

Chapter 6

Research Methods for the Study of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

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ABSTRACT

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have become a subject of study by themselves, given the wide range of topics revolving around research in this area, which can be easily observed while searching for information in the most prestigious databases in the world. This chapter presents the characteristics of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-research methods applied in the study of SMEs, since the understanding of these methods is a matter of vital importance to better analyze the particularities, environment, needs, and other relevant aspects of small- and medium-sized enterprises. Likewise, it is important to display the most relevant and significant variables to be included in the study of this kind of organizations.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2017a), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for 60% of employment in OECD member countries and generate between 50% and 60% of the average value added. In these countries, small, new businesses are often a driving force behind innovation and knowledge as they respond to new niche markets and social needs and contribute to the empowerment and inclusion of disadvantaged groups.

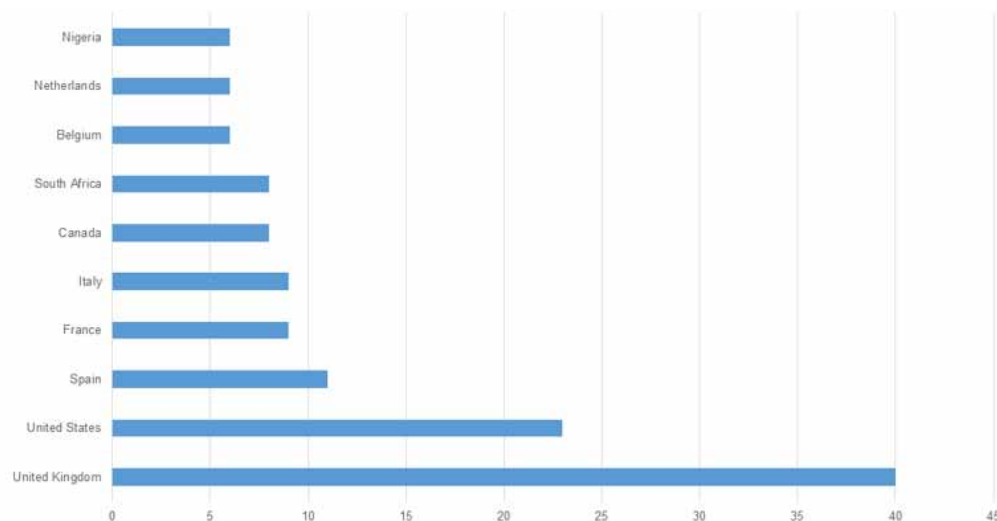
SMEs are key to achieving inclusive globalization and development, as they contribute in several ways to economic and social wellbeing and innovation, with the potential to contribute even more. Furthermore, small and medium-sized enterprises are key to achieving environmental sustainability and inclusive economic development, despite the great differences between these enterprises, their countries,

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and their sectors. Currently, greater access of SMEs to global markets and knowledge networks is being sought in order to strengthen the contributions already being made by these companies. However, the companies are undermined by trade and investment barriers, as well as poor physical and technological infrastructure. Digitalization offers new opportunities for SMEs to be integrated into the global economy; but, once again, they are lagging in terms of digital transition, and disruptions must be considered. In terms of institutional characteristics and regulatory framework, some aspects are unreasonable for the individual situations of SMEs. Inefficient and insolvent programs cripple business momentum and prevent the reorganization of viable companies, as well as access to external financing. Furthermore, the high costs of tax compliance fall upon small businesses disproportionately—businesses that are also still developing. And, finally, access to strategic resources is critical for competitiveness, such as: financial resources, better management skills, work force training, and public procurement; therefore, it is necessary to address these enterprises with cross-sectional insight (OECD, 2017b).

On the other hand, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have become a subject of study in themselves, given the wide range of topics revolving around the research in this area, which can be easily observed while searching for information in the most prestigious databases in the world. In order to set the framework for this chapter and to demonstrate how important SME research has become for academics, a search was performed in the Scopus database in March 2019. First, the search was set to find studies that included the keyword “SMEs” in the title of the article, summary, or keywords: this search yielded 14,532 documents. To refine the search, the following criteria had to be met: it had to have been published from 2015-2019; it had to be on the topic of business, administration, or accounting; and the document type had to be an article with a journal as the source. The result was narrowed to 162 documents: 74 of them published in the United Kingdom, United States of America, and Spain, as shown in Figure 1 and Table 1, which describe the frequency of publication by the 10 main countries or territories with the greatest number of publications on the subject.

Figure 1. Documents by country or territory
Source: Results obtained from Scopus database



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