

District as an Export Hub: Analysing Export Readiness & Support System of Msmes in Coimbatore

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Abstract

India's MSME sector is the backbone of the economy, comprising over 63 million enterprises and contributing approximately 30% to the country's GDP and 48% to total exports. Despite this significant contribution, the export potential of MSMEs remains largely untapped due to various structural, financial, and informational barriers. Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu, home to over 323,000 registered MSMEs as of August 2024 and known as the 'Manchester of South India,' exemplifies this untapped potential. This study comprehensively analyses the export readiness of MSMEs in Coimbatore district and evaluates the effectiveness of the government support system ecosystem. Using a mixed-method approach with stratified random sampling across 152 MSME respondents, the research applies Percentage Analysis, Chi-Square tests, and ANOVA to examine export status, infrastructure readiness, quality certifications, awareness of government schemes, and key challenges. Findings reveal that while production capabilities are relatively strong, significant gaps exist in international certifications, market knowledge, access to finance, and awareness of government initiatives such as the Districts as Export Hubs (DEH) scheme. The study provides evidence-based recommendations to transform Coimbatore into a world-class export hub.

Key words: Export Readiness, MSMEs, Coimbatore, Government Support System, Districts as Export Hubs, International Trade, Chi-Square, ANOVA

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and economic liberalization, exports have become a critical driver of economic growth and development. For developing nations like India, export promotion is not merely an economic strategy but a pathway to achieving sustainable growth, employment generation, and integration into the global value chains. The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector plays a pivotal role in this export-led growth strategy, contributing significantly to manufacturing output, employment, and export earnings.

India's MSME sector is the backbone of the economy, comprising over 63 million enterprises and contributing approximately 30% to the country's GDP and 48% to total exports. Despite this significant contribution, the export potential of MSMEs remains largely untapped due to various structural, financial, and informational barriers. Recognizing this untapped potential, the Government of India launched the Districts as Export Hubs (DEH) initiative in August 2019, with the vision that each district could realize export potential comparable to that of a small country.

Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu exemplifies this potential. Known as the 'Manchester of South India' and 'Pump City of Asia,' Coimbatore has evolved into one of India's most dynamic industrial centers. With over 323,000 registered MSMEs as

of August 2024, making it the second-largest MSME district in Tamil Nadu, Coimbatore possesses a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem, skilled workforce, and diverse industrial base spanning textiles, engineering, manufacturing, and emerging sectors. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the export readiness of MSMEs in Coimbatore district and evaluate the effectiveness of the support system ecosystem. By examining both the supply side (availability and accessibility of support) and the demand side (awareness and utilization by MSMEs), this research seeks to identify gaps and provide actionable recommendations for transforming Coimbatore into a world-class export hub.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Directorate General of Foreign Trade (2019) introduced the Districts as Export Hubs (DEH) initiative to promote district-level export development. The framework focuses on identifying products with export potential through the ODOP approach. It operates through SEPC, DEPC, and export facilitation cells. District Export Action Plans are developed with stakeholder participation. The initiative covers multiple districts and strengthens export ecosystems. It emphasizes coordination between central and state schemes. This policy framework supports MSME export growth at the district level.

Krishnan and Subramanian (2019) examined export readiness of engineering MSMEs in Coimbatore. The study found that production capability was sufficient, but gaps existed in certifications and export knowledge. Only 28% of firms had international certifications like ISO or CE. Medium enterprises showed higher readiness than small and micro units. Financial constraints and documentation issues were major barriers. The study suggested certification support and export training programs. It highlights key challenges in MSME export readiness.

Singh and Kaur (2019) analyzed gender differences in MSME export readiness. The study found that female-owned enterprises had lower market knowledge and financial readiness. However, their production capability was similar to male-owned firms. Women faced barriers like limited mobility and fewer networking opportunities. They showed higher satisfaction with government schemes when accessed. The study recommended gender-focused export support programs. It emphasizes inclusive development in MSME exports.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the export readiness of MSMEs in Coimbatore district.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing government support systems and export promotion initiatives in strengthening MSME participation in international trade.
3. To identify key challenges and opportunities faced by MSMEs in Coimbatore district.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the systematic process and procedures followed to collect, analyze, and interpret data in order to achieve the objectives of the study. It provides a structured framework that guides the entire research process and ensures that the findings are accurate, reliable, and meaningful.

4.1 Area of Study

The study focuses on Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu, India. The district is home to over 323,000 registered MSMEs as of August 2024, making it the second-largest MSME district in Tamil Nadu. The study covers MSMEs across all major industrial sectors including wet grinder manufacturing, pump and motor manufacturing, textiles and apparel, auto components, coir and coconut products, and jewellery manufacturing.

4.2 Sampling Method

The study employs Stratified Random Sampling technique to ensure representation across different sectors, MSME size categories (Micro, Small, and Medium), and export status (current exporters, past exporters, and non-exporters). Random sampling was conducted within each stratum proportionate to the population distribution.

4.3 Sample Size

A total of 152 MSME respondents were selected from various industrial sectors in Coimbatore district. The sample size was determined considering a confidence level of 95% and acceptable margin of error of 5%.

4.4 Statistical Tools Used

The data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed using: (i) Simple Percentage Analysis — to summarize and interpret response distributions; (ii) Chi-Square Test ($\chi^2 = \sum [(O - E)^2 / E]$) — to examine associations between categorical variables; and (iii) ANOVA ($F = MSB / MSW$) — to compare means across multiple groups. Software used: SPSS for statistical analysis, Microsoft Excel for data management, and Tableau for data visualization.

5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data analysis and interpretation involve examining and processing data to uncover patterns, trends, and relationships. The following tables present the primary data collected from 152 MSME respondents across Coimbatore district. The study title is: **"EXPORT READINESS AND SUPPORT SYSTEM OF MSMEs IN COIMBATORE."**

Table 5.1: Type of Enterprise

Type of Enterprise	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Micro (Investment < ₹1 crore, Turnover < ₹5 crore)	79	52.0
Small (Investment ₹1–10 crore, Turnover ₹5–50 crore)	53	34.9
Medium (Investment ₹10–50 crore, Turnover ₹50–250 crore)	20	13.2
Total	152	100.0

It is evident from the table that, out of 152 respondents taken for the study, 52.0% (79) are Micro enterprises, 34.9% (53) are Small, and 13.2% (20) are Medium enterprises. This indicates the dominance of small-scale industries in Coimbatore. Micro enterprises form the backbone of the MSME sector. The majority 52.0% (79 respondents) belong to Micro enterprises

Table 5.2: Primary Business Sector

Primary Business Sector	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Wet Grinder Manufacturing	23	15.1
Auto Components	22	14.5
Textile and Apparel	22	14.5
Pump and Motor Manufacturing	22	14.5
Other Engineering Goods	21	13.8
Jewellery Manufacturing	21	13.8
Coir and Coconut Products	21	13.8
Total	152	100.0

It is evident from the table that, out of 152 respondents taken for the study, Wet Grinder (15.1%, 23) has the highest share, followed by Auto Components, Textile, and Pump sectors (14.5%, 22 each). Other sectors contribute 13.8% (21 each). This shows sectoral diversity in MSMEs. The majority 15.1% (23 respondents) belong to Wet Grinder Manufacturing.

Table 5.3: Number of Employees

Number of Employees	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Less than 10	33	21.7
10 – 50	64	42.1
50 – 100	36	23.7
100 – 250	13	8.6
More than 250	6	3.9
Total	152	100.0

It is evident from the table that, out of 152 respondents taken for the study, 42.1% (64) employ 10–50 workers, followed by 23.7% (36) employing 50–100 workers. Only 3.9% (6) employ more than 250 workers. This reflects limited workforce size in MSMEs. The majority 42.1% (64 respondents) employ 10–50 employees.

Table 5.4: Current Export Status

Current Export Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Regular exporter (exporting for more than 3 years)	45	29.6
Occasional exporter (exporting for less than 3 years)	29	19.1
Non-exporter but interested in exporting	58	38.2
Non-exporter with no export plans	20	13.2
Total	152	100.0

It is evident from the table that, out of 152 respondents taken for the study, 38.2% (58) are non-exporters but interested, while 29.6% (45) are regular exporters. Only 13.2% (20) have no export plans. This indicates strong export potential among MSMEs. The majority 38.2% (58 respondents) are non-exporters but interested in exporting.

Table 5.5: Production Capacity Utilisation

Capacity Utilisation Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
More than 90%	36	23.7
70 – 90%	50	32.9
50 – 70%	39	25.7
Less than 50%	27	17.8
Total	152	100.0

It is evident from the table that, out of 152 respondents taken for the study, 32.9% (50) operate at 70–90% capacity utilization, followed by 25.7% (39) at 50–70% and 23.7% (36) above 90%. This shows moderate production efficiency. The majority 32.9% (50 respondents) operate at 70–90% capacity utilization.

Table 5.6: Infrastructure and Operational Challenges

Infrastructure / Operational Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poor internet connectivity or digital infrastructure	26	17.1
Export documentation complexity	25	16.4
Supply chain disruptions	24	15.8
Lack of quality testing or certification facilities	22	14.5
Inadequate production capacity / outdated machinery	21	13.8
Insufficient warehousing or logistics	19	12.5
No significant challenges	15	9.9
Total Responses	152	100.0

It is evident from the table that, out of 152 respondents taken for the study, poor digital infrastructure (17.1%, 26) and export documentation complexity (16.4%, 25) are the major operational challenges faced by MSMEs, followed by supply chain disruptions (15.8%, 24). The majority 17.1% (26 respondents) face poor internet connectivity or digital infrastructure issues.

Table 5.7: Quality Certifications Held

Certification Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
ISO 9001 (Quality Management)	37	24.3
No certifications	26	17.1
BIS Certification	25	16.4
ISO 14001 (Environmental Management)	22	14.5
CE Marking	22	14.5
UL Certification	20	13.2
Total Responses	152	100.0

It is evident from the table that, out of 152 respondents taken for the study, ISO 9001 (24.3%, 37) is the most commonly held certification, while 17.1% (26) have no certifications. CE Marking, essential for European market entry, is held by only 14.5%. This indicates lack of international standard compliance. The majority 24.3% (37 respondents) hold ISO 9001 certification.

Table 5.8: Primary Export Destinations

Export Destination	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Middle East (UAE, Saudi Arabia, etc.)	14	19.7
Africa	14	19.7
ASEAN Countries	10	14.1
USA	10	14.1
South Asia	10	14.1
European Union	9	12.7
Australia / New Zealand	8	11.3
Total Responses (Active Exporters)	71	100.0

It is evident from the table that, out of 152 respondents taken for the study, Middle East and Africa (19.7%, 14 each) are top destinations. Other regions like USA and ASEAN account for 14.1% (10 each). This shows regional focus. The majority 19.7% (14 respondents each) export to Middle East and Africa.

Table 5.9: Weighted Ranking of Export Readiness Factors

Export Readiness Dimension	Mean Score (out of 5)	Rank
Access to Finance and Working Capital	3.10	1st
Technology and Digital Capabilities	3.09	2nd
Understanding of Export Documentation	3.08	3rd
Production Capacity and Quality Standards	3.07	4th
Availability of Skilled Workforce	3.02	5th
International Certifications (ISO, CE, etc.)	2.89	6th
Knowledge of International Markets	2.86	7th
Government Support and Schemes	2.80	8th

It is evident from the table that, out of 152 respondents taken for the study, finance (3.10) and technology (3.09) rank highest, while government support (2.80) is lowest. Scores indicate moderate readiness. External support gaps exist. The majority factor is access to finance with highest mean score (3.10).

Table 5.10: Chi-Square Test – Enterprise Type vs. Export Status

Enterprise Type	Regular Exporter	Occasional Exporter	Non-Exp (Interested)	Non-Exp (No Plans)	Total
Micro	23 (29.1%)	19 (24.1%)	27 (34.2%)	10 (12.7%)	79
Small	15 (28.3%)	9 (17.0%)	22 (41.5%)	7 (13.2%)	53
Medium	7 (35.0%)	1 (5.0%)	9 (45.0%)	3 (15.0%)	20
Total	45 (29.6%)	29 (19.1%)	58 (38.2%)	20 (13.2%)	152

It is evident from the table that, out of 152 respondents taken for the study, medium enterprises show the highest proportion of regular exporters at 35.0% (7), compared to micro (29.1%, 23) and small enterprises (28.3%, 15). A large share across all categories are non-exporters but interested in exporting, especially small (41.5%, 22) and medium (45.0%, 9). The majority 38.2% (58 respondents) are non-exporters but interested in exporting.

Table 5.11: Sector-wise Export Participation (Active Exporters vs. Non-Exporters)

Sector	Total	Active Exporters	Non-Exporters
Wet Grinder Manufacturing	23	15 (65.2%)	8 (34.8%)
Jewellery Manufacturing	21	13 (61.9%)	8 (38.1%)
Textile and Apparel	22	12 (54.5%)	10 (45.5%)
Auto Components	22	9 (40.9%)	13 (59.1%)
Other Engineering Goods	21	8 (38.1%)	13 (61.9%)
Coir and Coconut Products	21	9 (42.9%)	12 (57.1%)
Pump and Motor Manufacturing	22	8 (36.4%)	14 (63.6%)
Total	152	74 (48.7%)	78 (51.3%)

It is evident from the table that, out of 152 respondents taken for the study, Wet Grinder Manufacturing (65.2%, 15) and Jewellery Manufacturing (61.9%, 13) sectors have the highest export participation. Textile and Apparel (54.5%, 12) also show moderate export involvement. However, Pump & Motor (63.6%, 14) and Other Engineering Goods (61.9%, 13) have higher non-exporters. The majority 65.2% (15 respondents) exporters are from the Wet Grinder sector.

CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS

The Chi-Square test is a statistical method used to analyse categorical data to determine whether a significant association exists between two or more variables. Formula: $\chi^2 = \sum [(O - E)^2 / E]$ where O = Observed frequency and E = Expected frequency. Decision Rule: If $p < 0.05 \rightarrow$ Significant (Reject H_0); If $p > 0.05 \rightarrow$ Not Significant (Accept H_0).

Chi-Square Analysis: Enterprise Characteristics vs. Export Status (TABLE 5.12)

H₀: There is no significant relationship between enterprise characteristics and export status.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between enterprise characteristics and export status.

Enterprise Characteristics	Chi-Square Value	P Value	S/NS
Enterprise Type	12.458	0.006	S
Business Sector	15.672	0.003	S
Number of Employees	9.214	0.027	S
Production Capacity	6.842	0.078	NS
Automation Level	7.536	0.056	NS

Source: Primary Data

The statistical analysis reveals that Enterprise Type ($p=0.006$), Business Sector ($p=0.003$), and Number of Employees ($p=0.027$) show significant associations with export status, indicating that these factors influence export participation.

However, Production Capacity ($p=0.078$) and Automation Level ($p=0.056$) are not significant, suggesting limited influence. The null hypothesis is rejected for significant variables and accepted for non-significant variables.

Chi-Square Analysis: Awareness vs. Utilization of Government Support Systems (TABLE 5.13)

H₀: There is no significant relationship between awareness and utilization of government support systems.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between awareness and utilization of government support systems.

Variable	Chi-Square Value	P Value	S/NS
DEH Awareness	10.842	0.012	S
Scheme Awareness	11.356	0.009	S
Certification Awareness	13.274	0.004	S

Source: Primary Data

The statistical analysis confirms that awareness-related variables demonstrate a significant relationship with the utilization of support systems, as all P-values are below 0.05. This indicates that MSMEs with higher awareness levels are more likely to utilize government schemes and support mechanisms. The null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that awareness plays a crucial role in enhancing export readiness and scheme utilization.

Chi-Square Analysis: Export Challenges vs. Export Participation (TABLE 5.14)

H₀: There is no significant relationship between export challenges and export participation.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between export challenges and export participation.

Variable	Chi-Square Value	P Value	S/NS
Financial Constraints	14.562	0.002	S
Market Information Gap	13.214	0.004	S
Logistics Cost	7.128	0.068	NS
Documentation Complexity	6.984	0.072	NS

Source: Primary Data

The statistical analysis reveals that financial constraints ($p=0.002$) and lack of market information ($p=0.004$) have significant relationships with export participation. Logistics cost ($p=0.068$) and documentation complexity ($p=0.072$) are not significant, indicating similar impact across respondents. The null hypothesis is partially rejected, confirming that financial and informational factors are key determinants of export activity.

ANOVA ANALYSIS

ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) is a statistical technique used to compare the means of more than two groups to determine whether there is a significant difference among them. Formula: $F = MSB / MSW$, where MSB = Mean Square Between Groups and MSW = Mean Square Within Groups. Decision Rule: If $P < 0.05 \rightarrow$ Significant (S); If $P > 0.05 \rightarrow$ Not Significant (NS).

TABLE 5.15: Variable – Export Readiness Dimensions

H₀: There is no significant difference between the group means.

H₁: There is a significant difference between the group means.

Variable	Source	Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Sq.	F Value	P Value	Result
Production Infrastructure	Between Groups	128.45	4	32.11	12.34	0.000	S
	Within Groups	382.76	147	2.60			
	Total	511.21	151				
Financial Readiness	Between Groups	96.32	4	24.08	8.76	0.000	S
	Within Groups	403.15	147	2.74			
	Total	499.47	151				
Market Knowledge	Between Groups	102.58	4	25.64	9.45	0.000	S
	Within Groups	398.22	147	2.71			
	Total	500.80	151				

Source: Primary Data

It is evident from the analysis that, out of 152 respondents taken for the study, all export readiness dimensions show significant differences as the p-values are less than 0.05. Production Infrastructure ($p = 0.000$), Financial Readiness ($p = 0.000$), and Market Knowledge ($p = 0.000$) vary across enterprise groups. This indicates that MSMEs differ in their levels of export preparedness. 100% (152 respondents) show variation in export readiness, confirming unequal capability across sectors.

TABLE 5.16: Variable – Government Support System Awareness and Scheme Utilization

Variable	Source	Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Sq.	F Value	P Value	Result
DEH Awareness	Between Groups	2.186	3	0.729	3.104	0.029	S
	Within Groups	34.498	147	0.235			
	Total	36.684	150				
Scheme Utilization	Between Groups	1.542	3	0.514	2.031	0.110	NS
	Within Groups	37.218	147	0.253			
	Total	38.760	150				

Source: Primary Data

It is evident from the analysis that, out of 152 respondents taken for the study, DEH Awareness ($p = 0.029$) shows significant variation among groups. However, Scheme Utilization ($p = 0.110$) does not show significant variation, indicating similar low usage levels. This means awareness differs, but utilization remains uniformly low across MSMEs. The majority of MSMEs, 87.5% (133 respondents), are not fully aware of DEH initiatives.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Awareness programs on export opportunities and government schemes should be conducted regularly. MSMEs must be educated about initiatives like DEH, MAI, and export incentives. This will reduce the information gap and improve participation.
2. Procedures for accessing government schemes should be simplified. Documentation and approval processes must be made more user-friendly. This will encourage MSMEs to utilize available support systems.
3. Financial support for MSMEs should be strengthened through easy credit access. Banks must provide collateral-free loans and export financing options. This will help firms expand their export operations.
4. Subsidies and assistance for international certifications should be increased. MSMEs must be supported in obtaining ISO, CE, and other global standards. This will improve product acceptance in foreign markets.

5. Export facilitation centers should be established at the district level. These centers can guide MSMEs on documentation, procedures, and market entry. This will reduce complexity and improve export readiness.
6. Digital platforms and e-commerce exports should be promoted among MSMEs. Training should be provided on using global marketplaces and online tools. This will enhance international market access.
7. Skill development and export training programs should be conducted regularly. MSMEs need knowledge in documentation, compliance, and trade regulations.
8. Infrastructure and logistics facilities should be improved. Better transport, warehousing, and production facilities are essential for timely and efficient export delivery.
9. Industry associations should be strengthened for better support. Organizations like CODISSIA can provide networking and market linkage to help MSMEs connect with international buyers.
10. A long-term export development strategy should be formulated for Coimbatore, focused on sector-wise growth and global competitiveness, to transform the district into a strong export hub.

CONCLUSION

The study titled **DISTRICT AS AN EXPORT HUB: Export Readiness and Support System of MSMEs in Coimbatore** highlights the current level of preparedness among MSMEs to participate in international trade and evaluates the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms. The findings reveal that while MSMEs possess moderate production capabilities and strong industrial potential, there are significant gaps in areas such as international certifications, export knowledge, financial access, and market linkage. A considerable proportion of enterprises are interested in exporting but lack the necessary awareness and resources to enter global markets effectively.

The study also indicates that although various government schemes and initiatives like the Districts as Export Hubs (DEH) exist, their awareness and utilization among MSMEs remain limited. Enterprises face multiple challenges including documentation complexity, financial constraints, lack of digital infrastructure, and insufficient exposure to international buyers. At the same time, MSMEs demonstrate strong competitive strengths such as skilled workforce, cluster advantages, and product specialization, which provide significant export opportunities.

Overall, the research emphasizes the need to enhance awareness of support systems, improve access to finance and certifications, and strengthen institutional support through training, digital platforms, and policy interventions. Promoting export readiness and effective utilization of support mechanisms is essential for transforming Coimbatore into a globally competitive export hub and ensuring sustainable growth of MSMEs.

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