would not be available. Moreover, Governments can act as credible references for firms seeking partners abroad. Another function pointed to is the trusted intermediary: if the firms or individuals are heterogeneous and the information is limited, markets may not be able to function efficiently without one.

The existence of market failures is also suggested by Kang (2011) as a justification for support for export since—even though we know that exports impact the economy as a whole by allowing economies of scale and spillovers of productivity—gaps in the market, such as asymmetric information and externalities, might justify government intervention. Moreira & dos Santos (2001) seem to be driving at the same point and hold that intervention is based on the assumption that markets without aid tend not to be sufficiently efficient and that government failures would not occur immediately, but only after the failures of the market, which would therefore explain intervention by means of support policies.

Much of the rationale for support programs is fundamentally of an economic nature, as in Naidu, Cavusgil, Murthy, & Sarkar (1997), who, from a macro point of view, alert to the emerging consensus that export promotion is one of the best paths to economic development and that the diversification of markets resulting from such exports also contributes to economic stability. Baumann, Canuto & Gonçalves (2004) remind us that even the classical and neoclassical economists advocated the principle that foreign trade enables a country to grow and develop, reach new markets, market new products and incorporate new technologies.

Seringhaus & Rosson (1990) summarize in their work several reasons why governments should assure firms services and incentives for export: fostering international trade, while making the most competitive industries so on a global scale,

leads companies that confine their activities to domestic markets to eventually erode their competitive advantage. For cases in which domestic markets are relatively small, exports would help strengthen domestic industries by providing economies of scale in production. The authors also indicate benefits for firms from the behavioral point of view: by coming to understand the needs of external customers, domestic enterprises can generate improvements in their products and even develop new ones.

This same aspect is pointed out by Czinkota (1994), who notes that, through export activity, the firm would become more sensitive to different structures of demand and dimensions of culture, thereby proving its ability to survive in environments that are unfamiliar / have higher transaction costs, thereby rendering it more competitive in the domestic environment. The author further notes, in a vision aligned with the behavioral theories of internationalization (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975) that because exportation is just one of the ways to do international business, it can lead to different strategies of external insertion, such as direct foreign investment, joint ventures, franchising and brand licensing, all of which contribute to economic growth and strengthening of the firm and, in aggregate, the country. Czinkota (1994) also incorporates economic reasons, such as the possibility that firms, through export, can benefit from market diversification, both from the different growth rates in different markets and from the gain of even more stability by not depending on any one particular market.

3 METHODOLOGY

In order to be eligible for this survey of the literature, the articles had to be empirical. Case studies, however, were not included. Additionally, the articles needed to include among their core constructs of interest support for exportation, with one key variable, dependent or independent in studies with a focus on microeconomic studies—related to the study of the firm or export ventures. As such, works that adopted broader analytical approaches (such as sectoral, regional or national level) were not considered. This survey covers articles published between 1992 and 2011, thus encompassing the last twenty years of academic research on the subject. The year 1992 was set as a reference for the beginning of the survey period because the work of Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, & Tse (1993), the last survey of the theme identified, covered the period between 1971 and 1991.

The search for articles was made in bibliographic databases such as JSTOR, EBSCO, Emerald Insight, and other available resources such as Google Scholar, thus identifying papers that have expressions associated with the phenomenon of support for export such as “export promotion,” “export assistance,” and “export programs” among keywords, title and abstract was fairly straightforward. Based on the citations appearing in these articles, a further manual search was conducted to capture papers that might have slipped through in the first search. Initially, only publications in English were considered; however, one study published in Spanish was identified from the review of the articles’ references, and was included in the group of studies surveyed.

A total of 25 articles were identified according to these search criteria. Although the selection of papers cannot be assumed to be exhaustive, we are confident that the procedures adopted ensure that the articles selected adequately portray the current state of knowledge regarding export support. Table 1 lists in chronological order the works that were identified and that will be reviewed in this study.

TABLE 1
List of articles identified

Kotabe & Czinkota, 1992	Spence, 2003	Volpe Martincus & Carballo, 2010a
Naidu & Rao, 1993	Alvarez, 2004	Volpe Martincus & Carballo, 2010b
Singer & Czinkota, 1994	Collins-Dodd & Francis, 2004	Volpe Martincus & Carballo, 2010c
Czinkota & Crick, 1995	Lages & Montgomery, 2005	Durmuşoğlu et al., 2011
Gray, 1997	Wilkinson & Brouthers, 2006	Freixanet, 2011
Seringhaus, 1998	Volpe Martincus & Carballo, 2008	Geldres Weiss et al., 2011
Gençtürk & Kotabe, 2001	Shamsuddoha et al., 2009	Leonidou et al., 2011
Ahmed et al., 2002	Sousa & Bradley, 2009	Volpe Martincus & Carballo, 2011
Fischer & Reuber, 2003		*****

Author’s elaboration.

An analysis of Table 1 shows that the number of articles increased significantly in the second decade of the period studied: seven empirical articles on support for exports were identified between 1992 and 2001, while the remaining eighteen were published after 2002. In an integrative review of research in exports between 1960 and 2007, Leonidou & Katsikeas (2010) pointed out that government support or promotion of exports was one of the areas that received particular attention; however, they emphasized the decreasing importance of the topic over the period, going so far as to suggest that the issue could have reached a saturation point. However, in the context

of the current work, it was observed that the recent period has brought new life to the theme, with eleven additional articles published since 2007. The period was divided into two subperiods of equal length to better highlight the changing trends of research in the area.

The evaluation of the content of each article was made according to the same method of analysis, conducted by an expert on the subject and supervised by an investigator with extensive experience in international business. The criteria used for the analysis of the papers were objective, which minimizes the possibility of interference from the perceptions of authors who worked in the encoding. The protocol adopted for encoding involved, besides the identification of the authors and journals publishing the studies, major aspects, such as: (a) objective of the research; (b) theoretical perspective; (c) unit of analysis; (d) empirical locus; (e) number of countries involved; (f) industries covered; (g) size of firms; (h) method of data collection; (i) data treatment technique; (j) temporal dimension and, finally (k) evaluation method. Some of the studies reviewed did not explicitly mention certain of these aspects, especially in relation to the theoretical perspective, industries, and size of firms studied. In such cases, the authors chose not to make inferences regarding categorization, and thus they figure in the analysis as “not reported.”

4 DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

4.1 MAJOR RESEARCH JOURNALS AND LOCI

Among the articles identified, over 60% were concentrated in seven journals: *International Business Review*, *Journal of International Marketing*, *Journal of Business Research*, *International Marketing Review*, *Small Business Economics*, *European Journal of Marketing* and *Journal of International Business Studies*, among the sixteen that published articles on the topic, as summarized in Table 2. Importantly, the area of International Business has the largest number of publications.

In 1993, Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch and Tse reported that more than half of the studies on export promotion had been carried out in the USA and Canada, reflecting only the experiences of these countries. The analysis of the first subperiod shows no changes in relation to the loci indicated by the authors—indeed, six of the

eight articles concerned empirical loci in either USA or Canada. The data for 2002-2011, however, show a greater balance across the contexts of research, both via the expansion of studies to beyond the ambit of other industrialized countries (as is the case of Europe) and also via expansion to other continents where emerging and developing countries predominate: nine of the studies of the period were conducted in Asia or Latin America.

TABLE 2
Journals with articles on export assistance

Area	Journal	Number of articles	Total Articles
Economics	Journal of International Economics	1	5
	Journal of Development Economics	1	
	The World Economy	1	
	Review of World Economics	1	
	The Journal of International Trade & Economic Development	1	
International Business	International Business Review	3	10
	Journal of International Marketing	3	
	International Marketing Review	2	
	Journal of International Business Studies	2	
Management	Journal of Business Research	2	7
	Small Business Economics	2	
	Academia Revista Latinoamericana de Administración	1	
	Journal of Enterprise Information Management	1	
	International Small Business Journal	1	
Marketing	European Journal of Marketing	2	3
	Industrial Marketing Management	1	

Author's elaboration.

An additional recommendation made by some authors is to adopt a comparative perspective of different countries (Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch and Tse, 1993; Seringhaus, 1986). Nevertheless, the data in Table 3 point to the fact that researchers have predominantly confined themselves to studies of a single context, possibly following the recommendations of Cavusgil (1984), who suggests this option for the handling of a more homogeneous sample *vis-à-vis* variations in the macro environment.

TABLE 3
Research Loci

Aspects	1992-2001	2002-2011
Empirical Locus		
USA and Canada	6	3
Europe	1	6
Asia	0	2
Latin America	0	7
Other	1	0
Number of Countries Involved		
One	6	18
Two	1	0
Three or more	0	0

Author's elaboration.

4.2 DESIGN AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The empirical studies on export support had two goals: to analyze the impact of the measures adopted and the attempt to obtain the best segmentation base for the firms to be able to receive support from the programs that best suit their needs. Among the 25 articles reviewed, just 3 focused on the construction of bases for segmentation (Table 4).

TABLE 4
Objective and unit of analysis

Objective	Number of articles		Unit of analysis	Number of articles	
	1992-2001	2002-2011		1992-2001	2002-2011
Segmentation	2	1	Firm	1	0
			Managers	1	0
			Owners	0	1
Analysis of Impact	5	17	Firm	5	15
			Export Venture	0	2

Author's elaboration.

Each of the studies dedicated to segmentation opted for a distinct analysis unit, thus showing evidence of low conceptual and methodological convergence among this group of authors. The impact studies utilized, to a large extent, the firm as unit of analysis. Within the context of international business literature, studies have traditionally alternated between two options: (i) a specific operation that involves a particular product/service or a particular line of products/services related to a particular

country of destination, commonly referred to as export venture, and (ii) the firm. Leonidou, Katsikeas, & Samiee (2002) conducted a meta-analysis in which 86% of the reviewed studies used the firm as the unit of analysis; only 14% had opted for export venture, a predominance which was also observed in the research on export support (see Table 4). How the empirical studies are distributed among different company sizes was verified, as summarized in Table 5.

TABLE 5
Distribution of studies by size of firms analyzed

Size	1992-2001	2002-2011	Total articles
SME	0	7	7
Large companies	0	0	0
Mixed samples	6	11	17
Not reported	1	0	1

Author's elaboration.

The results indicate that only seven of the studies focused specifically on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). One article was not clear as to the size of the companies studied, and no work focused exclusively on large companies. Approximately 70% of the articles utilized mixed samples, with companies of various sizes.

Another analytical approach investigated in this study pertained to the sectors that were studied. The identification of the industries to which the organizations analyzed belonged was not a unanimous concern of the authors, since 20% of articles made no mention of this parameter. Although Table 6 does not reveal such fact, the option to focus on manufacturing sectors was dominant.

TABLE 6
Distribution of studies by industry

Sector	1992-2001	2002-2011	Total Articles
Single sector	0	1	1
Multiple sectors	6	13	19
Not reported	1	4	5

Author's elaboration.

Over 75% of the studies focused on multiple industries, and only one study addressed a single segment: Collins-Dodd & Francis (2004), who analyzed the impact

of Canadian programs dedicated to the information and communication technologies (ICT) sector.

Finally, the analysis of the design and scope of the research ascertained which theoretical perspectives drove the empirical investigations conducted, as summarized in Table 7.

TABLE 7
Theoretical Perspectives adopted in research on export assistance

Theoretical Perspective	1992-2001	2002-2011	Total Articles
RBV	1	8	9
Behavioral theories	2	3	5
Contingency Theory	0	1	1
Not reported	4	10	14

Author's elaboration.

The works were predominantly based on the resource-based view (RBV) (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984) and the behavioral theories of internationalization (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975); the sum of articles based on these two approaches represents over 40% of the studies reviewed, and, more importantly, almost all the articles that were concerned with stating the theoretical basis. The two theories are used simultaneously by three studies, which used them to ground their hypotheses for empirical testing; this is why the last column of Table 7 adds up to more than 25. In addition to these 11 works, only one emphasized the theoretical model underlying the empirical test: Lages & Montgomery (2005), who adopted contingency theory; thus more than half of the studies were not concerned with explaining this aspect in the text. This trend was more prevalent in the older studies on the topic.

4.3 COLLECTION AND DATA PROCESSING TECHNIQUES

Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch and Tse (1993) emphasized the possibility that the results of research on export performance based on surveys reflect more the differences in perceptions than the differences in performance of firms, also noting that analyses of the impact of export support have been predominantly based on published measures of opinion, to the detriment of measures of actual performance. For Brewer (2009), the surveys may not be satisfactory to investigate the impact of promotional programs,

given the fact that companies may be reluctant to criticize programs for which, in many cases, they incur no cost. Despite these limitations, the surveys remain, even between 2002 and 2011, the primary source for the collection of data on the research topic (Table 8), thus reflecting a general trend in the research on export performance, as highlighted (Sousa, Martínez Lopez & Coelho, 2008).

TABLE 8
Data collection techniques adopted

Technical	1992-2001	2002-2011	Total Articles
Survey	7	12	19
Secondary data	0	5	5
Survey + Secondary data	0	1	1

Author's elaboration.

Although research based on surveys is able to capture objective measures, in the review conducted for this topic it was observed that researchers opted mainly to gather subjective measures of export performance. The surveys were predominantly used not only to capture the measures of performance, but also, on many occasions, researchers would consult the very managers of the firms to discern their participation in certain programs.

The second subperiod analyzed marked the beginning of the use of objective secondary data for the empirical research. Five studies were based exclusively on these data (Volpe Martincus & Carballo, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011), and only one study associated the objective data obtained from official databases with subjective information regarding export performance obtained through survey (Geldres Weiss, Etchebarne López, & Medina, 2011), thereby enabling the researcher to investigate other dimensions of performance that are hard to capture through secondary data, such as *vis-à-vis* the contribution of such programs to achieve the firm's strategic objectives.

Table 9 describes the analytical techniques used by researchers. The value of the column "total articles" exceeds 25 because of the deployment of different techniques in the article by (Freixanet, 2011), who used two techniques to test hypotheses.

TABLE 9
Data treatment techniques adopted

Technical	1992-2001	2002-2011	Total Articles
Descriptive	1	1	2
Uni- or bivariate analysis	3	3	6
Multivariate analysis	3	9	12
Propensity Score Matching	0	6	6

Author's elaboration.

Also noteworthy is the fact that in the two subperiods, the use of simpler techniques, such as descriptive statistics and univariate or bivariate analyses, changes substantially, dropping from 57% to just over 20% between 2002 and 2011. This finding adds to the results obtained by (Leonidou & Katsikeas, 2010) who found, in a comprehensive analysis of the research on exports, that the merely descriptive techniques and the univariate and bivariate analyses lost ground to multivariate techniques between the 1990s and the 2000s. In fact, in the second analysis subperiod, the emergence of the use of more robust techniques such as multivariate analysis and propensity score matching is quite discernible.

Table 10 depicts the temporal dimension of the studies reviewed. Longitudinal studies are still in the minority compared to the studies of transverse orientation, and gathered momentum only in the second subperiod, 2002-2011.

TABLE 10
Temporal Dimension of studies on export assistance

Orientation	1992-2001	2002-2011
Transversal	7	13
Longitudinal	0	5

Author's elaboration.

Public programs to support exports present a range of configurations among countries. Assuming that the form of classification adopted by the authors will tend to affect the way the empirical research is operationalized, the analysis methods used in the articles reviewed were evaluated according to the structure proposed by Seringhaus (1986), cf. Table 11.

TABLE 11
Impact Evaluation Method

		Methodology
Construct Export assistance	Global	Measures jointly all services or assistance programs for exports offered by the government
	Specific Global	Measures jointly the services or programs with similar purposes, such as, for example, those that provide objective information for exports planning
	Individual	Measures individual assistance provided by a service or program
	Specific	Measures specific assistance provided by a specific program

Source: Seringhaus (1986).

All items were evaluated in accordance with this structure; the results are shown in Table 12. The field “not applicable” encompasses the two reviewed studies that were dedicated to segmentation, which were, therefore, excluded from the analysis of the articles.

TABLE 12
Distribution of the research according to evaluation method

Method	1992-2001	2002-2011	Total articles
Global	2	9	11
Specific global	2	1	3
Individual	0	6	6
Specific	1	1	2
Not applicable	2	1	3

Author's elaboration.

The data in Table 12 show that the majority of the articles opted for “global” evaluations. In more operational terms, this option means that all instruments were evaluated together; thus in these cases the impact was assessed simply by virtue of the firm's participating in a public program for export support, without differentiating the nature of the instrument. Moreover, the analyses indicate that there was some improvement in the studies over time in this regard, given that no individual analysis was conducted between 1992 and 2001; yet, in the following period, 30% of the studies were based on this analytical perspective.

One possible driver of the preference for global analyses is the difficulty in obtaining meaningful samples that allow individual analyses to be performed. Indeed, as Table 13 indicates, most studies in the last twenty years were based on very small samples of firms, which fact ends up affecting not only the methods of analysis, but also the use of statistical techniques.

TABLE 13
Sample size

Article	Sample size	Article	Sample size
Kotabe & Czinkota, 1992	162	Wilkinson & Brouthers, 2006	98
Naidu & Rao, 1993	777	Volpe Martincus & Carballo, 2008	60272
Singer & Czinkota, 1994	89	Shamsuddoha, Ali & Ndubisi, 2009	203
Czinkota & Crick, 1995	590	Sousa & Bradley, 2009	287
Gray, 1997	413	Volpe Martincus & Carballo, 2010a	Not reported ¹
Seringhaus, 1988	230	Volpe Martincus & Carballo, 2010b	11399 ¹
Gençtürk & Kotabe, 2001	162	Volpe Martincus & Carballo, 2010c	2088
Ahmed et al., 2002	53	Durmuşoğlu et al., 2011	143
Fischer & Reuber, 2003	188	Freixanet, 2011	272
Spence, 2003	113	Geldres Weiss, Etchebarne López, & Medina, 2011	73
Alvarez, 2004	295	Leonidou, Palihadadana, & Theodosiou, 2011	223
Collins-Dodd & Francis, 2004	183	Volpe Martincus, & Carballo, 2011	Not reported ¹
Lages & Montgomery, 2005	519	*****	

Author's elaboration.

Note: ¹ The studies carried out by Volpe Martincus & Carballo (2008, 2010b) cover the entire population of exporters of Peru and Colombia, respectively. However, the text of these articles is not explicit as to the exact number of firms in the sample; thus the figures presented in the table are the sum of the firms in the last year of the period analyzed in each of the papers, indicated as an approximation of the actual number companies in the sample. In Volpe Martincus & Carballo (2010a, 2011) the articles cover, respectively, the entire population of exporters of Chile and Costa Rica; not made explicit, however, is the absolute number of companies included.

The analysis in Table 13 shows that the sample size was small in several of the studies reviewed. In the first subperiod, exceptions are recorded for Naidu & Rao (1993) and Czinkota & Crick (1995), with the proviso in the latter case that it concerns a comparative study between countries; as such, the sample reported in the table is the sum of the USA sample and the UK sample. In the last subperiod, the studies based on larger samples, such as Lages & Montgomery's (2005) and the five articles produced by Volpe Martincus & Carballo stand out.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 MAIN JOURNALS AND RESEARCH LOCI

The literature on export support has seen its recent work concentrated in International Business, Marketing and Administration journals. The significant participation of Economics journals during the period is swayed by the heavy output in the last five years of two authors in the area, Volpe Martincus and Carballo. It is interesting to note that these authors also impacted two other indicators: the empirical loci and techniques used.

As illustrated in Table 3, the period between 1992 and 2001 saw no study carried out in Latin America, while seven publications were identified in the following period. Of these seven publications, five were written by Volpe Martincus and Carballo, and pertain to Chile, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Peru and Colombia. The other two publications identified were Alvarez (2004) and Geldres Weiss, Etchebarne López, & Medina (2011), both conducted in the context of Chile.

The expansion of the empirical loci was also observed in the context of Asia, which, like Latin America, had failed to garner the interest of a single study between 1992 and 2001, yet saw the appearance of two studies thereafter: Ahmed, Mohamed, Johnson, & Meng (2002) and Shamsuddoha, Ali, & Ndubisi (2009), which addressed, respectively, the case of Malaysia and of Bangladesh.

But even these efforts at diversification were insufficient to address cases that remain deserving of greater attention from researchers. Emerging countries that are among the world's largest exporters, such as Brazil, Mexico, India and Australia, remain without studies.

Furthermore, no comparative studies involving these countries between 2002 and 2011 were identified. Such finding can be attributed to certain clear obstacles; indeed, the conceptual and methodological complexity of this kind of work can be a justification for its apparent extinction. In addition, in view of their diversity goals, different countries' instruments, programs and support services for exports may not be exactly equivalent to each other. Nevertheless, several very broad classifications have been proposed in theoretical and prescriptive studies on the subject, as in Cavusgil & Poh-Lin Yeoh (1994) and Naidu, Cavusgil, Murthy, & Sarkar (1997). More effort could be undertaken on the part of the researchers in the direction of resuming comparative studies; indeed, these could provide interesting insights for policy makers—subject to the warning of Naidu, Cavusgil, Murthy, & Sarkar (1997) as regards the fact that the mere transposition of policies adopted in a country to a different context may not achieve the effectiveness obtained in the original one.

5.2 DESIGN AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

Most of the empirical studies conducted focused on assessing the impact of policies to support exports: only three of the 25 studies identified dedicated themselves to test the best segmentation basis to be adopted by Governments on assisted firms (Fischer & Reuber, 2003; Gray, 1997; Naidu & Rao, 1993). These contributions are especially important from the standpoint of governments since it is impossible to conceive and implement a program that is a universal solution for all the companies in a country.

It is necessary to note, however, that these studies are concerned with an ex-ante moment of the policies supporting export; thus, in the way they were presented, they are of limited use when it comes to the evaluation of such policies. Similar studies could proceed by relating the segmentation bases used by governments for the provision of a particular program for the export performance of the firms supported by it, thus evaluating in an integrated way the alignment between the model used and the performance thereby obtained. The results of research with this focus – evaluating the segmentation model that is used by governments – could more effectively contribute to the development of adequate public policies to promote export. In this review, no studies were identified that adopted a more comprehensive research design.

The unit of analysis adopted by the vast majority of the studies devoted to the assessment of impacts was the firm. A possible justification for such methodological prevalence can be attributed to the fact that, for several authors, the goal of export support programs is not improve export performance per se, but rather to assure the firm of resources and expertise that would be essential for its international insertion (Gençtürk & Kotabe, 2001; Leonidou, Palihawadana, & Theodosiou, 2011; Shamsuddoha, Ali, & Ndubisi, 2009).

Two studies adopted the export venture as the unit of analysis: Lages & Montgomery (2005); Sousa & Bradley (2009). Those authors justified their choice based on the fact that exploratory interviews conducted early in the research indicated that firms would typically use received export assistance for the development of specific strategies for their main export venture; as such, secondary export ventures would not benefit directly from the assistance received—either due to the lack of their own defined strategies or due to having strategies defined only as a function of the main venture. Sousa & Bradley (2009), in turn, adopt the export venture due to the possibility that

different export ventures present different results and properties, thus making it difficult for managers who responded to the survey to give precise answers in the questionnaire if the results were indicated on the basis of the firm's export performance as a whole.

This methodological option may make sense in the case of samples with low representation of large firms; however, further analysis is required in the case of evaluations where firms are large or already have reasonably diversified export products / target markets / sophistication of control of results, in which the most appropriate option would in fact be the firm.

The analysis of the methodological aspects in the studies reviewed then proceeded, revealing that 70% of the articles opted to use mixed samples, with companies of various sizes. Taking into account that the programs usually have target company segments defined a priori, an interesting possibility would be to conduct the analysis by-size and by-instrument, since analyses performed in accordance with the "global" method (which takes into account the use of any instrument in an indiscriminating fashion) in samples with different-sized firms may generate results of limited utility. In the wake of these observations, it appears timely to assess how the impact of export support is manifested in relation to firms of different sizes and degrees of internationalization in studies that sought to answer questions such as, "What types of firms benefit most from the programs?" and, "Which firms garner fewer benefits from participation?" This line of research could be followed by an estimate of quantile treatment effects.

The use of mixed samples in relation to the economic activity of firms was also predominant in the articles surveyed. Only one of the 25 papers was restricted to a single sector: Collins-Dodd & Francis (2004). If the use of mixed samples *vis-à-vis* industry is not in itself a problem, the small samples end up limiting the analytical possibilities arising from these works. Geldres Weiss, Etchebarne López, & Medina (2011), for example, used a sample of 73 small and medium companies in two sectors—agriculture and forestry—in the La Araucária region of Chile. Shamsuddoha, Ali, & Ndubisi (2009) looked at 203 small and medium enterprises in three sectors identified only as "export-oriented." Durmuşoğlu et al. (2011) investigated 143 firms in Turkey, primarily SMEs, in 21 different sectors, and Leonidou, Palihawadana, & Theodosiou (2011) analyzed 218 industrial firms in the UK. Another example of the use of mixed samples is Freixanet (2011), with 272 companies in various industries in

Catalonia, a region of Spain. Surprisingly, five of the studies reviewed failed to provide any information regarding the industry of the firms studied—a severe limitation, since the existence of distinct characteristics that can be highly influential on the export performance of firms' economic activities can render a direct comparison hard to operationalize.

Similarly, a significant proportion of the studies was not explicit as to the theoretical perspective underlying the models tested. It must be noted, however, that the concern to clearly define the theory became more present in the second subperiod analyzed—a positive aspect of the analyses in this paper.

5.3 COLLECTION AND DATA PROCESSING TECHNIQUES

Like the broader research on exports, the empirical studies devoted to export assistance were mainly based on surveys. One advantage of this option is the ability to capture objective and subjective measures, while secondary data are usually only useful for objective measures. However, as noted above, criticism of this option has been made by some authors, such as Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch and Tse (1993) and Brewer (2009). One must assume that this methodological option was certainly not random, but, rather, driven by researchers' difficulty in obtaining secondary data with objective measures of performance, since the information concerning export performance is not usually available to academia, just as the list of companies supported by each type of government program is not usually published.

This fact may, in large part, explain the predominance of surveys. Some recent cases, however – whereby international researchers had access to export microdata and the participation of program participant firms (Volpe Martincus & Carballo, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011) – have changed this scenario over the last decade. Indeed, these are studies that might work with objective data derived from secondary sources for the operationalization of the constructs of interest. An additional case that deserves attention is that of Geldres Weiss, Etchebarne López, & Medina (2011), which was the only study identified that associated the use of objective performance measures obtained from official data with subjective measurements obtained via survey, which thus enabled the authors investigate other dimensions of performance, such as in relation to the programs' contribution to achieving the strategic objectives of the firm.

In addition to using data from different sources – and also as a result thereof – the six studies used propensity score matching, an analysis methodology distinct from those traditionally used.

This technique has several advantages in relation to the options of the other authors. In a recent editorial in the *Journal of International Business Studies*, Reeb, Sahakibara & Sarkar (2012) alerted to the problem that studies in the area frequently suffer from the endogeneity problem, since most authors fail to consider in their research design the problem of non-randomness of the sample. As research in the area is primarily concerned with providing evidence as to the causal effects of some particular phenomenon—such as export assistance, for example, Reeb, Sahakibara & Sarkar (2012) indicate that the development of a method that best approximates a controlled experiment is a challenge for researchers, and one of the suggestions of the editorial to overcome this problem is to engage a matching approach. The use of matching avoids selection bias and even allows control to be performed by a set of variables that involve the sector of activity, the size of the firm and the degree of internationalization—and also addressing the problem caused by the impossibility to observe performance in cases of non-receipt of assistance by firms that were actually supported by the programs. However, adequate operationalization is subject to researchers' having access to a rich database.

Similarly, operational difficulties may discourage authors from getting involved in longitudinal research designs. Despite these issues, the need for longitudinal empirical studies on export performance is not pointed to only when it comes to the effect of export support programs (Collins-Dodd & Francis, 2004; Czinkota & Crick, 1995; Freixanet, 2011; Majocchi, Bacchiocchi & Mayrhofer, 2005; Seringhaus, 1986); it is also seen as an imperative for the development of research in general exports (Leonidou & Katsikeas, 2010; Matthyssens & Pauwels, 2001). Especially in the case of export support, a pertinent line in inquiry as to the adoption of cross-sectional research designs is the need for lags to be used between the period of receiving the support and the period in which the effects of support on export performance are measured: as Skarmeas, Katsikeas & Sclegelmilch (2002) warned, it is not expected that the effect of the policy be ascertainable in companies' economic performance in the same year it was used. This requirement, although it may seem obvious, has not always been adopted in the studies on the topic; exceptions include Collins-Dodd & Francis (2004), Volpe Martincus & Carballo (2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c), and Geldres Weiss, Etchebarne López, & Medina (2011).

Using the taxonomy proposed by Seringhaus (1986), the empirical studies were also evaluated as to their methodology of investigation of programs to support exports, with the majority of the articles opting for a global assessment. Thus, the impact would be measured similarly for purposes of tax relief as for a program of an informational nature, for example. It is reasonable to assume that this option has some limitations—indeed, interesting insights are most certainly lost as regards to the different modalities of support. As Freixanet (2011) and Geldres Weiss, Etchebarne López, & Medina (2011) point out, there is a need for further assessment of the impact of export support via individual instruments, with suitable performance indicators for each of the programs.

This limitation, present in several papers, is possibly related to the fact that, in order to carry out more robust analyses using the “individual” method, larger samples are required. Similarly, barriers to obtaining the data necessary for research also seem to act as a limiting factor in relation to treatment techniques—and this aspect is manifested by the significant incidence observed of studies employing descriptive and univariate and bivariate techniques—all told, some 30% of the reviewed publications. Therefore, to the extent sample size and database quality are directly related to the ability to conduct more robust research—discriminating by business and by industry and utilizing individual assessments with more sophisticated statistical techniques—going forward, researchers would do well to conduct their studies on export support accordingly.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to resume the survey of the current status of issues related to promotion of exports and develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The analysis indicates that academic production did evolve across the two subperiods analyzed, both in quantity and quality.

The older studies of this review, published between 1992 and 2001, were conducted predominantly in USA and Canada. They suffered from small samples and overly simplistic, transversally applied analysis techniques; moreover they failed to exploit individual methods of analysis, in accordance with the structure proposed by Seringhaus (1986). However, the second period saw an expansion of the loci of research,

the adoption of more robust statistical techniques such as multivariate analysis and propensity score matching, the advent of longitudinal studies, and the incorporation of individual analyses of programs. Also evident was the fact that surveys were no longer the only form of data collection used by researchers, who came to rely more on objective secondary databases.

Even so, these advances have not yet extinguished certain enduring obstacles that limit the theoretical development of the area. Despite the incorporation of emerging economies in the research contexts, several interesting cases of countries that are prominent among the world's largest exporters have as yet still failed to garner the interest of researchers. Scant sample sizes were observed even in very recent work, constituting a limitation that has implications both methodological and analytical. The combination of subjective and objective indicators, as proposed by Majocchi, Bacchiocchi, & Mayrhofer (2005), was observed in just one of the studies reviewed, Geldres Weiss, Etchebarne López, & Medina (2011). Another aspect that deserves further attention is the need for longitudinal studies, which allow more reliable estimates of causality among the hypothesized relationships in the studies.

Empirical studies that contribute to a better understanding of the export performance of firms are required for governments to be able to adequately monitor the benefits of the adopted strategies to support exports, thereby obviating that further rounds of investment – which always occur at the expense of limited resources – are deployed only to see the repeat of the previous failures. Underlying this concern is the public interest in fostering exports and the development of domestic export companies as drivers of national development and sustainability of economic growth. Thus – and considering that the export assistance is one area in which research in International Business can provide great contributions, useful both for policymakers and practitioners – it is suggested that the development of future research should be done within a framework that encompasses the issues raised in this work.

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