

2017

# Import and Export Strategies to Sustain Business Under Economic Sanctions

Essam Abdalla  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Walden University  
2017

Abstract

Import and Export Strategies for Business Sustainability Under Economic Sanctions

by

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MBA, Regis University, 2011

BA, Regis University, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2017

## Abstract

Economic sanctions can result in more than a 70% decrease in business activities in a sanctioned country. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify the strategies import and export small business owners use to sustain businesses under economic sanctions. The population for this study was import and export small business owners in the state of Khartoum, Sudan. General systems theory served as the conceptual framework and underpinned the study. The data collection included semistructured interviews and government financial reports. Adhering to an interview protocol, conducting transcript reviews of participants' interviews, member checking, and methodological triangulation represented the measures to ensure dependability, trustworthiness, creditability, transferability, and confirmability of the research. The thematic data analysis involved data cleaning, uploading the transcribed interviews into qualitative data analysis software, reorganizing the data, coding relevant information, and methodological triangulation against financial reports from the Central Bank of Sudan and the World Development Bank Indicators. The results from the thematic data analysis led to the identification of some major themes, notably, innovative strategies to secure funding and increase business sustainability despite the unfavorable economic climate consequent to the prevalent economic sanctions. The consensus among participants denoted that creative strategies presented the only choice to overcome the adverse business climate. The study findings may contribute to positive social change as the knowledge from it may aid in the improvement of employment, the living standards, and the prosperity of small businesses and societies in Sudan.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to the soul of my mother Haja Zainab who passed away last April 2017, a little before the completion of my doctoral degree. She inspired me through every step of my academic success. Her encouragement was remarkable. Her words were kind and full of passion and love. I had plans to surprise her with a phone call and tell her; I made it. I wish she were here to celebrate this significant academic achievement moment. I could not have done it without her support and inspiration. She will never, ever, be forgotten.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small businesses have an important role in job creation and in contributing to the growth of the economy of a nation (Anyadike-Danes, Hart, & Du, 2015). Small business owners are known to experience challenges in achieving profitability, growth, and the creation of jobs while operating under economic sanctions, which often cause businesses to close and lead to a decrease in the volume of exports (Barry & Kleinberg, 2015; Meyer & Thein, 2014; Moret, 2014). The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify the strategies import and export small business owners use to sustain businesses under economic sanctions.

### **Background of the Problem**

Achieving business sustainability is an important objective for small business owners (Svensson & Wagner, 2015). Multiple factors can negatively affect the profitability and sustainability of small businesses (Kosi & Bojnec, 2013), such as embargoes, known widely as economic sanctions, which often restrict small businesses from conducting financial and business transactions (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2013b). Small business owners, particularly importers and exporters, experience challenges in sustaining profitability and growth under the prevalent and protracted economic sanctions in the state of Khartoum and across Sudan (Aalen, 2013). The volume of in-trade exchange between Sudan and the United States has decreased by more than 70% (U.S. International Trade Commission, 2014). The existing information about the effect of economic sanctions on business owners in Sudan is limited. There is potential to understand the strategies used by import and export business owners to

sustain enterprises under the current economic sanctions and add new knowledge, which was the purpose of this study. With a brief background of the problem, the focus shifts to the articulation of the problem statement.

### **Problem Statement**

Economic sanctions cause debilitating consequences to small businesses in a country under sanctions arising from restrictions on imports and exports, financial transactions, and travel (McLean & Whang, 2014). Economic sanctions decrease the in-trade exchange of businesses in a sanctioned country by more than 70% (U.S. International Trade Commission, 2014). The general business problem is that Sudanese small business owners have been unable to complete trade transactions in United States dollars, which has adversely affected the growth and survival of individual enterprises. The specific business problem is that some import and export small business owners lack strategies to sustain businesses under economic sanctions.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify the strategies import and export small business owners use to sustain businesses under economic sanctions. The research population was import and export small business owners who reside, own, and operate a business in the state of Khartoum, Sudan, for a minimum period of 5 years and have strategies to sustain business under economic sanctions. The findings from this study may help to identify strategies and alternatives for Sudanese entrepreneurs to help business sustainability under economic sanctions, which could lead to a positive social change in respect to improving the quality of life and the living

standards of employers and employees and thereby positively influencing the transformation of communities in the region.

### **Nature of the Study**

I chose the qualitative methodology for the study. A qualitative research method is a useful approach to explore a phenomenon from the perspective and experiences of study participants (Yin, 2014). Using a quantitative method, researchers rely on statistical approaches to analyze numerical data, which is ideal for testing a theory or hypothesis (Rissman & Gillon, 2017), but this was not the focus of the study and consequently excluded as a research option. A mixed methods study is a combination of the theoretical aspects of quantitative research and qualitative research techniques (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). A mixed methods approach may provide an opportunity to strengthen the research by using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies; however, I did not consider it due to the elongated time-period required to conduct such a study (Povee & Robert, 2013).

The main designs for qualitative research are ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case study (Guetterman, 2015). Researchers use an ethnographic design to study cultural groups in a natural setting over an extended period (Goldstein, Gray, Salisbury, & Snell, 2014). Researchers using an ethnographic design, typically study the behaviors of culture rather than the viewpoint of the participants (Goldstein et al., 2014), and therefore, I excluded it as a research approach option for this study. The primary goal of a grounded theory design is to promote a theory (Wu & Beaunae, 2014). The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies used by import and export small



business owners to sustain business and not to promote a new theory; therefore, the grounded theory was not the most appropriate design for this study. A phenomenological design is conducive to acquiring a profound understanding of the phenomenon under study. It requires the researcher to immerse and actively participate in cultures and groups to achieve this understanding (Yin, 2014). A phenomenological research design is suitable for capturing and understanding the lived experiences of individuals from a personal point of view (Guetterman, 2015), which was not the purpose of this study.

Yin (2013) noted that using case studies can help to explain events in a particular context and provide an in-depth exploration strategy to gain insights into the views and perceptions of participants in a real-world setting. The invocation of a case study methodology offers the flexibility to ask *how* or *what* questions, which are considered essential to comprehend the characteristics of real-life events and may serve to identify working relationships between events over time (Yin, 2014). The characteristics of qualitative research method and case study design as described by Yin (2014) aligned with the focus of this study, notably in identifying the strategies used by import and export small business owners to sustain businesses under economic sanctions and served to fulfill the research objectives of the study.

### **Research Question**

The following was the research question for this study:

RQ: What strategies do import and export small business owners use to sustain businesses under economic sanctions?

### **Interview Questions**

The interview questions for the study were as follows:

1. What strategies do you use to increase the volume of your business transactions?
2. What strategies do you use to secure funding for your business?
3. What strategies do you use to secure payments for your import or export business transactions?
4. What strategies do you use to mitigate the risks associated with fluctuation in foreign exchange rates for your import or export business transactions?
5. What strategies do you use for payments made or received involving foreign currencies?
6. What information would you like to add about strategies you use to sustain your business under economic sanctions?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Von Bertalanffy (1972) introduced the systems theory at the University of Chicago in 1937 and in 1949 in a German journal. The systems theory is a logico-mathematical formal pathway that applies to all sciences involved with systems (von Bertalanffy, 2008). Theorists have postulated that different parts and interrelations of parts produce a system (von Bertalanffy, 2008). The alignment of the systems theory to the nature of this study prompted consideration for its use as the conceptual framework to underpin the study. The systems theory serves as a useful theoretical reference in analyzing the change effect on each part of a complex system (Mangal, 2013). For this

study, systems theory aided in underpinning the research and seemed quite relevant and applicable to my efforts to identify and analyze the strategies import and export small business owners use to sustain businesses under economic sanctions.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following explanation of unique business terms, using peer-reviewed sources, may increase clarity for the reader:

*Angel investor:* A former entrepreneur, professional, or a wealthy person or group who provides capital, advice, and contacts for start-up businesses, usually in return for capital interest and equity in the business (Hellmann & Thiele, 2015).

*Bootstrapping:* The notion of starting or growing a business without getting capital or support from outside the business (Grichnik, Brinckmann, Singh, & Manigart, 2014).

*Crowdfunding:* A practice of funding a business by finding a group of individuals willing to make small or considerable financial contributions (Mollick, 2014).

*Foreign direct investment (FDI):* The inflow of foreign capital into the domestic market (Girma, Gong, Gorg, & Lancheros, 2015).

*Initial public offering (IPO):* A process of offering stocks and shares to the public to increase capital for a public company (Gao, Ritter, & Zhu, 2013).

*Microfinance:* A provision of providing microcredit to low-income clients seeking to become small business owners using small loans and other financial products (Allison, Davis, Short, & Webb, 2015).

*Small business:* In United States, an enterprise with fewer than 500 employees (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2014). In Sudan, it is a requirement to register the business under the Commercial Company's Law of 1925 and select the company's category from a public, private, or partnership company as may be appropriate (Embassy of Sudan, 2015).

*Sustainability:* The capacity of a business leader to predict the future needs while supporting its continuation (Wilson & Wu, 2017).

*Venture capital:* A form of financial capital provided to a growing startup company with a potentially high risk by venture capitalists in exchange for equity (Bellavitis, Filatotchev, Kamuriwo, & Vanacker, 2017).

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

The identification of assumptions, limitations, and delimitations may be essential to understanding the potential implications of a research study. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) noted that assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are crucial components of any research study. Without identifying the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, there may be questions raised about the credibility of the study.

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are beliefs the researcher considers as facts in developing the study although they are not verifiable (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). An assumption behind this study was that participants would share personal experiences openly and answer the interview questions honestly. Another assumption was that participants would understand the interview questions and respond with detailed viewpoints that accurately

reflected personal experiences. An important assumption was that participant responses did not conflict with any political affiliation. Regarding participation in the study, another assumption was that a sufficient number of importers and exporters would be willing to participate in interviews and that repeated interviews would be necessary to reach data saturation. I assumed that semistructured interviews and trusted documents constituted optimal strategies to collect adequate data in order to answer the main research question of the study. A final assumption was that the findings from this study would contribute to positive social change by potentially elevating the quality of life and the living standards of employers and employees.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are the uncontrollable threats to the validity of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). The participation in the study was available only to current import and export small business owners in the state of Khartoum, Sudan. Drawing from a population representing importers and exporters in the state of Khartoum, Sudan, may constitute a limitation as it meant the exclusion of participants from other states. Only willing participants participated in one-on-one interviews. The restriction of the study findings to the state of Khartoum, Sudan, merited consideration as a limitation given the exclusion of other geographic regions of the country. The proficiency and expertise of the researcher as the major instrument for collecting the data may restrict the profoundness and wealth of the data gathered (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations denote the boundaries of the study identified and selected by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). The intended geographic coverage of the research study included only the state of Khartoum and not other states in Sudan. The screening and eligibility criteria for importers and exporters participating in the study included requiring mandatory domicile, residence, and operation of the business in the state of Khartoum, Sudan. A minimum duration of 5 years as the length of time for running a business by current import and export small business owners in the state of Khartoum, Sudan, represented another important inclusionary requirement for participation in the study. As noted earlier, the eligibility criteria for participation in the study included only import and export small business owners and not all other business owners operating other kinds of enterprises. The use of interviews and documents from trusted sources as the main instruments for data collection limited opportunities to obtain valuable information from other sources.

## **Significance of the Study**

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Economic sanctions have minimized the economic growth of Sudan by decreasing trade with American and western countries (Mann, 2014). Small businesses in Sudan have experienced a trade embargo, restraining trade with American companies and forbidding transacting in the United States dollar since 1997 (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2013a). The findings from this study may be of value to businesses and other

stakeholders as the aim was to identify effective strategies for import and export small business owners to sustain businesses under the existing economic sanctions.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings of this study may potentially hold implications for positive social change as it can provide importers and exporters with strategies to overcome the adverse business climate arising from the prevailing economic sanctions. The study findings could contribute to knowledge on how businesses can achieve sustainability and growth despite economic hardships. Business sustainability is considered a means to offset poverty and unemployment (Alvarez & Barney, 2014; Bruton, Ketchen, & Ireland, 2013). Functional strategies and practices applied by entrepreneurs can have a favorable effect on enterprise sustainability, which may minimize business risk of failure (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014; Furlan, Grandinetti, & Paggiaro, 2014). Small businesses contribute to economic growth by creating jobs (Mann, 2014). The results and the knowledge from this study may aid employers, employees, and communities, and potentially facilitate positive social change through the contribution the study findings may have in improving the performance, sustainability, and prosperity of small enterprises. Furthermore, the findings may hold added-value to human social change because the knowledge could serve to promote and improve the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, organizations, and societies.

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

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify strategies import and export small business owners use to sustain business under economic sanctions. The

literature review is an important step because it includes relevant publications about the research topic (Bernard, 2013). Valuable information normally comes from seminal books, scholarly journals, and authoritative Internet sources; however, peer-reviewed journals are the preferred sources in doctoral dissertations (Ross & Mash, 2014). A literature review is a critical analysis of pertinent scholarly and practitioner discourse on topics aligned to the research topic. The information in this study represents literature derived from multiple sources, notably (a) online databases from the Walden University Library, (b) seminal books, (c) government websites, and (d) Google Scholar. *Ulrich's Periodical Directory* was the tool used to verify the peer-reviewed status of journals. The keyword search for selection of literature included the following: *research design, data collection, methods of data analysis, systems theory, qualitative research, case study, economic sanctions, embargo, barriers, challenges, small businesses, small business financing, foreign direct investment, sanctions on Sudan, role of export and import, sustainability, and business sustainability*. One hundred and sixty-eight sources were employed in the literature review section, of which 92% were peer-reviewed articles (see Table 1), and 91% of the total of 282 sources used in the entire study was peer-reviewed articles from the periods of 2013 to 2017 (see Table 2).



Table 1

*Summary of Citations in the Literature Review Section*

Description	Number of citations	Percentage of citations
Peer-reviewed citations (2013-2017)	151	90%
Government websites	4	2%
Peer-reviewed citations older than (2013)	13	8%
Total	168	100%

Table 2

*Summary of Citations in the Entire Study*

Description	Number of citations	Percentage of citations
Peer-reviewed citations (2013-2017)	241	85%
Government websites	17	6%
Peer-reviewed citations older than (2013)	13	5%
Non-peer-reviewed sources	11	4%
Total	282	100%

The focus of this qualitative single case study was to determine the strategies import and export small business owners use to sustain businesses under economic sanctions. An introduction to the literature review in this section commenced with the systems theory, which represented the conceptual framework of the study. The discussion herein includes the role of small business in the economy and job creation, challenges of small businesses, and small business and financing. The literature review

component concludes with a review of small business sustainability and role of import and export in the economy.

Several researchers have studied the effectiveness and the ineffectiveness of the economic sanctions from a political point of view as per the reasoning offered by the country imposing the sanctions. The dearth of business research studies on the impact of economic sanctions, however, represents a gap in the current literature. The effectiveness of economic sanctions depends on many factors. Sanctions succeed when the sanctioned country mainly trades with the country imposing the sanctions (Bapat, Heinrich, Kobayashi, & Morgan, 2013). Majidpour (2013) claimed that U.S. sanctions on Iran were ineffective because Iran found alternative markets in trade and technology. Li (2014) asserted that sanctions in the past years failed to lead sanctioned countries to show remarkable concessions toward the claims made by the imposing country. Lektzian and Patterson (2015) connected the effectiveness of sanctions with the degree of damage on economy and trade before the sanctioned country concedes. The research in literature also revealed that most studies on economic sanctions are political in nature and related to the public relations field (Early & Jadoon, 2016; Morgan, 2015; Nielsen, 2013; von Soest & Wahman, 2015). However, there is little information on the effect of the economic sanctions related to Sudanese small business owners, which potentially provided this study with some significance.

### **Systems Theory**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to determine the strategies import and export small business owners use to sustain businesses under economic

sanctions. The economic sanctions have had a negative impact on small businesses in Sudan (McLean & Whang, 2014).

Systems theory was the conceptual framework that underpinned this study. Von Bertalanffy (2008) introduced the general systems theory in the 1930s. Mangal (2013) noted that the effectiveness of the system thinking depends on the degree of coordination among its components. Van Lier (2013) characterized the results from applying systems theory in representing the interactions of populations, networks, or organizations. Von Bertalanffy explained that systems interact with related mediums and can increasingly gain new properties, leading to a process of continuous development. The propositions of the systems theory support the collective components of entities and consider these more than a total of parts (Chettiparamb, 2014). In an open system, the systems theories connote more communication between the components and the environment (Chettiparamb, 2014). In the field of information security and human resource development, the systems theory has a significant role in understanding the drivers of innovation and continues to prove its relevance in the field (Fagan, 2014). Von Bertalanffy used the systems theory to examine the relationships between various elements, objects, or procedures. Systems theory may be useful to study the interrelationships between multiple components rather than single components and patterns of change (Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur, & Schley, 2010).

One of the techniques of systems analysis is systems thinking (Salmon et al., 2017). Systems thinking differs from traditional forms of analysis, and it helps provide understanding as to how multiple parts and functions in an organization interact with

each other (Chettiparamb, 2014). Mangal (2013) explained that systems thinking denotes a path to promote a perception of interactions between parts and the implied patterns of behavior. The combination of systems theory and systems thinking could serve to identify potential risks or issues within an organization (von Bertalanffy, 1972). Von Bertalanffy noted that managers make considerable decisions jointly in the departments of an organization. Independently, decisions may appear to be beneficial to the organization; however, the cross interaction could vandalize the intended expectations and produce unfavorable outcomes (Senge et al., 2010; von Bertalanffy, 2008). However, the application of systems theory could mitigate this effect and result in effective decision-making (Senge et al., 2010).

Karniouchina, Carson, Short, and Ketchen (2013) conducted a study involving 1,957 businesses representing 49 industries focusing on the link between the life cycle of the industry and the business from a systems theory point of view. Karniouchina et al. concluded that a firm's growth is dependent upon industry growth, which indicates that industry weaknesses would negatively reflect on business sustainability and success. Karniouchina et al. projected reflections on the relationship between the import and export industry and importers and exporters as far as the opportunities for success and sustainability for the business. Therefore, systems theory aligned well as a conceptual framework for this study because the aim of the study was to identify strategies used by import and export small business owners to sustain business under economic sanctions.

## **Resource-Based Theory**

The exploration of a supporting theory in addition to the systems theory included several theories and led to the development of the resource-based theory (RBT). The RBT is a powerful model in strategic management, which has grown rapidly in complimentary fields such as marketing and operation management (Hitt, Xu, & Carnes, 2016). In 1959, Penrose first applied the RBT in the field of economics (Hitt et al., 2016). Barney further developed the scholarly works of Ricardo in 1817, Porter in 1980, and Nelson and Winter in 1982, to consciously advance the theory, to the resourced-based enterprise vision (Barney, 2014). The main concept of RBT is that small businesses could generate more income by utilizing resources (Barney, 1991). However, isolation, poor utilization of the resources, and the lack of integration and management will limit the business success (Barney, 1991; Day, 2014; O'Donnell, 2014). In the field of strategic management related to the RBT, the focus is on resource management regarding the managerial decision and integrity of the whole business (Hitt et al., 2016). Before the formulation of the RBT, researchers employed strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, which know as SWOT analysis to measure sustainability in small businesses (Barney, 1991). The SWOT analysis model is primarily the practice of optimizing internal strengths and exploiting and addressing external opportunities (Barney, 1991). The employment of internal factors along with business management can help minimize external threats and reduce deficiencies within the enterprise (Barney, 1991; Barney, 2014; Day, 2014; O'Donnell, 2014; Kozlenkova, Samaha, & Palmatier, 2014). Arguably, the SWOT analysis model and the RBT are alike and are useful scales

to evaluate business sustainability for import and export small business owners in Khartoum, Sudan under economic sanctions.

Small business owners have variable leadership styles and strategies to overcome challenges and utilize resources sustain the business. Of note, is that import and export small business owners in Khartoum, Sudan has been operating businesses under restricted economic sanctions, which came into effect in 1997. The application of RBT in the fields of supply chain management, operation strategy, performance management, and product/service innovation can add great value to the business effectiveness and competitiveness (Hitt et al., 2016). Campbell and Park (2016) used RBT to test small business performance using a sample size of 477 small businesses measuring factors such as social capital, intellectual capital, and corporate social responsibility. The RBT has characteristics to drive appropriate changes, strategies, and behaviors, which could lead to sustainable competitive advantages to the business performance (Barney, 2014; López-Navarro, Callarisa-Fiol, & Moliner-Tena, 2013). Small business owners can achieve best results by deploying effective procedure and avoid ineffective business practices (Barney, 2014). Judiciously managing resources and implementing operation strategies, therefore, became critical to import and export small business owners to sustain business under economic sanctions in Khartoum, Sudan.

### **Role of Small Businesses in Economy Growth and Job Creation**

The general mainstream impression is that small businesses contribute to the economy growth and job creation (Gale & Brown, 2013; Sokoto & Abdullahi, 2013). In this section, the aim is to discuss the role of small businesses in employment and

economy growth. Despite the popularity of the term of small business, the definition varies globally due to the unique features and the various business settings and differences in regulations. Some countries use the number of employees, capital and revenue, and organization framework (Charman, Petersen, Piper, Liedeman, & Legg, 2017). Many countries use methods of size and specialization to define small business.

Great Britain, the United States, and some of the European Union countries use the capital turnover and the number of worker models to classify business enterprises (Gbandi & Amisah, 2014). For example, in Ireland, small businesses refer to as private sector; a self-employed individual with no employees will not qualify that individual as a small business firm (Langseth, O'Dwyer, & Arpa, 2016). In Nigeria, capital and number of employees are the characteristics to classify the business (Gbandi & Amisah, 2014). Another defining factor in Nigeria is that the small business reflects entities, which employ less than 50 employees (Juliana, 2013). In Sudan, the most standardized formation of a new firm is the private limited liability company (PLLC), which has between 10 and 50 employees (World Bank Group, 2016).

High growth firms start small and grow rapidly generating more jobs in the economy (Deligianni, Voudouris, & Lioukas, 2015). In studying the job creation and wage growth in the Irish market, Langseth et al. (2016) found that small businesses count for 99.5% of all Irish firms and employ 66.8% of the Irish private sector workforce proving these entities are critical contributors to the economy. In India, three million SMEs produce 50% of the industrial sector and 40% of exports representing the second

largest employer (Gupta, Seetharaman, & Raj, 2013). In Singapore, the number of SMEs is 154,000, which represents 99.3% of the entire enterprises (Gupta et al., 2013).

Most researchers have agreed that small businesses create jobs and contribute to economic growth (Baumgartner, Von Braun, Abebaw, & Müller, 2015; Gale & Brown, 2013; Memili, Fang, Chrisman, & De Massis, 2015; Shukla & Shukla, 2014). Creating jobs means security to employees and families, income tax revenue to the federal government and state authorities, and injection of money into the market as consumers spend money on retail products. Spending money by consumers increase the purchasing power and result in more production and expansion of businesses, which strengthens the economy.

### **Role of Importers and Exporters in Economy**

The evolution of production has been prominent in the global economy (Saslavsky & Shepherd, 2014). There are considerable benefits collectively to the contribution of trade (Saslavsky & Shepherd, 2014). Global trade and services are highly dependent on the performance of financial markets (Manova, 2013). Enhanced operation execution helps businesses to trade faster, easier, cost-efficient, and with trust (Saslavsky & Shepherd, 2014). Bussière, Delle Chiaie, and Peltonen, (2014) studied the role of emerging market economies in 40 countries including 22 emerging economies (EMEs). EMEs play a substantial role in global trade, including the U.S. where imports grew from 28% in 1990, to 55% in 2011 (Bussière et al., 2014).

Importers and exporters play a major role in international trade and economy growth (Abu Saleh, Yunus Ali, & Saad Andaleeb, 2014). Exporters and importers enjoy



higher outputs than firms do with no trade activity and businesses that export and import have distinctive trade volumes and productivity (Kasahara & Lapham, 2013; Smeets & Warzynski, 2013). High productivity firms with low shipping costs select to engage in both export and import activities (Kasahara & Lapham, 2013). Producing high-quality goods is a prerequisite for success and expansion (Amiti & Khandelwal, 2013).

Exporters increase productivity by employing skilled workers, gain additional International Organization Standard (ISO) certificates, and produce high-value products (Amiti & Khandelwal, 2013). Exporting and importing businesses in most countries have high sales volumes, more productive, more skilled, pay high wages, and larger in employment markets (Bernard, Jensen, Redding, & Schott, 2012). For example, in China, 41% of exporters engage in import, and 79% of importers have export activities while intermediaries' contributing almost \$168 billion, which constitutes 22% of total exports (Bernard et al., 2012). Exporters are also 97% larger in employment numbers and 108% larger in shipments while importers are highly skilled and have more capital (Bernard et al., 2012).

Sleuwaegen and Onkelinx (2014) studied the growth and survival of new international ventures in Belgium and found that early entry into global markets resulted in further expansion, and the new global entities contribution was 21% of total exporting businesses between 1998 and 2005 creating 27% of total exports growth. Esteve-Pérez and Rodríguez (2013) studied the relationship between Spanish exporting SMEs and R&D and found that the business participation in the export market indicates the firm's success and ability to compete globally. Involvement in global markets produces

knowledge through interacting with foreign rivals, expands production, and encourages innovation (Esteve-Pérez & Rodríguez, 2013).

Several researchers have explained the value of quality in trade quantity and the capability to trade in various goods (Feenstra, Hong, Ma, & Spencer, 2013). Feenstra et al. (2013) examined Chinese trade data for domestic and foreign exporters compared to processing against normal trade. Processing exports refer to the duty-free imported goods and then processed in China (Feenstra et al., 2013). The processing of exports is contractual, where the buyer identifies the classifications of the merchandise and pays for it as stated in the contract (Feenstra et al., 2013). The categorization of Chinese exporting and importing businesses shows ownership as domestic, foreign, and joint venture (Feenstra et al., 2013).

Trade-liberalization improvements followed by training and assistance programs for exporters and importers are ways to increase productivity and efficiency in the economy (Augier, Cadot, & Dervis, 2013). Fixed destination cost is substantial; however, experienced firms in international trade can minimize and maintain these costs at a lower level (Meinen, 2015). An importer's experience from a market simplifies exporting to that origin and exporter's knowledge from different markets also makes it easy to export to other countries (Meinen, 2015). Becker, Chen, and Greenberg, (2013) studied the role of financial development and fixed cost using data for almost 100 countries and found that past exporting experience potentially raises exports by 60% in the case of Colombian firms. The first step before a firm engages into exporting is to conduct research before the selection of the suitable market, the profit probability, product adaptability to foreign

regulations (Becker et al., 2013). Manufacturers often have the capability to export to multiple countries while exporting firms can select some trade partners, price, and quantity by country to achieve high profits (Manova, 2013).

International trade has a high growth rate in recent years due to the decrease in trade costs such as tariffs and transportation, which enables almost all countries to trade more compared by 40 years ago (Novy, 2013). International trade faces barriers that restrict the export and import transactions (Novy, 2013). One of the deficiencies of the international market that diminishes the role of international trade is that exporters need external funding to meet immediate upfront costs such as advanced payments, equipment, and rentals (Manova, 2013). Capital finance affects trade transactions as exporters need short-term funding to pay for logistics because there is a gap between preparing the shipment and the final payment (Auboin & Engemann, 2014). Exporters normally access trade finance from banks and trade partners, which need a collateral in the form of a fixed asset in addition to purchasing insurance policies to cover the risk associated with the shipments (Manova, 2013). Collateral includes several forms such as real estate, machinery, inventory, and accounts receivable, which meet creditors and banks requirements before approving finance for small business owners (Calomiris, Larrain, Liberti, & Sturgess, 2017). The finance and insurance covering world international trade transactions volume were between \$10-\$12 trillion in 2008 (Manova, 2013). An advanced financial market and a strong banking system in the exporter's country are critical for exporters to execute trade transaction and sustain businesses (Becker et al., 2013; Manova, 2013).

Importers and exporters have the potential to play a pivotal role in every country's economy. Global competition, quality of products, upfront costs, and the financial market performance have an impact on the growth of imports and exports business. However, access to capital remains the most challenging issue for many importers and exporters.

### **Challenges of Small Businesses**

Small businesses are the drivers of economic growth and job creation (Gale & Brown, 2013; Sokoto & Abdullahi, 2013). Small business owners undertake the role of financial growth, innovation, and job creation, which benefit the country, communities, and stakeholders, and therefore, require an encouraging business environment (Byrd, Ross, & Glackin, 2013). In this section, the aim was to discuss the challenges that make small businesses less productive and perform below the normal standards.

Small businesses most commonly experience financial restrictions and challenges of weak performance (Joeveer, 2013). Multiple factors affect the performance of businesses, which may be internal or external. Internal factors are legal, barriers to international trade and investment, bureaucracy, regulation, corruption, protection of intellectual property, lack of financial funding, employment laws, economic and product freedom, and unemployment (Kosi & Bojnec, 2013).

External factors include consumer preferences and habits, tariff and import regulations by foreign governments, exchange rates, communication issues, cultural differences, and political constraints (Uner, Kocak, Cavusgil, & Cavusgil, 2013).

External factors influencing businesses also include national and institutional conditions

such as political, economic, social, and technical environment, financial regulations, antitrust laws, incentives, trade and investment climate, and macroeconomic policies (Singh, Darwish, Costa, & Anderson, 2012). Economic factors, lack of effective strategies, consumer's access to different channels, and social variables are among factors influencing the marketing environment (Luxton, Reid, & Mavondo, 2015). Barriers to market entry vary between industries depending on the fixed cost and the minimum efficiency scale (MES), which means entry to the market for an airplane corporation differs from a hairdressing business (Lofstrom, Bates, & Parker, 2013). In studying family-owned businesses and the capability to become innovative, Spriggs, Yu, Deeds, and Sorenson (2013) found that too many owners would limit the levels of collaboration, innovation, and slowed the firm's performance.

In South Africa, Strydom (2015) summarized the main challenges that face small businesses as inflation, interest rates, unemployment, competition, crime, regulations, and management of operating costs and debt. Yusoff and Zainol (2014) stated that the Malaysian launched the Government Business Support Services (GBSS) to provide small businesses with best practices, financial support, consultation, and training, however; the program failed to attract businesses since due to reluctance to attend training. Many businesses were also not aware of the existence of the GBBS. Small businesses in Malaysia failed to benefit from the program due to the restrictions in funding, bureaucracy, lack of confidence in the GBSS program and low trust in GBBS's representatives (Yusoff & Zainol, 2014). Small businesses in Malaysia have global challenges; global recession, competition with low-cost foreign products, intellectual

property, bankruptcy issues, and multination corporations (MNCs) heading to cheap labor countries like India, Vietnam, and Indonesia (Ho, Ahmad, & Ramayah, 2016).

In another attempt to identify challenges for small businesses, Lyee and Cowling (2015) summarized the difficulties in problems with financing, management, the shift from an R&D approach to a sales orientation approach, and issues with low financial performance. In Russia, the main challenges for small businesses are the high tax, lack of transparency in legislation, lack of financing, lack of skilled managers, low-demand for products and services, and corruption (Chadee & Roxas, 2013). In Iran, small businesses face different challenges; economic sanctions, corruption, government inefficiency, transparency, and lack of operational innovation strategies (Tajeddini & Trueman, 2015).

In Mozambique, small businesses struggle with access to private funding, regulations, and employment (German, Cavane, Siteo, & Braga, 2016). The situation in Turkey does not differ much; small businesses experience high economic risks, high innovation costs, lack of funding, high rates of interest, and inflation (Bayraktar, 2015). Greek's small businesses share most of the challenges faced by others around the world' access to funding, high-interest rates of bank loans, complicated regulations, and lengthy procedures for obtaining loans (Theriou & Chatzoudes, 2015). In a study conducted on African American entry to self-employment business, Lofstrom and Bates (2013) found that well-educated individuals tend to enter high rewarding business fields rather than entering low-barrier lines of business.

In conclusion, small businesses face shared challenges worldwide. Domestic issues such as access to capital, high-interest rates, and competition may look similar but

vary from country to country. In some countries, issues seem complicated and harder to resolve such as regulations, corruption, financial restriction, and external embargos.

However, small business owners strive to work out solutions even if limited.

### **Small Business Financing**

In summary, the most common challenges for small businesses, as identified by researchers are (a) lack of funding, (b) high-interest rates, (c) regulations, (d) competition, (e) competition and low demand for products, (f) corruption, (g) intellectual property rights, and (h) inflation. Funding is critical to small businesses to maintain stability and growth by adding new products, additional points of sale or locations, hiring more employees (Kuschel, Lepeley, Espinosa, & Gutiérrez, 2017). Small businesses need immediate access to funds to meet daily obligations, paying bills, wages, shipments, and buy from suppliers who do not offer flexible payment options (Kuschel et al., 2017). Many factors could lead to quick funding such as banking regulations, and high-interest rates (Buchanan, 2017). The cost of financing would reflect on the pricing of the product, which may affect the demand for the product in case a competitor offers the same product at a lower price (Strydom, 2015). Some of the small business owners may prefer self-financing to avoid the tough banking regulations and eliminate the credit cost (Wamba, Hikkerova, Sahut, & Braune, 2017). Failure to comply with intellectual property rights plays a role in countries where the enforcement of the law is weak, as manufacturers distribute cheap products, which often convinces the buyer who prefers to pay less for an identical product (Ho et al., 2016).

The funding issue, discussed earlier, appears as more of a universal challenge. In Nigeria, financing small businesses by banks depends on often subjective criteria like gender, class, ethnicity, political affiliation, and business sustainability (Eze, Ayigbe, Eberechi, & Jordan, 2015). Lee and Cowling (2013) suggested that some policy involvements are important to provide financing for businesses located in deprived areas. In studying start-up businesses in western Arkansas, Moon, Farmer, Miller, and Abreo (2014) found that approximately, 42% of that survey participants stated that capital is the main barrier. Despite the support programs the government offers to small businesses in the Gulf Council Countries (GCC), the ventures have difficulties accessing finance (Faisal, Jabeen, & Katsioloudes, 2017). The situation in GCC area is rare in which, small businesses in the GCC do not experience the traditional challenges of high taxes, high-interest rates, but competition comes from the government agencies.

Several reasons may convey the importance of start-up capital for new businesses, which may include building new premises, purchasing machinery, vehicles, and inventories. The financial market involves traditional and nontraditional sources. Examples of traditional sources include banks, personal, family members and friends, bootstrapping, and IPO while nontraditional ones include microfinance, crowdfunding, venture capitalists, business angels (BA), government grants, peer-to-peer funding, franchising, and international development organizations (Ozmel, Robinson, & Stuart, 2013).

Equity and debt financing are among the major sources of finance to start a new business, which may be internal or external. Equity financing is capital offered by



external lenders who seek a share in the ownership of the new business such as venture capitalists, angel investors, or business angels (FAO, 2014). Examples of providers of this type of funding are debt financiers, who provide funds in the form of a loan, credit card, or overdraft. Providers of debt financing include banks and government agencies such as the United States Small Business Administration.

Derera, Chitakunye, and O'Neill (2014) who studied the gender impact on start-up funding in South Africa, found that female business owners do not have equal opportunities for funding as men do because of discriminatory policies and practices in the lending models, which made women reluctant in applying for funding through banks because of the fear of rejection based on gender. Kim (2014) researched the gender factor in financing new businesses, which revealed that women have fewer opportunities to obtain funding through the social capital finance in contrast to men. In a study on gender and ethnicity impact on funding new firms, Abbasian, Yazdanfar, and Hedberg (2014) found that women and minority groups have limited access to funding.

Some business owners use bootstrapping as a source of funding and growing of ventures when traditional sources of funds are unavailable. Bootstrapping is funding a new business or growing an existing business without using external financing resources by leveraging existing sources such as savings, personal income, stock and bonds, and home equity (Bergset, 2015). Afolabi, Odebunmi, and Ayo-Oyebiyi (2014) noted that bootstrapping could close the funding gap created by the external funding sources for small businesses, which would provide additional cash flow for the first 2 years.

External funding through bank loans and equity becomes the next choice when bootstrapping fails to fulfill business financial goals. Banks generate revenues by approving loans to borrowers and businesses, not refusing them (Loutskina & Strahan, 2015). Bankers increased lending standards and stayed away from risky mortgage collateral as a lesson learned from the outcomes of the Great Depression (Loutskina & Strahan, 2015). Business owners should not depend heavily on banks as a reliable source of financing as these institutions do not take risks, particularly when dealing with people not known, or considered untrustworthy to repay the loan (Hanson, Shleifer, Stein, & Vishny, 2015). The most popular funding type for start-up businesses is bank short-term loans and overdrafts, which have a fixed monthly payment including interest and maintenance fees (Buchanan, 2017).

Byrd et al. (2013) studied the credit scoring measure in small business lending, which affects credit limit and availability, risk, and profitability. Byrd et al. used data between 2003 and 2009 for small business loans. The lending to small businesses significantly declined between 2007 and 2009, after the financial crises, which drove lenders to tighten lending policies and adopt new procedures (Byrd et al., 2013).

One of the unusual characteristics for approving funding requests by banks was the subject of gender. Beck, Behr, and Guettler (2013) examined the gender of the loan officer in banks and performance and concluded that the loan applications screened and processed by female loan officers had a higher success rate than loan applications handled by male loan officers, which had a greater chance of turning problematic. The interpretation of this conclusion suggested that female loan officers had better

communication skills and capacity for enhancing the relationship and trust building between borrowers and the business.

IPOs occur when a company offers its shares to the public in the form of stocks and shares to increase the level of capitalization (Gao et al., 2013). Dambra, Field, and Gustafson (2015) studied the impact of the Jumpstart Our Business Startups Act (JOBS Act) on the IPO activity by using a sample of 1,242 U.S. IPOs firms and 2,271 firms from Australia, Hong Kong, and Japan from January 2001 to March 2014. The JOBS Act has spurred 21 new IPOs annually representing an increase of 25 percent compared to the period before the implementation of the JOBS Act (Dambra et al., 2015).

Venture capital (VC) is another capital funding source provided to start-up businesses at an early stage, and potentially high risk, in which venture capitalists own equity (Bellavitis et al., 2017; Rosenbusch, Brinckmann, & Müller, 2013). VC promotes business initiatives whereas it potentially leads to economic growth, therefore; venture capital promotes commercialization (Rosenbusch et al., 2013). Venture capital provides successful IPO funding and access to the market (Ozmel et al., 2013). Venture capital is a form of investment for small businesses to benefit potentially from financial returns from involvement in ventures, which contributes to economic growth while promoting innovation (Rosenbusch et al., 2013).

On the conflict between venture capital and innovation, Wadhwa, Phelps, and Kotha (2016) found that venture capital catalyzes innovation. Chemmanur, Loutskina, and Tian, (2014) examined the differences between corporate venture capital (CVC) and independent venture capital (IVC) firms in sponsoring innovation. Chemmanur et al.

(2014) analyzed data for 2,129 VC-backed IPO firms that went public between 1980, and 2004 and found that CVC-backed firms are more innovative than IVC firms. Bernstein, Giroud, and Townsend (2016) discussed the contribution of venture capital to businesses innovation and success analyzing a sample of 22,986 venture-backed companies funded from 3,158 VC firms between 1977 and 2006. The findings indicated that VC contributions increased innovation and success were remarkable.

Crowdfunding is a group of investors who make small and large contributions to a business initiative, product, service, or invention (Mollick, 2014). Allison et al. (2015) examined how microloans generated by crowdfunding contribute to a positive social lending practice. Allison et al. analyzed a sample from more than 36,000 microloans recipients in 51 countries and concluded that lenders described the method as an approach and way to assist others rather than a business opportunity.

Microfinance is the practice of offering financial services to low-income clients. The recent spread and success of microfinance globally provide hope to lower socio-economic groups who prior to microfinance, received little consideration as creditworthy by traditional financial banks and intermediaries (Allison et al., 2015). Micro businesses are small; made up of one person, and no more than five (Gherardi, 2015). Allison et al. (2015) conducted a study on Kiva, a leading organization in micro-credit lending practices, examined its lending practices and clarified that the leaders of the organization normally base lending decisions to borrowers that align with some of the same groups as the company, and of the same ideology. The conclusion was that repayments rate was

around 98% and highlighted that social constructs drive lending decisions (Allison et al., 2015).

Zhang and Liu (2012) used Prosper.com the largest microloan market in the United States to explain the rationale behind herding and found that lenders use borrowing characteristics from other lenders to project investment returns. Kasali, Ahmad, and Lim (2015) studied the impact of microfinance loans in South-West Nigeria, regarding poverty reduction. The researchers acknowledged the role of microfinance loans and recommended the implementation of regulations to enhance the efficiency of the institutions, training, and healthcare services for optimum results (Kasali et al., 2015).

Fujisawa, Ishida, Nagatomi, and Iwasaki (2015) discussed how Muhammad Yunus founded the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which successfully started offering microloans at low-interest rates to the poor. The findings showed that Grameen met the social responsibility objectives beyond just lending (Fujisawa et al., 2015). In 2011, Grameen Bank provided microloans to over six million borrowers in Bangladesh (Gandja, Estay, & Tchankam, 2015).

In the United States of America, a major challenge that faces small businesses is providing health insurance coverage to employees due to the high premiums; during the period 1995-2005, only 62% of employees had health insurance provided by employers (Gumus & Regan, 2015). In a research study on small businesses, Wang, Robson, and Freel (2015) identified five gaps facing small businesses, (a) capital gap, (b) asset gap, (c) transitional gap, (d) information gap, and (e) capacity gap. Outsourcing has created new challenges for small businesses, such as communication issues, language, cultural

barriers, religion, lack of control, and quality of service (Livanis, Robertson, Al-Shuaibi, & Hussain, 2016).

Finance plays a significant role in sustaining the growth of small businesses (Boateng, Muhammed, & Abdulrahman, 2013). Small business owners have bad experiences with funding in developing economies, which often affect the long-term growth. The permanence of small businesses relies on the availability of funding, which makes credit an essential factor to business success (Byrd et al., 2013). Samson, Mary, Yemisi, and Erekpitan (2012) proposed that the implementation of a capital management system would increase the revenue of enterprises. Working capital management is an accounting method with a focus on maintaining of short-term assets to provide sufficient operating capital to keep the company solvent. Samson et al. (2012) suggested that working capital management assisted firms to monitor cash flow closely to fulfill the short-term debt commitments.

Small business owners have experienced complications in accessing funds from banks due to insufficient collaterals and meeting credit history criteria set by the bank (Loutskina & Strahan, 2015). Boateng et al. (2013) for example noted that savings and supplier credit were the top sources of funding for businesses in West Africa, which aligned with the results of Samson et al. (2012) emphasizing the value of personal savings as a source of funding. Several researchers have concurred that insufficient funding from the financial institutions is the main reason for small businesses failure in emerging economies (Wang, Wang, & Wang, 2017).

Zairani and Zaima (2013) asserted that banks would only extend credit to companies that have a solid credit history, capable of surviving successfully and have a strong business relationship with the institution. Banks fear the risks of repayment of credit, which make them reluctant to approve funding to small businesses (Zairani & Zaima, 2013). Bankers commonly favor bigger corporations over small businesses to provide funds based on the assumption that small firms represent high-risk (Zairani & Zaima, 2013).

In Nigeria, Ezeagba (2017) found that restricting small businesses from accessing funds would potentially limit their overall contribution to the economy. Ezeagba added that small business owners do not have enough knowledge to access funding through banks, which represent barriers to contribution to the economic growth and restricts business productivity. Small businesses often beset with risk, makes these entities less favorable to banks for normal channels of finance. Ezeagba noted that issues that cause challenges for small businesses were the shortage of risk management and insurance coverage. Kanayo, Jumare, and Nancy (2013) suggested using knowledge and experiences proved useful in other countries like Bangladesh and Indonesia for organizations specializing in microfinance.

Financing is the main factor for small business success and sustainability. There are several options for small business owners to obtain capital such as bank loans, self-financing, venture capital, bootstrapping, crowdfunding, Initial Public Offerings, and microfinance. However, each option has characteristics and limitations. For example, bank loans require collateral and high credit scores, which may not disqualify thousand of

small business owners. Therefore, access to capital represents the most challenge for the majority of small business owners.

### **Sustainability**

Sustainability is the capacity of a business leader to predict the future needs while supporting business growth and continuity (Wilson & Wu, 2017). Sustainability refers to the concentration of business growth, support, and entrepreneur's pursuance to add new products and services to the current offerings to increase revenue and manage the three objectives of economy, humankind, community, and morals (Rajasekaran, 2013).

Sustainability is a significant component in many of enterprises, which interacts with leadership strategies, planning, vision, and decision-making (Jansson, Nilsson, Modig, & Hed Vall, 2015).

Business sustainability needs innovation and inventive process within the firm to achieve the venture's objectives for social welfare, which has an impact on businesses, society, and market environment (Inigo, Albareda, & Ritala, 2017). Sustainability as a process is a path of conducting business (Inigo et al., 2017). Business actions and plans to achieve sustainability must account for a global vision and not only focus on the enterprise (Inigo et al., 2017). The concept of sustainability goes far beyond climate change. Sustainability and concepts such as the triple bottom line include all stakeholders and may contribute to maximizing shareholder equity (Ferro et al., 2017; Rajasekaran, 2013). Sustainability initiatives include a vast domain of business inventions and social change that contribute to the company framework (Rajasekaran, 2013).



Dahmen and Rodríguez (2014) studied 14 small businesses that requested a consultation from the Growth Acceleration Program in the state of Florida seeking help to develop strategies for business growth. Half of the businesses participated in the study were experiencing financial problems ranging from decreased revenue, low cash flow, and too much debt. Dahmen and Rodríguez noted that the financial difficulties were mostly due to the declining economy, and outside the control of business owners. Another half of the participants in the study lacked financial literacy and did not pay attention to the financial statement on a regular basis (Dahmen & Rodríguez, 2014). The lesson learned from Dahmen and Rodríguez is that some external factors may lead to business challenges for sustainability such as the overall performance of the economy and others may be specific to entrepreneurs who lack some critical skills to develop sustainability strategies.

Lubin and Esty (2014) discussed the increasing lack of connection between corporations and sustainability in the United States. A part of business owners is satisfied that fiscal earnings and competitive power are significant segments of sustainability (Lubin & Esty, 2014). The dominant trend of investors assumes that sustainable leadership is the key to business profitability and market prosperity (Lubin & Esty, 2014). Regardless of the belief of some entrepreneurs, sustainability influences performance, competitiveness, and market accomplishment (Lubin & Esty, 2014). Investors make decisions based on reports that show sustainable results and rely on reliable and measurable data (Lubin & Esty, 2014).

Lawler and Worley (2012) addressed interests for businesses to raise growth, which has positive results on consumers, climate, and society. Sustainable businesses lead to good business practices and drive powerful market outcomes (Lawler & Worley, 2012). Lawler and Worley studied Wal-Mart's plans and sustainability strategies. Wal-Mart efforts to enhance sustainability included better packaging, new energy-saving programs, and sustainable seafood standards (Lawler & Worley, 2012). Despite some of the sustainability projects do not show immediate returns; they form a part of a long-term corporate social responsibility plan (Lawler & Worley, 2012). Many businesses have started departments or teams to promote sustainability in the areas of finance, environment, and society, often known as the triple bottom line performance (Lawler & Worley, 2012).

Sardana (2014) studied globalization as a pivotal part of architectural sustainability work. The current globalization setting has expanded the opportunity for businesses to acquire new creative initiatives to compete globally and succeed (Sardana, 2014). Globalization enables entrepreneurs to enter into new markets and maximize growth (Sardana, 2014). In conclusion, whether the business is domestic or global, leaders and owners need to develop sustainability strategies to ensure continuous growth.

### **Business Sustainability**

Businesses must show no results of unfavorable outcomes on the economy, society, and local climate to become sustainable. Strohhecker and Größler (2012) have shown scenarios on how businesses end in failure or success. Most business leaders make significant efforts to achieve business sustainability (Strohhecker & Größler, 2012).

Business growth is an essential goal for any business that develops sustainable strategies (Strohhecker & Größler, 2012). The process of developing sustainable practices involves the inclusion of relevant components such as consumers, high standards of customer service, and quality products (Strohhecker & Größler, 2012). Business sustainability has a positive impact on the permanence of business operations. Strohhecker and Größler (2012) studied strategies leadership implements to achieve sustainability and presented the challenges experienced (Strohhecker & Größler, 2012).

In the process to maintain a sustainable business, business leaders need to consider the gradual change and development of culture, workforce, and the surrounding environment (Ferro et al., 2017). The conception of seeing failure as a problem requires the need to search for new tools for environmental security and social prosperity (Ferro et al., 2017). The consideration of innovation to sustainable business should not discourage business leaders to promote and implement ethical work standards (Ferro et al., 2017). Business leaders need to continue and emphasize the features of power, anticipation, prudence, and trust to originate a sustainable business (Ferro et al., 2017).

Continuing the discussion of business sustainability, Blaga (2013) characterized a sustainable business as a firm that has a sustainable strategy and capability to compete in a diversified market full of challenges, opportunities, and investors' hopes. Any economic activity has a fair chance to become sustainable if it follows governing actions to enhance economic execution. The leadership of a sustainable business needs to exercise transparency by sharing power, risk, and information with shareholders throughout the life of the business (Blaga, 2013). A committed business leader exercises

sustainability through multiple steps (a) secure the safety of business and workers, (b) adopt innovative strategies for a competitive business, (c) fulfill the obligations of shareholders, (d) enhance the workplace and enthusiasm of workers, (e) produce quality products and services to customers, and (f) create employee retention and attraction program (Blaga, 2013).

Year after year, more businesses have realized the importance of sustainability (Blaga, 2013). Entrepreneurs have an obligation to provide investors with data, tools, and information to gain their confidence (Blaga, 2013). The comprehensive business processes and actions may help entrepreneurs in business sustainability. The sale of goods to public and entertainment sectors support the achievement of sustainability in customer service (Chen, 2015). The responsibility of a business leader in the areas of public goods sales and entertainment includes offering employees up-to-date training to achieve customer satisfaction and changes in consumer behavior (Chen, 2015). The attraction and retention of new customers are subject to innovation, higher standards of service, and listening to the customer (Chen, 2015). Customers' feedback and suggestions are important sources for new and improved products, which contribute to business sustainability initiatives (Chen, 2015).

Sustainability leaders are responsible for originating business strategies that maintain continuous expansion for the enterprise, climate, and the society (McCann & Sweet, 2014). The priority of leaders is to identify sustainable strategies of innovative nature and revenue-focused, which make these individuals valuable assets and the first line supporters to the business (McCann & Sweet, 2014). An effective sustainability

leadership is a key success factor for any organization's overall performance and success (McCann & Sweet, 2014). Sustainability leaders focus on the long-term permanence practices and policies (McCann & Sweet, 2014).

Entrepreneurs need to develop sustainable economic strategies to maintain the growth of their enterprises (Tideman, Arts, & Zandee, 2013). Enhancing product knowledge, fostering corporate proficiencies, and promoting innovation are necessary for small businesses sustainability (Haifeng & Kingsley, 2014). Small business owners have obligations to care about their employees, clients, and the society to enforce positive social change policies (Haifeng & Kingsley, 2014). Risk management and identification of opportunities are crucial for business sustainability (Al Badi, 2014). Al Badi discussed the importance of technology, which supports businesses with functional tools that comprise new features such as reducing expenses, managing overheads, and enhancing customer loyalty. Entrepreneurs need to focus on the long-term vision while operating their business for profitability instead of a short-term plan (Tideman et al., 2013). The focus on long-term strategies can result in a sustainable growth business (Tideman et al., 2013). Individuals in charge of sustainability in an enterprise are focusing on areas for development, innovation, and changes to maximize the shareholder's' returns (Tideman et al., 2013).

Sustainability is the capability to preserve the survival scale of the business to continue generating profit (Lourenco, Jones, & Jayawarna, 2013). Therefore, small business owners strive for sustainability by ensuring continuous growth and steady revenue, which require certain actions and strategies. Leadership skills and knowledge

are strategic for the success of small businesses (Frid, 2015). An entrepreneur's strengths, expertise, and capacity can impact the business prosperity and sustainability (Frid, 2015). Motivation, proficiency, efficiency, and personality of a small business owner are essential characteristics for small business success and sustainability (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013).

### **Effects of Economic Sanctions on Small Businesses**

Economic sanctions block free trade and restrict the flow of products and services between countries (Rarick, 2016). The government of the United States imposed economic sanctions against other countries for different reasons, anticipating that these punitive measures will cause economic hardship, and, therefore, the sanctioned governments will also change behaviors (McLean, Hinkkainen, De la Calle, & Bapat, 2016). There was no intention to discuss the effectiveness, the failure of the economic sanctions, or the political content of the sanctions in this study. Instead, the focus of this study was on identifying the strategies used by import and export small business owners to sustain business under economic sanctions. Unlike the domestic challenges faced by small businesses of high taxes, regulations, competition, high-interest rates, economic sanctions are external because a different country imposes the sanctions (Singh et al., 2012). In this section, the aim was to discuss the available literature on countries that currently experience, or have previously experienced sanctions.

Economic sanctions are destructive to the global economy such as wars (Ali, 2013). Economic sanctions by nature are punitive and hampering business activity and growth (Dizaji & van Bergeijk, 2013; Peksen, 2014). According to Neuenkirch and

Neumeier (2016), sanctions have caused loss of lives by the destruction of property, job losses, and weakening the economy. Sanctions on Iraq have caused the death of women and children due to the inability to import medicine (Neuenkirch & Neumeier, 2016). Sanctioned countries experience a decrease in foreign direct investment due to the risk of investments (Barry & Kleinberg, 2015). Foreign direct investment is the inflow of foreign capital into the domestic market (Girma et al., 2015).

The sanctioned countries, also face depreciation in local currency as a direct result of the diminishing export volumes (Peksen & Son, 2015). A method used by countries to improve foreign direct investment is by increasing exports, which is a positive signal to invite investors to engage in new businesses or collaborate with existing businesses (Loots & Kabundi, 2012). Some countries generate high rates of economic growth by heavily relying on export known as export-led countries such as China, Germany (Bailey, 2016; Trost & Bojnec, 2016). Export-led countries have high GDP rates, which requires better business conditions for exporters and market expansion to improve the economic growth (Trost & Bojnec, 2016). Investors refrain from conducting any business activities in sanctioned countries to avoid the risk of fines and penalties levied by the sender country resulting in lower reserve currencies (Loots & Kabundi, 2012). Economic sanctions include a freeze on assets of the sanctioned country, which have a great impact on the economic sustainability and disable the country from fulfilling obligations to businesses of the country (Kim, 2013a). This statement is true in respect of financial institutions; banks in the sanctioned countries fail to finance letters of credit to their business clients because of the frozen foreign currency balances held in international

banks (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2013b). Per the U. S. Department of Treasury (2013b), Sudanese banks cannot receive transfers in the United States dollar. Businesses, therefore, have no choice other than buying foreign currencies to fund letters of credits from the black market. The black market exchange rate is normally higher than the official currency exchange rate, which often results in increasing the cost of the products and makes it harder to sell to consumers (Central Bank of Sudan, 2017a). Economic sanctions could cause irreparable harm to the reputation of businesses, loss of customers, and may lead to the shutting down of the whole business (Kim, 2013a).

Economic sanctions have indirect effects as in the case of Iraq; sanctions promoted corruption, shortage of food, clean water, medicine, electricity, goods, and services (Neuenkirch & Neumeier, 2016). Economic sanctions could damage the trade relationship between joint ventures as foreign trade partners withdraw to comply with sanctions (Kim, 2013b). In the case of Sudan, small businesses failed to attract American companies to form joint venture businesses due to imposed economic sanctions as these enterprises fear to get penalized for violating sanctions regulations (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2013b). Small businesses in Sudan have missed trade opportunities to form joint ventures, or partnership with American businesses due to the imposition of economic sanctions (Aalen, 2013). The loss of revenues, customers, and foreign capital due to the absence of partnerships have weakened the financial position of small businesses and the failure to obtain bank loans (Boadi, Dana, Mertens, & Mensah, 2017). Access to funding through the regular channels becomes impossible for small businesses because of bureaucracy and corruption of government officials (Boadi et al., 2017).



Economic sanctions can also demolish the lives of people and the infrastructure of a country through resource sequestration in the attempts to enforce the aims and objectives of sanctions.

The sanctions against Cuba have existed for over 50 years and have included a U.S. ban on sales of medicine to Cuba and restriction on Cuban-Americans from traveling to meet personal families (LeoGrande, 2015). Trade sanctions on agricultural products, medical equipment, and pharmaceutical products cause a shortage in food and medicine and inflated prices, which lead to poverty, and unemployment (LeoGrande, 2015). The restrictions on importing medical equipment cause loss of revenue for businesses dealing in medical supplies and pharmacies, and could lead to the closure of these businesses, as well as adding more unemployed workers. A shortage of agricultural products, such as fertilizer and seeds cause losses to farmers who depend on selling products to exporters, which will have a dual effect on small businesses and traditional farmers. Economic sanctions, supported by coalitions of several countries and international businesses, who earlier served as trading partners with commercial enterprises from the sanctioned country, cause more economic hardship to it (McLean et al., 2016).

In the case of Sudan, although the United States has imposed the economic sanctions, the European Union has also supported the sanctions and restricted trade relations, which caused exports to drop by nearly 89% (Yang, Askari, Forrer, & Zhu, 2009). The sanctions against Sudan have included trade embargoes, freezing of assets, blocking of financial transactions and the prohibition of American businesses and

individuals from conducting any business or financial activities with Sudanese businesses (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2013b). Economic sanctions constrain economic growth and cause poverty in the sanctioned country because of the restrictions on financial transactions and trade (Neuenkirch & Neumeier, 2016).

An international alliance may add pressure to the sanctioned country and results in hardship to the economy and small businesses. Sanctions imposed collectively, cause hardship to the gross domestic product (GDP), which negatively affects small businesses role in generating revenue, and retaining existing employees, or in creating new jobs (Teorell & Wahman, 2017). The impact of sanctions appeared stronger in countries with weaker economies (McLean et al., 2016). As in the case of Sudan, sanctions effects could worsen the economy, limit the role and viability of small businesses, while constraining contribution to the economy as the ability to pay taxes and job creation is curtailed. In the case of North Korea, sanctions have almost stopped in trade exchange with the United States (Jing & Lovely, 2015). Although North Korea is a communist country, and the role of small businesses seems limited, the effect of the drop in trade exchange may have negatively affected the entry of American products to Korean citizens. The sanctioned country would normally seek a replacement to its trade partners to fill the gap created by the punitive measure, which, however, leaves the country with limited options (Pond, 2017). The quality of the imported products will probably be of a lower quality, the exported good will not necessarily have the same competitive price, and all restrictions will affect the economy, small businesses, and citizens.

The discussions here do not delve into the legitimacy or justification of the sanctions, rather only focus on the business ramifications arising from the imposition. Although American sanctions imposed on Iran have not led the Iranian government to concession, however, have troubled Iran's economy and small businesses. The stock market was unstable, power shortages, double-digit inflation rates, high unemployment, and individual hardships continue to plague the business environment (Naghavi & Pignataro, 2015). In addition to the United Nations and U.S. sanctions on Iran, the European Union have a different set of sanctions, which include banking, insurance, shipping, freezing of assets, investment in oil and energy, and transfer of technologies (Borszik, 2016). As a major producer of caviar, Iranian exporters have experienced a decline in demand because sanctions restricted foreign companies cannot trade with the businesses (Hosein, Mehrizi, & Hanoomarvar, 2013).

The European Union imposed sanctions on Burma, which suspended commercial partnerships and placed restrictions on exporting and importing any Burmese products (Meyer & Thein, 2014). Long-term sanctions often lead to the isolation of the sanctioned country (Pond, 2017). The most common problem with sanctions is that it harms innocent populations, who have nothing to do with the conduct of leaders (Pasternak, 2009). In Iraq, the sanctions had decreased the volume of trade, decreased the exports, skewed the distribution of income, which led to the inequality of income among the low-income people (Afesorghor & Mahadevan, 2016). The U.S. economic sanctions not only penalize target firms from accessing U.S. markets, but also from the operations of third-party countries (Pond, 2017).

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify the strategies import and export small business owners use to sustain businesses under economic sanctions. There is strong belief that small businesses contribute to the economy's growth and job creation (Gale & Brown, 2013; Sokoto & Abdullahi, 2013). A comprehensive review of the available academic sources was necessary to uncover the different views about the role of small businesses, the role of importers and exporters, the challenges of small businesses, small business financing, and small business sustainability. Economic sanctions by nature come with restrictions on small business owners specifically in import and export fields (McLean & Whang, 2014). Restrictions on import and export small business owners included a ban on financial transactions in United States dollars (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2013b). Therefore, a considerable part of the literature review was essential to cover the effects of economic sanctions on small businesses. The goal in this study, was to find, discuss, compare, and contrast the different views and opinions that relate to the research topic, which was not limited to the success or failure, but rather centered on studying and analyzing multiple information and data sources small businesses owners use to stay successful and run sustainable businesses. The economic sanctions factors related to import and export small business owners also an understudied business topic, which made the contribution to the existing body of knowledge on innovative import and export strategies in Sudan, one of some importance.

## **Transition**

Section 1 included the introduction of the research topic and commenced with a discussion of the background of the problem and the relationship with the current business climate and justified the need for research to explore the strategies used by import and export small businesses to sustain business under economic sanctions in the state of Khartoum, Sudan. Further details in this section included an introduction to the research method, research design, and rationale for the selection and alignment to the research objectives. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify the strategies import and export small business owners use to sustain businesses under economic sanctions. The literature review section involved in-depth discussion and analysis about the challenges of small businesses, small business financing, business sustainability, and effects of the economic sanctions on small businesses, which is related to the purpose of the study. A critical review of the literature included the consideration of the systems theory, which was the conceptual framework chosen for the study supported with the resource-based theory. In Section 1, the discussion covered examples of previous researchers who have used systems theory, which also served as a theoretical lens to underpin the study, as the detailed justification herewith may provide the appropriateness of this theory.

In Section 2, the details represent a restatement of the purpose statement and its relationship to the existing business problem. The discussion encompasses (a) description of the researcher's role in the data collection; (b) discussion of the strategies of relationship with participants; (c) identification of the research method and design; (d)

explanation the population, sampling, and ethical research process; (e) presentation of data collection instrument, technique, and analysis; and (f) outlining of the measures to ensure reliability and validity. In Section 3, the details include: (a) an introduction, (b) the presentation of the study findings, (c) the application of the discoveries of the study to professional practice, (d) the implications for social change, (e) recommendations for future actions and further study, and (f) final reflections and conclusions.

## Section 2: The Project

Section 2 commences with the purpose statement, connecting to all the components of the study including (a) the role of the researcher as the primary player undertaking the study, (b) study participant relationship and involvement, and (c) a detailed discussion of the research method and design compared to other research options. In this section, the discussion also includes details of the population and sampling, comprehensive information on the ethical approach to the intended study; data collection, organization, and analysis techniques; and ensuring the reliability and validity of the research.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify the strategies import and export small business owners use to sustain businesses under economic sanctions. The research population was import and export small business owners who reside, own, and have operated a business in the state of Khartoum, Sudan, for a minimum of 5 years and have strategies to sustain a business under economic sanctions. The findings from this study may help to identify strategies and alternatives for Sudanese entrepreneurs to help business sustainability under economic sanctions, which could lead to a positive social change in respect of the quality of life and the living standards of employers and employees.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As researcher, I had a major role in data collection and analysis in keeping with the description provided by Guetterman (2015). Therefore, to conduct a study of quality,

it was my responsibility to choose the research method and design, create interview questions, select participants, gather data, and conduct data analysis. The data collection included the use of semistructured interviews and collection and analysis of documents from reliable and dependable sources. I chose semistructured interviews over structured interviews because of the flexibility this approach affords to highlight the area of interest, as noted by Patton, Hong, Patel, and Kral (2017). In a case study design, observations, interviews, documents, and records are common data collection sources (Yin, 2012).

I have grown-up, studied, and worked in the banking industry in Khartoum, Sudan. I have witnessed the era of the economic sanctions and have a curiosity to explore with the actual players some of the hidden experiences of business personnel engaged in imports and exports. However, I currently do not maintain connections with any of the businesses operating in Sudan because I left the country 20 years ago.

The data collection included interviewing six import and export small business owners who resided in the state of Khartoum to the point of data saturation. In achieving comprehensive data collection, data saturation refers to the stage where information from interviews become repeatable and produce no new knowledge (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014; Reid & Mash, 2014; Roberts et al., 2014). Arabic is the main spoken language in Sudan, and English is a second language. In the case a participant was not fluent in English, conducting the interview in Arabic represented an alternative option. I am proficient in both spoken and written Arabic and capable of translating Arabic into English and vice versa, so there was no need for an interpreter. Bedford, Gandhi, Admassu, and Girma (2013) used a research assistant to translate between English and



Amharic in studying the location of childbirth in rural Ethiopia. A native speaker of the language understands the language variances better, which is important when conducting cross-language interviews (Rowley, 2012).

I closely followed the ethical research standards as outlined in the Belmont Report. Ethical research stands on three principles: (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research [Belmont Report], 1974). The principle of respect for persons includes the requirement that participants remain independent and protective of those of a weaker disposition or status. Participants in this study had full autonomy and the right to withdraw from participating at any stage without explanation or consequence (Belmont Report, 1974). I requested participants to notify me of a personal decision to withdraw from the study via phone or e-mail. The right to withdraw was in the contents of the informed consent form. As indicated in the Belmont Report, the principles of beneficence and justice refer to doing no harm, minimizing possible harm to participants, treating participants fairly, and maximizing benefits to participants as outlined in the objectives of the study in the informed consent form.

Additional responsibilities of my role as a researcher included asking follow-up questions as necessary to capture or clarify important information, for which I used phone and e-mail when it became difficult to meet with a participant. I also transcribed each interview after transferring the recorded voice transcript to my personal computer and saving it before I started data analysis. I used NVivo 11 Pro, qualitative data analysis software to analyze the data.

The researcher should develop a trustworthy relationship with the participants to capture and interpret responses accurately as intended by participants (Astin, Horrocks, & Closs, 2014). Researchers need to ensure that personal experiences regarding the research topic could not potentially bias the interpretation (Astin et al., 2014). Qualitative researchers tend to rely on personal experience and feelings, which might influence the research and create bias (Elo et al., 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). As outlined by Elo et al. (2014) and Leedy and Ormrod (2013), I minimized bias by using the following principles: (a) refrain from asking leading questions, (b) do not assume that participants share your point of view, and (c) do not depend on the first hearing and expect all responses will be the same. As stated, it is also important to treat all answers fairly without giving preference to interpretations that might advance the study but do not represent the participant's thinking (Bredart, Marrel, Abetz-Webb, Lasch, & Acquadro, 2014; Elo et al., 2014).

The use of semistructured interviews confers convenience by allowing the researcher to select the number of questions, follow-up questions, and the level of modification to each question for the study (Rowley, 2012). A central question followed by a selection of semistructured interview questions is a viable way to gain rich information about a case (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). There were multiple steps I followed until the completion of interviews, which required a consistent process such as using interview protocols to ensure accuracy and fairness, as detailed by Foley and O'Connor (2013). An interview protocol (Appendix A) assisted me in keeping the same procedure and process and reminded me to stay organized and punctual. Interview

protocols enhance uniformity and contribute to the reliability of the study (Foley & O'Connor, 2013).

### **Participants**

The eligibility criteria for import and export successful small business owners to qualify for participation in this study were as follows: (a) own an import and export business for at least 5 years, (b) be 25 years old or older, (c) reside and operate the business in the state of Khartoum, Sudan, (d) be able to answer the research question, and (e) have strategies to sustain a business under economic sanctions. Trust, respect, and professional communication were the strategies adopted in this research, which helped to build a good working relationship with participants. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), the researcher should deal with honesty and trust with participants, being forthright regarding the intentional purpose and objectives of the study. It is crucial for the researcher to maintain clear communication, ethical behavior, and fairness with participants at all times (Yanchar, 2015).

The recruitment of participants started by randomly contacting two potential participants using the business directory of the Sudanese Businessmen and Employers Federation in Sudan. The Sudanese Businessmen and Employers Federation in Sudan has a directory classified by industry, which includes import and export small business owners and has contact information. Using snowball sampling, I explained the eligibility criteria and requested additional referrals to recruit six participants, which was the sample size for the study. Participants learned about the research topic and its objectives initially from the introduction letter (Appendix B) and from the information in the informed

consent form, which contained the written assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, notably that participants' responses would not bear any identifiers or personal names when the study became public. The first step in the process of recruitment was contacting the potential participants by phone. To initiate participant recruitment, a brief introduction to the topic of the research and subsequent e-mail of the introduction letter (Appendix B) followed. The second step included the explanation of the content of the two forms, answering any questions, and obtaining a signed copy of the informed consent form. In another contact approach, the participant received the forms via e-mail, which I followed up with a phone call to answer any questions. I then obtained a signed copy of the informed consent form electronically by requesting that the participant type "I consent" in reply to the original solicitation request e-mail. The third step was to contact participants to schedule the interview at a mutually convenient location and time. The informed consent form included the following labels: (a) the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval number and name and address of the university faculty; (b) a disclosure to the participants of the retention of responses for a period of 5 years with secure storage provisions, including text data in a computer protected by a password with the researcher; and (c) confirmation of the deletion of data on the due date.

### **Research Method and Design**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to determine the strategies import and export business owners use to sustain businesses under economic sanctions. The selection of the qualitative research method and the case study design involved extensive reading and completing educational classes on research design and analysis. In

the following subsections, I expand on the discussion of research method and design by providing in-depth knowledge about the different research approaches and justifying the rationale behind the selection of the study method and design for the study.

### **Research Method**

The selection of a research method represents a major step in conducting academic research (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). There are three different research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Stuckey, 2013). Qualitative research is a methodology for finding and understanding the insights of individuals or groups related to the background of a public problem (Stuckey, 2013). For this study, the use of the qualitative research method served to explore the strategies used by import and export business owners to sustain their businesses under economic sanctions. The qualitative research methodology has the advantage over quantitative research with respect to the relative simplicity of data analysis and interpretation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2014). The implied assumption of the favorability of qualitative research rests on the potential for a holistic exploration of the opinions and philosophies of study participants instead of using predefined views. The goal was developing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Qualitative methodology is appropriate when (a) the study is exploratory, (b) plans for interpretation include thematic analysis, (d) a broad cross-section sample may not be available or appropriate, (e) the researcher will attempt to interpret the phenomenon, or (f) the researcher has control over interpretation of the data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The qualitative methodology, therefore, was appropriate for this study considering the probing nature of the research

question, which was framed to determine the strategies import and export business owners used to sustain business under economic sanctions.

Quantitative and mixed methods methodologies were not appropriate for this study. Quantitative research is conducive to testing objective theories by studying the extent of any association between variables, and it requires the use of a survey or experimental design (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Quantitative research has rigid procedures relating to the sample size, instrumentation, variables, testing, and validation of numerical data (Long & Nelson, 2013; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Quantitative research is number-based and is a useful method to focus on examining the relationship between data and observation through performing statistical analysis of numerical data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). A mixed methods study is a combination of the theoretical aspects of quantitative research and the qualitative research techniques (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). A mixed methods approach may provide an opportunity to strengthen the research by using qualitative and quantitative methodologies; however, it did not receive consideration in view of the length of time required to conduct such a study (Povee & Robert, 2013).

A review of similar studies confirmed the optimal fit of a qualitative method for this study. Olsen and Hasle (2015) explored the role of intermediaries in delivering occupational health for small businesses and found that the use of the qualitative research method helped in documenting the factors that influenced intermediaries and their relationship with the target groups. Ghezzi, Cortimiglia, and Frank (2015) used a qualitative case study design to explore a framework for mobile network operations

support. Kurnia, Karnali, and Rahim (2015) explored business-to-business adaptation to the electronic commerce technology through a qualitative method and multiple case study design, which provided a comprehensive understanding of the impact of adoption factors.

Based on the experiences of Ghezzi et al. (2015), Kurnia et al. (2015), and Olsen and Hasle (2015), the qualitative research method was an appropriate option for this study. Data analysis in qualitative research entails a process of data reduction and constant comparison of recorded and transcribed interviews conducted in an environment of openness (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), which made qualitative methodology optimal for gaining insights into the lived experiences of import and export business owners who have experienced the phenomenon of economic sanctions first hand.

### **Research Design**

The researcher uses research questions to select the research design (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2014), which aims to answer questions of what or how in a qualitative case study research. A case study design by nature is appropriate for addressing research questions that need an exhaustive understanding of organizational or social processes (Cronin, 2014). Researchers use case study designs to explore events over an extended period. A case study design is suitable when conducting evaluations, studying a phenomenon in a natural setting, or finding why and what happened (Yin, 2014). A case study design has the characteristics that help the researcher to explore the issues and daily practices of individuals, which is the goal of this study (Cronin, 2014). Case studies are becoming more popular for research designs in business (Yin, 2014); thus, the research design for this study was a case study. Kang, Chiang, Huangthanapan, and Downing

(2015) used the case study design to study sustainability in family-owned hotels. Several researchers used the case study design to examine business and corporate sustainability (Brix-Asala, Hahn, & Seuring, 2016; Hahn, Pinkse, Preuss, & Figge, 2015; Hockerts, 2015). A single case study is suitable for studying a group in the environment that shares a distinctive “extreme” condition (Yin, 2014), which is exactly the situation faced by import and export small business owners in Sudan. The extreme environment, in this case, represents the hardships experienced by the group of import and export entities in Khartoum, Sudan.

Other research designs used in qualitative methods include a phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography. After evaluating each design for appropriateness, a single case study design was found the most suitable for this study, as the intent was to gain insight into the strategies import and export business owners use to sustain business under economic sanctions. A phenomenological design is conducive to acquire a profound understanding of the phenomenon under study and requires the researcher to participate actively in involvement and immersion in cultures and groups associated with the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2014). A phenomenological research design is suitable to capture and understand the lived experiences of individuals from a personal point of view (Guetterman, 2015). After careful consideration of the two designs, a phenomenological, or grounded theory were determined to be less than ideal to explore the strategies used by business owners to sustain business growth, which was the focus of this study. The essential target of a grounded theory design is to promote a theory using data combination instituted on interactions with a large number of people (Wu &



Beaunae, 2014). The purpose of this study was not to develop a theory, but to explore the strategies used by import and export business owners to sustain business; therefore, the grounded theory approach was not ideal for this study.

Researchers use an ethnographic design to study cultural groups in a natural setting over an extended period (Goldstein et al., 2014). The focus of researchers using an ethnographic design is to study the behaviors of culture rather than the viewpoint of the participants, which was not the purpose of this study. Ethnography was not suitable as a design to fulfill the research objectives and therefore excluded. According to Yin (2014), the case study design is ideal for a researcher to study the behaviors of groups in answering the how and why of questions in exploring a current issue. The characteristics of the case study design as described by Yin aligned with the focus of this study of using probing questions to gain deep insights from qualified individuals, who have experienced the phenomenon personally, as the aim was to identify the strategies import and export business owners use. A case study, therefore, merited consideration as a design suitable to fulfill the research objectives of the study.

Data saturation is a step that indicates no further interviews are necessary as participants produce no additional information (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014; Reid & Mash, 2014; Roberts et al., 2014). In this qualitative single case study, the achievement of data saturation occurred after the sixth interview. Therefore, the interview stage ended promptly.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population of this study was import and export small business owners in the state of Khartoum, Sudan. Six import and export small business owners represented the sample size of the study. The sample size is frequently smaller in qualitative research as compared to quantitative because the researcher collects in-depth information about a phenomenon by using the how and why question format (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). The selection of an adequate number of participants is the ultimate target in the planning of sample size (Marshall et al., 2013). The focus of selecting a sample size is mainly to secure enough participants to reach data saturation, a stage in the research process, where data repeats itself, and no new information emerges, rendering further interviews redundant and of diminishing returns (Marshall et al., 2013).

The snowball sampling was the method selected to recruit six import and export small business owners to participate in this case study. Snowball sampling is a common method for selecting participants in a research study (Dusek, Yurova, & Ruppel, 2015; Woodley & Lockard, 2016). Snowball sampling is a technique in which one participant provides the researcher with a name of another subject such as colleagues and friends and share the same knowledge and experience of the research topic (Dusek et al., 2015; Waters, 2015).

In general, a sample size of between five and 15 interviewees is reasonable to capture enough responses and experiences, until reaching data saturation, beyond which there when there is no expectation of information that is new and remarkable (Reid & Mash, 2014; Roberts et al., 2014). Rowley (2012) recommended that a sample size over

10 participants in a case study may not necessarily warrant wealthy data. However, a small sample would limit the generalization of the study findings (Williams & Schaefer, 2013). A good case study research may range from one to 10 participants (Yin, 2014). In a doctoral study conducted on small business owners in Denver, Colorado, Gandy (2015) selected nine participants to explore the strategies leading to profitability and found no new information after interviewing the fourth participants. Regardless of the sample size, interviews must continue until the fulfillment of data saturation (Yin, 2014). Interviews, therefore, continued until reaching data saturation after interviewing the sixth participant, the stage where no new information becomes available as defined by Elo et al. (2014), Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014), and Robinson (2014).

The eligibility requirements for participation in the study comprised participant's ability to answer the research question, the age of 25 or older, being an import and export small business owner, must reside and operate in the state of Khartoum and has strategies to sustain business under economic sanctions. The location, date, and time of the interviews were at the participant's convenience. However, participants made aware that location must be safe, quiet, comfortable, and free from any noise or disturbance preferably at participant's business office. The site of the interview may leverage the conversation (Bredart et al., 2014). Places like interviewee's home may make the interviewee hesitant to provide all the information in the presence of family members or friends (Bredart et al., 2014).

### **Ethical Research**

Conducting interviews, data collection, and data analysis commenced after the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the research proposal. The IRB approval is an important step that provides the creditability to the research and the researcher (Belmont Report, 1974). The IRB approval number is 11-23-16-0280740, which may also signify that the provisions and research processes in this study reflect compliance with ethical standards enunciated in Belmont Report, (1974). The IRB application included a copy of a certificate issued by the National Institute of Health, Office of Extramural Research (see Appendix D) confirming the completion of the ethical web-based training along with a draft copy of the informed consent form.

Treating participants in any study is critical, and it is an ethical responsibility of the researcher (Belmont Report, 1974). The aim was to build trust with participants and ensure ethical rigor and compliance with participants by disclosing the process before and after the interview and offering the option to withdraw at any time either in person, by phone or e-mail. Researchers are responsible for communicating participants' right to withdraw from participating in a research study at any time without penalty or explanation; it is an ethical obligation (Bertram, Formosinho, Gray, Pascal, & Whalley, 2016; Chase, & Rabe, 2015; Waycott et al., 2015). Building trust moreover includes protecting the confidentiality and anonymity by non-inclusion of the names of individuals, and organizations. In the Informed Consent Form, a clear statement indicated that participants would not receive incentives to participate in the study as required and outlined in Belmont Report (1974).

The first contact with the potential participants was by phone, and serve to introduce the topic of the research, e-mail a copy of the Introduction Letter (Appendix B) and the informed consent form, and ask the individual to read, sign, and hand a signed copy. In cases where a face-to-face meeting with a participant was not possible, e-mail was the second option to send the consent form, requesting to read, sign electronically by typing *I consent* when replying to the original e-mail. It is a common practice to request signing an informed consent via e-mail to confirm participation in a study (Rowley, 2012). Phone and e-mail were the two communication methods to schedule the interview with participants at a mutually convenient location and time.

Exercising maximum attention throughout the research stages including data collection, storage, and analysis is fundamental to keep participants' rights and privacy (Yin, 2012). The data storage included scanning all paper notes with all documentation into a folder named "Doc Study" on a personal computer and remain for 5 years from the date of approval of the study. The data security policy comprised locking the data in a secure place with password-protection. In an effort to ensure participant anonymity, it was necessary to replace the actual names of participants with numeric codes such as *P1*, *P2*, *P3* and so on (Johnston, Lawton, & Pringle, 2017; Kowitlawakul, Chow, Salam, & Ignacio, 2015; Wiggins, Gordon-Finlayson, Becker, & Sullivan, 2015). Specific data software set with a pre-determined date will ensure the erasing of research files after five years from the completion of the study.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

In this qualitative single case study, I, the researcher, represented the primary data collection instrument. The researcher's knowledge and experience are critical to the outcome of the study (Rowley, 2012). In case study designs, data emerges from the following six sources: (a) archived records, (b) direct observations, (c) documents, (d) interviews, (e) participant's observation, and (f) physical artifacts (Yin, 2012). The open-ended interview questions and the annual foreign trade statistics from the U.S. International Trade Administration represented the two main origins of data collection. Qualitative research is a straightforward path for using qualitative data collection and analysis methods (O'Cathain et al., 2015). In conducting qualitative research, the researcher is frequently a data collection instrument. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) asserted that researchers have the flexibility to produce more data collection options. In this qualitative single case study, the open-ended semistructured interview, along with the annual foreign trade statistics from the U.S. International Trade Administration were the two major primary and secondary data collection sources respectively.

The selection of open-ended questions is helpful in gathering information, and breaking these into sets, codes, themes, and categories (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Kahlke, 2014; Lewis, 2015). The data collection process began with the development of the interview protocol and interview questions (Appendix A; Appendix C). Qualitative researchers rigorously verify data and the capacity of reproducing the findings of the study. Reliability refers to the consistency of the procedure throughout the research and the disclosure of study objectives and communication (Fan & Sun, 2014; Mangioni &

McKerchar, 2013). Validity is the measurement of trust and accuracy of the study findings (Fan & Sun, 2014; Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). Member checking is a validation practice between the researcher and participants to ensure precision and credibility of data analysis (Chan, Tam, Lung, Wong, & Chau, 2013; Holst-Hansson, Sjövall, Idvall, & Bolmsjö, 2013; Wang, Xiao, He, & Bellis, 2014;). Member checking refers to the step in which the researchers share the data analysis results with participants and seek feedback on whether or not the findings look reasonable (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). It is important to check back with participants to review the interview transcripts and correct any possible errors to ensure the accuracy of the responses. In this qualitative single case study, the measurement of reliability and validity of the study included transcript review and member checking. The utilization of member checking was by sending the data analysis results to participants via e-mail to request feedback within 2 days on agreement on the findings, or appropriate amendments (Appendix F). Member checking refers to the step where the researchers share the data analysis results with participants and seek their feedback on whether or not the findings look reasonable (Chan et al., 2013; Holst-Hansson et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2013).

The process of filtering and cleaning data includes identifying and deleting unaligned data with research questions, which counts to the research rigor and contribute to member checking (Chachula, Myrick, & Yonge, 2015). After the completion of data cleansing, the next step was by uploading the interview transcripts into NVivo 11 Pro, a qualitative data analysis software. NVivo 11 Pro has features to help with identification of trends, themes, and assignment of codes (Allard et al., 2014).

### **Data Collection Technique**

The data collection sources for this qualitative single case study included face-to-face semistructured interviews of eligible, screened, and qualified import and export small business owners and annual foreign trade statistics from the U.S. International Trade Administration. Interviews are valuable techniques for collecting qualitative research data (Yin, 2014). Qualitative researchers have the option to select the interview method from the following: (a) face-to-face, (b) telephone, (c) Skype, (d) video conferencing, (e) online, and (f) mail (Tucker & Lowe, 2014).

Telephone interviews can yield worthy data at low cost; however, the lack of face-to-face interaction restricts natural relationship with participants (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013; Weller, 2017). Qualitative researchers rank face-to-face interviews over the telephone, video conferencing, Skype, online, and mail techniques (Tucker & Lowe, 2014). The advantages of face-to-face interviews include the potential generation of high-quality data, flexibility in the collection that is vital when interviews are lengthy with complex questions, and this research approach may provide high response rates (Bernard, 2013; Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2013). The disadvantages of face-to-face interviews often stem from the intensive labor involved, travel cost, the difficulty in covering sensitive topics, and analyzing complex data which involves human experiences (Bernard, 2013; Irvine et al., 2013; Vogl, 2013).

Yin (2012) identified six data sources for case study design whereas the researcher needs to choose two from (a) archived records, (b) direct observations, (c) documents, (d) interviews, (e) participant's observation, and (f) physical artifacts). Using



open-ended questions in a semistructured interview process and the annual foreign trade statistics from the U.S. International Trade Administration, therefore, represented the two main origins of primary and secondary data respectively. The data collection technique for this single case study included semistructured interviews and government documentation.

The main formats of interviews in qualitative research are semistructured and unstructured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Semistructured qualitative interviews have advantages and disadvantages (Irvine et al., 2013). In the semistructured interviews, the researcher has a particular topic in mind, develops a limited number of questions beforehand, and intends to ask follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In the unstructured interviews, the researcher has a broad topic, but most of the specific questions come from the interviewee's answer as the interview develops (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The use of either semistructured or unstructured interview process by researchers promote interviewees and result in detailed responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). However, there are advantages and disadvantages to each interview format (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

The advantages of semistructured interviews are: (a) time effective, (b) limits researcher's bias, (c) the researcher controls the topic and flow of the interview, (d) easy to code and analyze, and (f) increases study validity (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The only disadvantage of semistructured interviews is that beginner researchers often fail in asking immediate questions resulting in uncaptured data (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The advantages of unstructured interviews are: (a) open questions, (b) useful when little

information is available about the topic, and (c) helpful in collecting background data (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The disadvantages of unstructured interviews are: (a) processing data can be hard and lengthy, (b) unsuitable for novice researchers, (c) places researcher's bias at risk, and (d) participants may share irrelevant information (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

The semistructured interviews option has the suitability to select the number of questions, follow-up questions, and the convenience to modify questions (Rowley, 2012). For this qualitative single case study, I developed six open-ended interview questions (Appendix C). Semistructured interviews are suitable because participants can share their experiences and knowledge openly (Patton et al., 2017; Rowley, 2012).

The scheduling of the interview location, date, and time with participants was by phone. Blocking of 90 minutes for the interview was a precaution for unexpected delays. A phone call to each participant a day before the interview date was a good reminder. Upon arrival of the participant at the interview location, I spent few minutes on talking about any public topic to enhance the relationship and make the participant more comfortable as encouraged by Leedy and Ormrod (2013). One of the practices followed before starting the interview, was to briefly repeat the information in the consent form and ask the participants if they had any questions.

Another critical step was to make sure to fully charge both digital voice recorders before coming to the interview location. Recording entire interviews aided in holistic data analysis. Each participant received the following: (a) a formal expression of thanks for the personal time spent; (b) information that they could receive calls if needed, to

provide details on for follow-up questions; and (c) informing participants that they would receive the interview transcription for review and the data analysis results for member checking. The measures outlined, aided in improving the trustworthiness, confirmability, and accuracy of the data and findings.

The transcription of each interview was within 48-hours from interview completion and saved in a Microsoft Word document, then sent to the participant by e-mail to review and request a feedback within 2 days, or otherwise, the assumption was that a non-reply signified that the participant confirmed the accuracy of the transcription (Appendix E). The next step was uploading of the scripts into the qualitative analytical data software NVivo 11 Pro. The NVivo 11 Pro software is useful for analyzing qualitative data, notably in aiding in identifying themes from interviews, using a process of data reduction, and constant comparison (Allard et al., 2014; QSR International, 2016).

The process of member checking was by sending the data analysis results to participants via e-mail to requesting feedback within 2 days on agreement on the findings, or appropriate amendments (see Appendix F). Member checking refers to the step where the researchers share the data analysis results with participants and seek their feedback on whether or not the findings look reasonable (Chan et al., 2013; Holst-Hansson et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2013). Transcript review refers to the step where the researcher sends back to participants the interview transcripts to check for any errors, which enhances the reliability of the study (Houghton et al., 2013). In this qualitative single case study, the measures of reliability and validity of the study comprised of the

steps and requests, representing requests for participant transcript reviews and member checking.

Data saturation refers to the point at which interview data is determined by the research to produce no new information (Marshall et al., 2013; Reid & Mash, 2014; Roberts et al., 2014). Therefore, interviews continued until the fulfillment of data saturation, which occurred after the completion of interviewing the sixth participant. A plan was in place for multiple rounds of interviews with each participant; however, there was no need for repetitions, as reaching data saturation with six participants obviated this step.

The second data collection used in addition to the interviews were annual foreign trade reports from the U.S. International Trade Administration, which have statistical data of imports and export volumes and other pertinent information. Documentary information is probably appropriate for every case study topic, and it has several forms, which makes for credible data collection technique (Yin, 2014). The advantages of using credible documentation as a data collection technique are: (a) the data is firmly established and constantly used, (b) inappreciable-not linked directly to the primary data collected and the findings of the case study, (c) represent accurate information, and (d) wide coverage (Yin, 2014). The disadvantages of documentation are: (a) difficult to retrieve, (b) subject to possible bias, (c) risk of bias reporting, and (d) access restrictions (Yin, 2014).

Triangulating of collected interview data against second sources enhanced the validity and the trustworthiness of the research, consistent with the views of prominent

scholars (Haozous & Knobf, 2013; Kaczynski, Salmona, & Smith, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2015). In this case study, methodological data triangulation included evaluation of the study findings against foreign exchange historical statistics, Sudan's volume of import and export from the Central Bank of Sudan, Sudan's trade volumes and the World Bank Development Indicators, which constituted an important part of the analysis.

### **Data Organization Technique**

In qualitative study methods, the data organization commences after the completion of interview transcription, which represents a specific stage in the data analysis continuum (Moustakas, 1994). The interview recording included two devices; a Sony ICD-BX140 digital device to record the interviews and a backup Olympus VN-7200 digital voice recorder. Testing both devices before each interview and transferring the recorded files to a personal computer, ensure the accuracy and proper data organization measures. The data organization process started by scanning and saving all handwritten paper notes, spreadsheets, and recorded interviews into separately labeled folders on a personal computer. Using Microsoft Word to transcribe the interviews and export to NVivo 11 Pro, a qualitative data analysis software, aided in transcriptions as part of data collection and storage. Qualitative data software is suitable for developing codes (Margarian, 2014). The NVivo 11 software has features that help the researcher in data organization and analysis (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, & Le, 2014).

Participants checked the accuracy of the transcribed interviews (Appendix E); a process widely accepted as *transcript review* (Boesch, Schwaninger, Weber, & Scholz,

2013; Houghton et al., 2013). Second, participants also reviewed the data analysis results and accepted the findings (Appendix F), conforming to the process of member checking (Holst-Hansson et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2014). Following the uploading of the transcribed interviews, NVivo 11 Pro served to identify codes, themes, and the frequency of words, phrases, and topics in responses, from which dominant and subthemes emerged. The research log for the data of this study included detailed information from journal articles, websites, documents, and books used in the literature review in a Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet also contained the author's name, peer-review status, source type, and year of publication. The annual import and export reports from the World Development Bank Indicators and foreign exchange reports from the Central Bank of Sudan aided in the triangulation of the primary interview data and other second data sources. The preparation for data analysis included data filtering and cleansing before uploading into NVivo 11 Pro, assigning codes, and performing data analysis.

The confidentiality of data requires the researcher to follow rigorous steps to keep data and research files secured during the timeline required by the institution supervising the study (Vanclay, Baines, & Taylor, 2013). The main folder has a password to access the data location on a personal computer. All data for this study will remain secure for 5 years after the completion of the study. On the expiration date of the retention period, I will permanently erase all the study data.

## Data Analysis

There is four types of triangulation: (a) data source triangulation, (b) analyst triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation, of which data source and methodological triangulation specifically strengthen case study validity (Yin, 2013). In this study, the invocation of methodological triangulation, was suitable and implemented, which refers to the collection of data from various origins and checked against the study findings as defined by Kaczynski et al. (2014), and Marshall and Rossman, (2015). The annual foreign trade and exchange rate historical data from the Central Bank of Sudan and annual volumes of import and export reports from the World Bank Development Indicators were the sources used for the triangulation of the data.

Data analysis is a process that starts from transcribing interview data to persuasive answers to the research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview analysis generally includes; (a) transcription, (b) coding, (c) finding same codes, (d) sorting and comparing excerpts, (e) integrating descriptions, (f) combining concepts and themes, and (g) generalizing study results (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The use of qualitative data analysis software helps the researcher produce a trustworthy and persuasive story (Odena, 2013). Researchers mostly use software such as ATLAS.ti and NVivo in data collection, data, management, and data analysis stages (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2015). For qualitative studies, more than 90% of researchers use ATLAS.ti and NVivo (Woods et al., 2015). In this study, NVivo 11 Pro, a qualitative data analysis software was the tool used to upload the transcriptions, track

participant responses, and determine themes from frequently occurring common words and trends, which emerged from the interview responses.

In this qualitative single case study, a semistructured interview was the process used to capture data from participants' responses to open-ended questions. The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies import and export small business owners have used to sustain business under economic sanctions. The primary source of data was the recorded and transcribed responses collected through the semistructured interviews of participants. The second source of data was the annual foreign trade statistics from the U.S. International Trade Administration.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) described data coding as the facilitation of each transcript of an interview question by locating themes or events and identifying these with codes. NVivo 11 Pro, a qualitative data analysis software, has multiple features that include collecting, organizing, and analyzing data (QSR International, 2016). The researcher using NVivo 10 Pro can utilize its features to capture themes, detect trends, and assign codes to the interview responses (Allard et al., 2014).

As outlined by Elo et al. (2014), Rubin and Rubin (2012), Marshall and Rossman (2015), and Braithwaite, Moore, and Abetz (2014), the data analysis for this study included the following sequential process: (a) transcribing each interview; (b) organizing the data by searching for common themes and emergent patterns; (c) uploading the transcribed interviews into NVivo 11 Pro software utilizing its capabilities, which led to identifying of emergent themes. The first step was the preparation of each interview transcript, which included accurate and verbatim participant responses for each question



because it was faster information than listening multiple times to the recorded interview. The second step, following Rubin and Rubin's (2012) advice was generating and saving backup copies of the transcripts on a personal computer with password protected files. The third step was the identification of words and phrases that appeared to have a meaningful passage and assignment of codes. Entering coded data into a computer file facilitates finding passages corresponding to terms or themes mentioned by participants in the interviews, which will enable retrieval of all passages on a relevant topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The fourth step was, that as the analysis of the interview transcripts continued, the search for concepts, events, and themes, led to labeling these as units of analysis. Each unit of analysis may connect to multiple codes (Rubin & Rubin, (2012). The fifth step was the coding process, which included the identification of examples, events, and concepts. While coding of examples and events is often steady and clear (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), coding concepts need more care, which means focusing only on data related to the research question of the study. Coding started with the concepts and themes directly mentioned in the interview questions before moving to the ones brought by the interviewees. The seventh step was the creation of categories for labels and themes and defining codes.

The NVivo Pro coding matrix serves to cross-reference the interview responses that match the themes from the literature review, which also helps to triangulate the data from the literature review and the conceptual framework along with any data from new studies published before completion of this study with the data collected from interviews

(Ringrose & Renold, 2014; Taplay, Jack, Baxter, Eva, & Martin, 2014). The coded data for each concept or theme was a separate file. After coding all interview transcripts, the data analysis started by sorting, summarizing, and comparing data, which Rubin and Rubin (2012) described as an analysis phase of describing data. The final steps in data analysis are the generating of theory and generalizing the findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The systems theory underpinned this study as it aligned with the concept of changes and collaborations within one system, which seen in the different strategies small business owners use in operations, funding, marketing, human resource, and management. The general systems theory is the scientific reconnaissance of whole and wholeness (von Bertalanffy, 1972). Von Bertalanffy (2008) explained that systems interact with the associated mediums and can increasingly gain new properties, leading to a process of continuous development. Small business owners deal with multiple factors similar to the systems described by von Bertalanffy in their effort to sustain the business. Small business owners need capital to import or export products, foreign currency to pay or receive for the imported and exported goods, entering new markets by having marketing plans and campaigns in place, which means that all these components interact with each other for the business development and sustainability. In this qualitative single case study, the purpose was to determine the strategies import and export business owners need to sustain businesses under economic sanctions.

## Reliability and Validity

### Reliability

The criteria for checking the study trustworthiness of qualitative research differs from the one for quantitative research (Foley & O'Connor, 2013; Mabuza, Govender, Ogunbanjo, & Mash, 2014; Munn, Porritt, Lockwood, Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). In quantitative research, trustworthiness refers to internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Mabuza et al., 2014; Venkatesh et al., 2013; Zachariadis, Scott, & Barrett, 2013). In qualitative research, validity represents the creditability, transferability, and confirmability of the data (Mabuza et al., 2014; Venkatesh et al., 2013; Zachariadis et al., 2013).

Reliability refers to the consistency of the procedure throughout the research and the disclosure of study objectives and communication (Fan & Sun, 2014; Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). Closely following the interview protocol (Appendix A) while preparing and conducting each interview, aided in ensuring a systematic and organized process. Following the transcription of each interview, was e-mailing the interview transcript to the participant for review and error check to ensure accuracy (Appendix E), known as *transcript review* (Boesch et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2013). The subsequent step after the transcript review was sharing the analysis results with participants for acceptance of the findings (Appendix F), known as member checking (Holst-Hansson et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2014).

Dependability refers to the potentiality of replicating similar findings from a recurrence of the study by producing an audit track, and triangulation (Haozous & Knobf,

2013; Mabuza et al., 2014; Huang, Liang, & Shyu, 2014). Dependability in qualitative studies also refers to research quality (Siegle, Rubenstein, & Mitchell, 2014). After the completion of transcription of each interview, participants received the interview transcript via e-mail for review and error check and confirmed accuracy (Appendix E), which was a necessary step that ensured the dependability of the study known as *transcript review* (Houghton et al., 2013). The second measurement used to ensure dependability was member checking (Appendix F), which involved sending the analysis results to each participant to solicit feedback about the accuracy and reasonability of findings as described by Holst-Hansson et al. (2013), Houghton et al. (2013), and Wang et al. (2014).

### **Validity**

In this qualitative single case study, semistructured interview questions and the annual foreign trade statistics from the U.S. International Trade Administration represented the data collection sources. Validity is the measurement of trust and accuracy of the study findings (Fan & Sun, 2014; Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). The criteria for checking the study trustworthiness of qualitative research validity measures the creditability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Houghton et al., 2013; Mabuza et al., 2014).

Credibility refers to the validity of the findings from data and may represent a reflection of reality through the lengthy process of qualitative data analysis which would involve correlation, peer briefing, triangulation, and member checks (Mabuza et al., 2014; Shavers & Moore, 2014; Schreiber, 2013). To ensure creditability of the study,

participants checked and revised the transcribed interviews, where necessary (Appendix E); a process widely accepted and termed a transcript review (Boesch et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2013). Second, participants received the data analysis results, reviewed the findings, and provided personal insights if findings are acceptable and reasonable (Appendix F), conforming to the process of member checking (Holst-Hansson et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2014). In a qualitative research study, Shavers and Moore (2014) studied the experiences of African American female doctoral students in white institutions and used member checking in 13 out of 15 participants who confirmed the findings, which increased the validity of the study. The third step performed to enhance creditability was triangulation, which refers to the collection of data from various origins through different methods, and using various notional lenses, and debate the developing findings with critical friends (Kaczynski et al., 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2015). The use of data source and methods forms in triangulating the findings of case studies would potentially support the validity (Yin, 2013).

Transferability refers to the likelihood of leading to the same findings in a comparable setting by applying triangulation and exercising reflexivity (Haozous & Knobf, 2013; Huang et al., 2014; Mabuza et al., 2014; Siegle et al., 2014). In the interest of research accuracy and rigor, the trustworthy measures include the use of data triangulation and member checks (Chan et al., 2013). In a qualitative research study in finance, Kaczynski et al. (2014) used memos, observations, interviews, and site documents to exercise triangulation in the study. To ensure the transferability of the study, the application of triangulation was by checking the study findings against data

from reliable, recent, and relevant sources such as the annual foreign trade statistics from the Central Bank of Sudan and the annual import and export reports from the World Bank Development Indicators.

The enhancement of validity in this qualitative single case study included the use of multiple methods such as transcript review and member checking, to ensure and meet the standards of dependability. The application of transcript review, member checking, and methodological triangulation was to improve the creditability of the study. Finally, member checking and triangulation were used to measure the transferability of the study.

Interviewing a sufficient number of participants until reaching data saturation, ensured a rigorous study. The determination of data saturation mainly depends on the exhaustion of new data, or when data from interviews becomes repetitive (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014; Reid & Mash, 2014; Roberts et al., 2014). Depth interviews of screened and qualified six participants, with the requisite business knowledge in exports and imports, have provided a level of data that was adequate to fulfill the objectives of the study. The aim of this study was to acquire a very high level of meaningful knowledge from six participants instead of recruiting a large number of participants. The researcher benefits from the multiple rounds of interviews by identifying opportunities missed in the first interview and obtaining detailed information and gaining more clarity from participants (Laurell, Andersson, & Achtenhagen, 2013; Wagstaff & Williams, 2014). However, the information shared by the participants was rich and detailed, which did not require conducting additional rounds of interviews. The emphasis was on undertaking a highly rigorous study to ensure a worthy contribution to the existing body of knowledge

as the purpose of the case study was to gain depth understanding of a phenomenon or finding why and what happened as defined by Yin (2014).

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 2 commenced with a restatement of the purpose statement of the study and continued with a description of the role of the researcher as a primary data collection source and outlining the process of selecting the study participants. A noted inclusion in this section was a detailed discussion of the rationale and justification of the research method and design. The discussion showed the characteristics and limitations of each method and design and provided the basis for the selection for the qualitative single case study. In Section 2, the identification of the population of the research, the sample size, and the eligibility criteria for participation, ensured the alignment of the population with the research question. Further details in this section consisted debating the advantages and disadvantages of semistructured and structured interviews and the different methods of interviews such as face-to-face, Skype, and phone interviews and selected face-to-face semistructured interview for the study. A considerable part of the discussion covered the data components, which included step-by-step processed followed for data collection, data organization, and data analysis. Section 2 involved an extensive discussion on the reliability and validity of the study. The details included measures to ensure reliability, dependability through transcript review and member checking; and the steps taken to ensure validity by specifically applying measures to ensure creditability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data. A step-by-step process of data analysis, along with the identification of the capabilities and features of the qualitative software,

used for data organization, collection, and analysis, represented specific details on measures for successful execution and completion of the study.

Section 3 includes a detailed description of the findings. The details offered in this section include an introduction, commencing with the purpose statement, presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, and recommendations for action and further research. Section 3, concludes with personal reflections, a summary, and conclusions of the entire study in perspective.



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

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify the strategies import and export small business owners use to sustain businesses under economic sanctions. The data collected emanated from face-to-face interviews with six import and export small business owners in the state of Khartoum, Sudan, and government documents from the U.S. International Trade Administration. The study findings showed business strategies import and export small business owners have used to increase the volume of business transactions, secure funding, mitigate the risks associated with the fluctuation of foreign currency rates, secure payments made or received in foreign currencies, and sustain business under economic sanctions.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question that guided the study was: What strategies do import and export small business owners use to sustain businesses under economic sanctions? From the core research question and the data analysis of participants' semistructured interview responses and the financial reports, the following six themes emerged: (a) the strategies used to increase the volume of business transactions, (b) strategies used to secure funding for business, (c) strategies used to secure payments for import or export business transactions, (d) strategies used to mitigate the risks associated with fluctuations in foreign exchange rates, (e) strategies used for payments made or received involving foreign currencies, and (f) the strategies used to sustain the business under economic sanctions. Von Bertalanffy (2008) used the systems theory to study the

relationships between various elements, objects, or procedures. Systems theory may be useful to study the interrelationships between multiple components rather than single components and patterns of change (Senge et al., 2010). Karniouchina et al. (2013) concluded that a firm's growth depends on industry growth, which may indicate that industry weaknesses would negatively reflect on business sustainability and success. Karniouchina et al. projected reflections on the relationship between the import and export industry and importers and exporters as far as the opportunities for success and sustainability for the business. The following findings presented as emergent themes from this study, which may contribute to the development of a manual of procedures and strategies for Sudanese import and export small business owners to maintain a sustainable business. The identification of themes primarily developed from the thematic analysis of participants' responses to the interview questions, the import and export reports from the U.S. Trade Commission, and the methodological triangulation against financial reports from the World Development Indicators and the Central Bank of Sudan.

### **Emergent Theme 1: Strategies to Increase the Volume of Business Transactions**

Increasing the volume of business transactions refers to the number of import and export trade deals executed by import and export small business owners. More business transactions result in increased sales and revenue and therefore lead to business sustainability. Participants shared different strategies to increase the volume of business transactions (see Figure 1 and Table 3).



**Guaranteeing the financial situation of the country.** The evaluation of the business climate was a priority, which includes the economic cost, the stability of the economic policies, and productivity. Table 3 shows that all participants shared a common concern that the country's economic situation and setting growth plans are critical. For example, P1 outlined the preparation strategy for obtaining finance under the current business environment,

The strategies involve two main points. The first one is finance, and the second one is about how to benefit from finance in the upcountry regarding the exports. This requires us to create a strategy to enable us to promote this sector along with the governmental problems as we do not have an option other than escorting them.

P4 highlighted the economic variables in Sudan and noted the connections between the domestic business climate with regional and international economic states and how these factors affect business growth plans,

The strategies are normally connected with targeted growth plans, the economic climate in the country, our business activities, the problems, which could hinder these strategic objectives. The variables in Sudan are high specifically the economic cost and the stability of the economic policies, and even the political stability and the stability of foreign and economic relations between Sudan and the countries in the region, neighborhood, and internationally.

P5 implemented a comprehensive expansion plan and noted, "Despite the sanctions and other barriers, we in the past three years have expanded our commercial

enterprises. We have restructured the infrastructure of the companies. We have completely renovated one factory and increased its size to boost production.”

Guaranteeing the financial situation is critical for import and export business owners. The process includes (a) making sure that no changes or amendments in government policies and regulations occur, (b) securing funds from financing sources prior to starting any business transaction, and (c) verifying the product availability.

**Meeting in advance with the government officials and representatives.** One of the strategies to increase the volume of business transactions is early preparation and knowing financial obligations associated with executing a trade transaction, which includes meeting with stakeholders such as government entities. Participants agreed that early preparation is important and involving all the parties who play a role in business activities are critical. P1 expressed concern about the instability of government policies and provided specific details about federal and state charges:

Our strategy includes meeting with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Trade and regional government in the upcountry such as the government of the state of Northern Kordofan – the areas of Gum Arabic production. We need to meet with them because these states were weakly supported financially by the central government by a small portion of money.

Business expenses and cost of products are vital components in forecasting gross revenue and net profit. In the case of having multiple channels that have fee schedules, a careful calculation of the cost is necessary before moving forward with a trade transaction. P1 continued to emphasize the importance of this step,

To promote our business, as I told you we have no choice, we must have to sit with these guys and agree with them. Sometimes, they require us to pay advance payments on account, which is not fair, but we have no choice.

Meeting with government officials at the federal or state level is one of the early preparation steps before starting an import/export transaction. Import and export small business owners need to know if there are new regulations or fee changes by the authorities. As shared by participants, the determination of cost and pricing of the product mainly depend on the forecasting of the expenses, fees, and taxes, which frequently change.

**Adding new products or entering new markets.** One of the best practices to expand a business is to launch new products and explore opportunities by entering new markets. All participants used this strategy to increase the volume of business transactions. Participant P3 explained as follows:

Our strategy is mostly through adding new products or opening new markets. This basically depends on how the market here accepts. Most of the information is via trade fairs because all trade deals are present in one place. We come back here and study whether the market is open for these opportunities.

Adding new products and entering new markets increase the import and export volumes between Sudan and other countries (see Figure 2). Trade statistics of Sudan showed slow growth and the volume of imports and exports was decreasing year after year instead of recording consistent year-over-year growth (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017).

Year	Merchandise Imports (US\$)	Merchandise Exports (US\$)
2007	8,775,000,000	8,879,250,000
2008	9,351,540,000	11,670,524,000
2009	9,690,900,000	8,257,000,000
2010	10,044,770,000	11,404,000,000
2011	9,235,860,000	10,193,432,000
2012	9,230,318,000	4,066,499,000
2013	9,918,068,000	4,789,732,000
2014	9,211,300,000	4,453,700,000
2015	8,584,562,000	2,985,005,000

*Figure 2. Sudan imports and exports annual volumes (2007-2015)  
Adapted from: World Bank Development Indicators*

**Increasing the productivity rate to maintain competitiveness in the Sudanese market.** Increasing the productivity rate is one of the successful strategies used by import and export small business owners in Sudan that helps in reducing the cost as well as resulting in greater revenue. P5 and P6 have personally put this strategy into action to ensure business sustainability, and P6 noted,

The production is low, the cost is high, and the competitiveness is weak. The international markets are fluctuating. Our strategy is to increase the productivity rate per acre, lower the cost, maintain our competitiveness in international markets, and ensure continuation.

Participants shared four strategies to increase the volume of business transactions, which mainly connected with planning. Appropriate planning is essential for small business strength and sustainability and the economy (Yamakawa & Cardon, 2017). The

four strategies were themes derived from the emergent theme representing interview question 1. The comprehension of themes and patterns advance to a resolution of the entire problem (Goodwin et al., 2017). Systems theory was the conceptual framework for this study. The application of a system approach led to the identification of strategies that could help import and export small business owners to increase the volume of business transactions. The findings revealed that one strategy is insufficient to achieve the goal of increasing volume of business transactions, which is consistent with systems theory. The postulations of the systems theory connote multiple factors interacting jointly as a whole to achieve success (Chettiparamb, 2014).

### **Emergent Theme 2: Strategies to Secure Funding for Business**

Funding is critical for small business owners to maintain sustainability and growth. Small businesses need immediate access to funds to meet daily obligations (Bellavitis et al., 2017). All participants provided a favored method of funding, which ranged from private financiers, banks, self-financing, and regional banks as shown in Figure 3 and Table 4. Thematic analysis of participants' response to interview question 2, financial reports, and methodological triangulation against historical data from the World Bank Indicators and the Central Bank of Sudan led to the emergent theme 2. The selection of a funding source depends on the availability of financing, interest rate, and the flexibility to access funds, which does not necessarily remain the only option for funding.





financiers or banks as sources of funding. For example, P5 noted, “Sixty percent to 70% of our exports were financed by local banks to attract foreign currencies to the country.” P6 added, “As for our company, we provide collaterals to the available commercial banks and the plans to obtain financing.”

Participants used several financing sources for business transactions. Private investors are one possibility, which depends on the availability and accessibility in the market. Banks are the second traditional financing provenance for import and export small business owners. However, banks have requirements to qualify applicants for funding. Collateral includes real estate, machinery, inventory, and accounts receivable, which creditors and banks require before extending finance for small business owners (Calomiris et al., 2017).

**Relying on self-financing.** Reliance on self-financing was a minor theme from the frequent conversations, within the larger dominant theme of the strategies to secure funding for business. Three out of the six participants used the self-financing method. For example, P2 stated, “I normally sometimes take money from my father because he is very well-off as a financier, and we give the money back with a certain interest rate, which is normally less than any bank charges.” P3 also chose to depend on self-financing, and “Our business is a family business. We rely on self-financing. We do not seek funding from banks because the situation is not stable to allow that.”

A considerable number of small business owners may prefer self-financing to avoid the tough banking regulations by raising money from within their families (Wamba et al., 2017). The avoidance of fees and high-interest rates may help import and export

business owners to compete in the market by offering lower prices for their products. However, the initial capital may take longer to grow, which limits the business growth and expansion.

**Relying on regional banking sectors.** Regional banks are those institutions located in the neighboring countries such as GCC or that have a presence in Sudan. Regional banks have a large capacity to meet the needs of import and export small business owners and provide finance in foreign currency only. P4 described the pros and cons of using regional banks as a source of funding: “There is a high risk in financing from this source because we receive funding in foreign currency and must pay back in foreign currency.” P1 justified the using regional banks. “The banks in Sudan have limited ceilings. This limitation in ceiling requires the applicant of finance to lower the amount of credit as no bank is capable of offering 100,000,000 Sudanese pounds or one billion (old value) in time.”

The trade volume between Sudan and the United States had fluctuated over the past 15 years (U.S. International Trade Administration, 2017c). Several factors have restricted import and export small business owners from expanding businesses and generating more trade transactions, which reflected the low trade volume with the United States and other countries (see Figure 4).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Imports (in US\$)</b>	<b>Total Exports (in US\$)</b>
2002	2,742,360	10,813,508
2003	5,592,083	26,199,406
2004	7,500,455	68,358,117
2005	27,148,542	108,105,454
2006	12,421,166	76,924,039
2007	14,954,478	79,129,315
2008	10,040,426	143,305,018
2009	19,854,909	78,414,774
2010	16,153,563	115,617,732
2011	20,707,088	74,694,129
2012	13,061,137	55,491,290
2013	20,737,094	88,268,450
2014	23,886,214	77,168,737
2015	17,946,506	59,514,997
2016	26,168,999	58,742,134

*Figure 4. U.S. Trade volume with Sudan (2002-2016)  
Adapted from U.S. International Trade Administration*

Participants indicated the frequent resorting to three major strategies to secure finances for businesses. The analysis of data revealed three strategies from the emergent theme of strategies to secure funding for business representing interview question 2. The concept of themes and patterns helps promote a resolution to the whole issue (Goodwin et al., 2017). Systems theory was the conceptual framework that underpinned this study.

The implementation of the system approach in systems theory aided deeper analysis and led to the recognition of the strategies import and export small business owners used to obtain funding for business. The findings from the data analysis showed that one strategy is not enough to fulfill the funding objectives, which aligned with the connotation of systems theory. Systems theory needs several components reacting together to assure success (Chettiparamb, 2014). Therefore, business sustainability needs the interaction of multiple factors such as various financing options, the stability of government policies, availability of foreign currencies at steady exchange rates, and opportunities to new markets entry.

### **Emergent Theme 3: Strategies to Secure Payments for Import, or Export Business Transactions**

Securing the payments for import and export transactions is critical for small business owners, as it is the final step for generating revenue, increasing capital, and getting ready for the next business transaction. All participants shared strategies to secure payments for import and export business transactions. Thematic analysis of participants' responses to interview question 3, financial reports, and methodological triangulation against historical data from the World Bank Indicators and the Central Bank of Sudan led to the identification of four themes (see Figure 5 and Table 5).



**Requiring payments in cash to ensure liquidity of money.** Four participants representing 67% of views, preferred the cash method as they believed it guarantees the liquidity for the business, which would provide more options such as starting a new business transaction or convert the local currency into foreign to keep the value. P 3 affirmed, "...Therefore, we depend here to sell in cash to secure liquidity of money and never get in a shortage of money. We do not use delayed letters of credit; it is all in cash; advance payments." P 4 added, "...Therefore, sometimes, the foreign currency proceeds from our exports have a surplus we sell to other importers."

The Central Bank of Sudan offers exporters the option to sell export proceeds to another importer within a short period. Otherwise, the second option is to convert the funds into local currency at the official rate and deposit in the exporter's account; a step that will cause losses to the exporter as the exchange rate is too low. The average exchange rate of the US\$ in 2017 is 6.7000 Sudanese pound calculated from 1.1.2017 through 5.31.2017 (Central Bank of Sudan, 2017a).

**Following strict and documented process between the company and the importers.** The import and export business involves international trade and dealing with foreign business entities worldwide, which needs a strict process, documentation, contracts, and careful execution. All participants have robust business procedures and processes to follow in each import or export transaction with clients overseas. For example, P1 shared, "The importer opens an LC to the company in London, but in our case, we always work against copy documents; this is an agreement in advance. We are committed to this practice, and our clients, certain clients, whom we have relationships

for 15 years.” Most of the international contracts have clauses that address disputes between parties, which make trade contracts critical to import and export small business owners. P3 continued, “For China, we pay in Yuan to avoid funds do not go through the Clearing House in New York. I pay here in dollars, and the bank pays in a different currency or Euro to avoid going through the American Clearing House.”

The reimbursement currency is an important part of any trade contract. Both importer and exporter must fulfill each contractual clause. As shared by participants, sometimes the second party requires the payment in a specific currency that is not available for purchase at the time of the transaction. The conversion between more than two currencies may cause losses if forecasting is poor or in the case of delayed transaction execution.

**Coordinating with the Central Bank of Sudan.** The Central Bank of Sudan publishes the policies and regulations organizing foreign trade, foreign currency exchange rates, fees, tariffs, and issues frequent updates. Imports and export small business owners, therefore, strictly follow all memos and announcements of the Central Bank of Sudan to avoid any fines, delays, and cancellations, which may result in huge losses. All participants concurred to closely following and coordinating with the Central Bank of Sudan. For example, P5 stated, “...there are payment terms to pay after two months, which aligns with the Central Bank’s conditions. Therefore, there is no problem.” P2 assured, “The whole thing is no national bank, or private bank can transfer money outside Sudan unless it is via the Central Bank of Sudan.” P1 followed, “If we



receive it in foreign currency, our strategy is that we cannot use foreign currency at hand according to the regulations of the central bank.”

The knowledge of the regulations and policies issued by the Central Bank of Sudan is essential for all import and export small business owners. Otherwise, the consequences of non-compliance may be of high impact. New fees and the reimbursement exchange rate are among the responsibilities of the Central Bank of Sudan, which directly affect the proceeds of trade transactions and net revenues.

**Money transfers through money exchange and banks have stopped.**

Transferring money through money exchange offices is not popular. Only one participant has used money exchange to transfer money. P2 noted, “I personally, don’t deal with LCs, I transfer it via money exchange.” Money exchange offices do not transfer large amounts; therefore, the additional method would fill the gap.

All participants implemented four strategies to secure payments for import and export business transactions. Four strategies produced from the main theme representing interview question 3. The awareness of the concept of themes and patterns help to find a resolution for the general issue (Goodwin et al., 2017). The application of systems theory guided to the identification of the strategies import and export small business owners used to secure payments for their business transactions.

In summary, the data analysis revealed that a single strategy is insufficient to secure the payments for import and export transactions, which aligned with the concept of systems theory regarding the interaction between components. Systems theory is the interaction of related components jointly and continuously to maintain success (von

Bertalanffy, 2008), which means that the strategies used by import and export small business owners to address one business objective, lead to success, provided ensuring the collaboration with other business activities.

#### **Emergent Theme 4: Strategies to Mitigate Risks of Foreign Exchange Rates**

##### **Fluctuation**

The exchange rate of the Sudanese pound against foreign currencies is volatile. Exchange rate volatility defined as the continuous fluctuations of the exchange rate (Alagidede & Ibrahim, 2017). Thematic analysis of participants' responses to interview question 4, financial reports, and methodological triangulation against historical data from the World Bank Indicators and the Central Bank of Sudan led to the themes about the strategies participants used to mitigate the risk associated with fluctuations in foreign exchange rates (see Figure 6 and Table 6).



Figure 6. Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 4.

Table 6

*Strategies to Mitigate Risks of Foreign Exchange Rates Fluctuation*

Themes	Number of participants (n = 6)	Percentage of participants (n = 6)
Forecasting the rates of the US dollar and the Sudanese pound	6	100%
Conversion of money on daily basis into hard currency	6	100%
Limiting the need for financing in foreign currencies	6	100%
Taking risks in foreign exchange as hedging has been prohibited	6	100%
Accepting delayed payments for big or high-profit transactions only	1	17%

**Forecasting the rates of the U.S. dollar and the Sudanese pound.** Import and export small business owners pay close attention to the exchange rate of the Sudanese pound against foreign currencies, which is an important step to help forecast and calculate selling and purchase prices. Forecasting the exchange rate is critical for the determination of sales and revenue calculation. All participants adopted the exchange rate monitoring strategy of paying close attention to the daily currency trading values of the U.S. dollar and the Sudanese pound. P1 explained how to determine the purchase price, "... We see the current rate of the U.S. dollar against the Sudanese pound in the black market. Second, we pick the indicative rate published by the central bank – you got the point? Between these two rates, we then figure the average rate, and set it as the purchase rate over there." P5 added to the forecasting strategy, "... We always conduct a forecasting for the open market exchange rate, as you know they call it the parallel market rate. The inflation rate in Sudan is speeding up significantly. If today, the open market rate is 19.00 pounds, we calculate our cost as 22.00 and 25.00 pounds to get closer to any risk of inflation or cost over."

Import and export small business owners deal with multiple rates for the U.S. dollars. Depending on experience and watching only, importers and exporters try to predict the trends of the foreign exchange rates and decide the purchasing and selling price of products. The ambiguity in a non-sustainable market makes forecasting a bit challenging for import and export business owners.

**Conversion of money on a daily basis into hard currency.** Import and export small business owners fear the devaluation of the Sudanese pound as it becomes the

norm. Therefore, they try not to keep large amounts of money in local currency. All participants implemented a strategy to convert all excess cash into foreign currency as a precautionary step. P2 confirmed, "... We transfer any money, any amount we have on a daily basis into hard currency as not to let it stay too long to lose its value. The actual price is nearly 20 pounds per dollar. That is going to be a loss; we keep it as cash money." P3 concurred, "... Within a day or two, we have to convert our money into dollars."

The Sudanese pound has experienced several depreciations in the last two decades (See Figure 7). In Sudan, there were multiple rates for the Sudanese pound against the U.S. dollar. For example, there were the official rate, the parallel rate, and the open market rate. The Central Bank of Sudan publishes the Sudanese pound official rate and parallel rate against the major foreign currencies but leaves the open market rate to the dynamics of the supply and demand of the market. Figure 3 illustrates the historical trend of the Sudanese pound rate to the U.S. dollar (Central Bank of Sudan, 2017a).

Year	Sudanese Pound
2007	2.0157
2008	2.1951
2009	2.2398
2010	2.3724
2011	2.6769
2012	4.4090
2013	4.3980
2014	4.3980
2015	6.2876
2016	6.4140

*Figure 7. Annual exchange rate of Sudanese pound per U.S.\$  
Adapted from: Central Bank of Sudan*

**Limiting the need for financing in foreign currencies.** Financing in a foreign currency means the repayment must be in the same currency, which requires the borrower to buy that foreign currency at a higher exchange rate to pay back; a risky step all participants agreed to limit. P4 explained the risk, “If you borrow in foreign currency, you take a high risk in the current situation in Sudan, and its local degraded value currency. Therefore, our strategy is to limit our needs for financing in foreign currency to the minimum.” In most cases, however, the financing bank would deduct the loan from the export proceeds, which originally received in foreign currency; in such situation, there would be no risk.

Import and export small business owners buy foreign currencies from the open market and set the pricing according to the equivalent in local currency after adding the profit margin. Borrowing money in foreign currency requires the repayment in the same currency. The term of the loan may be six or 12 months, which makes it harder to predict the exchange rate at the time of repayment. Therefore, participants refrain from financing in foreign currency. However, it is still an option.

**Taking risks in foreign exchange as hedging has been prohibited.** The risk of foreign exchange rate occurs when converting a foreign currency into another one whereas the price of a product is different in the contract. P6 shared a personal experience. “Now, we have a prime example, we sold and converted into Euro; the Euro rate dropped, and the U.S. dollar increased. The value of the contract lost \$100,000, which was a huge loss.”

Hedging in foreign currency is a strategy to purchase today (spot) at forward (future) rates, which protects the buyer from any fluctuation in the exchange rate (Chatsanga & Parkes, 2017). Because the Central Bank of Sudan does not allow hedging, dealing with more than one foreign currency would involve a risk. Hedging also requires dealing with foreign markets, which is not available for Sudanese small business owners as one of the restrictions of the economic sanctions.

**Accepting delayed payments for big or high-profit transactions only.** Only one participant uses delayed payment for the sold product, however, under one condition; that the profit margin is too big and worth the wait. Participant 2 explained, “We

normally, don't give more than 10 - 14 days unless it is an item where the margin of profit is very high.”

All participants indicated the practice to five strategies to mitigate the risks associated with fluctuations in foreign exchange rates for the import, export business transactions. The analysis of data led to the identification of five strategies representing responses to interview question 4. The understanding of the concept of systems theory and the interrelationships within one system helped to recognize the strategies import and export small business owners used to mitigate the risks associated with the fluctuation in foreign exchange rates. Mangal (2013) described systems theory as a set of parts coordinated in a specific technique to interact collectively.

#### **Emergent Theme 5: Strategies for Payments Made or Received Involving Foreign Currencies**

Import and export small business owners mainly deal in international trade with buyers and sellers in different countries, which involve payments in major foreign currencies. The strategies used for payments made or received involving foreign currencies was an emergent theme, derived by thematic analysis of participants' responses to interview question 5, financial reports, and methodological triangulation against historical data from the World Bank Indicators and the Central Bank of Sudan. Participants shared various and different strategies used in receiving and in making payments in foreign currencies (see Figure 8 and Table 7).





Figure 8. Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 5

Table 7

*Strategies for Payments Made or Received Involving Foreign Currencies*

Themes	Number of participants (n = 6)	Percentage of participants (n = 6)
Paying the local banks in foreign currency	6	100%
Dealing with banks in the Gulf area alone	3	50%
Dividing the local and foreign currencies to ensure cash liquidity for importing and exporting of products	6	100%
Ensuring that they are dealing with well-trusted and reputable clients	6	100%

**Paying the local banks in foreign currency.** Due to the huge gap between the official rate and the market rate of the foreign currency, import and export business owners need to purchase foreign currencies from the open market and deposit into banks who agree to conduct the trade transaction with the client overseas. P2 noted, “I purchase the dollars, and I put dollars in the bank, and the bank actually transfers them to the outside.” P3 outlined the process, “... There are no foreign transfers at the bank’s rate. Therefore, we pay the bank in foreign currency. We ask the bank to pay a foreign company in a foreign country a specific amount of money, and we pay the bank in dollars.” P5 added, “The Central Bank and the local banks had no foreign currency, and we had to use our own resources of foreign currency to import the product lines.” All participants agreed that banks do not offer foreign currencies for any trade transaction; import and export small business owners must provide the foreign currency to complete trade deals.

**Dealing with banks in the Gulf area alone.** Many banks in the GCC region have established new branches in Sudan. In 2014, European banks stopped facilitating transactions with Sudanese businesses, which opened the doors for the banks in the GCC to play a new role in foreign trade. Three out of the six participants have dealt with banks in the GCC. P4 assured, “We left now with banks in the Gulf area; in Bahrain and Emirates only.” P1 provided more details and examples,

Most of the banks who lead the exports finance are foreign banks or having some foreign flavor in the sense that the shareholders are foreigners such as Capital

United Bank, Blue Nile-Mashreq Bank, QNB, Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank, National Bank of Abu Dhabi, Habib Bank, and Byblos Bank.

Banks in the GCC region may temporarily resolve some of the import and export small business owners in the short-term. The favoritism of GCC banks over Sudanese bank is that GCC banks are not under sanctions. They enjoy some flexibility as long as the Central Bank of Sudan does not make any changes to the policies governing foreign banks.

**Dividing the local and foreign currencies to ensure cash liquidity for importing and exporting of products.** All six participants followed a balanced strategy to maintain sufficient amounts of funds in local and foreign currency. P1 explained how they use the export proceeds, “We can use 90% of the export proceeds. The 90% have two ways to use: either to sell to an importer or to use it to import goods for yourself.” When they sell to an importer, they receive the equivalent in Sudanese pound at the open market rate, which is higher than the official rate published by the Central Bank of Sudan. P5 described the situation, “We sell part of the foreign currency balance in case we need liquid money in Sudanese pound, and we use another part to buy inputs for our factories such as packaging materials.” Import and export small business owners need to maintain adequate reserves of local currency to meet purchases and fulfill daily business cash payment obligations, with an adequate amount of foreign currencies for import and export trade transactions.

**Ensuring that they are dealing with well-trusted and reputable clients.**

Conducting business under any restriction require a high level of scrutiny measures and

care to know your client. All six participants asserted that they deal with clients overseas for long periods with full trust. For example, P1 noted, “Our clients, certain clients, whom we have relationships for 15 years. There is no risk for us.” P4 also emphasized the trust factor. “You ship out the goods, and it all depends on the trust you have on the client whom you deal with for a long period.”

Participants implemented four strategies for payments made or received involving foreign currencies. Four strategies derived from the emergent theme representing interview question 5. Systems theory represented the conceptual framework chosen for this study. The application of systems theory guided deeper analysis and aided in the identification of the strategies import and export small business owners used for payments made or received involving foreign currencies. Participants expressed views, which indicated that using many strategies often lead to the same goal, which aligns with the postulations of the systems theory. Mangal (2013) described systems theory as a set of parts sorted in a specified order to interact jointly.

#### **Emergent Theme 6: Strategies to Sustain Business Under Economic Sanctions**

Import and export small business owners have experienced some business restrictions, which needed formulating innovative approaches and strategies to minimize the impact of these limitations to ensure business sustainability. Thematic analysis of participants’ responses to interview question 6, financial reports, and methodological triangulation against historical data from the World Bank Indicators and the Central Bank of Sudan led to the identification of the emergent theme and subthemes. The analysis, in

addition to the emergent theme, further resulted in three subthemes, which garnered the agreement of participants (see Figure 9 and Table 8).



Figure 9. Thematic derivation from participant responses to interview question 6.

Table 8

*Strategies to Sustain Business Under Economic Sanctions*

Themes	Number of participants ( <i>n</i> = 6)	Percentage of participants ( <i>n</i> = 6)
Sudanese government policies are heavily impacting the export activities and markets	6	100%
Relying on trust and partnership with the clients	6	100%
Needing to lift the sanctions for local businesses to flourish	6	100%

**Sudanese government policies significantly impact export activities and markets.** All participants opined that the government policies represented by the Central Bank of Sudan negatively impact the growth of the export sector and the markets. Policies included high fees, limited local finance, various taxes, and lack of support. For example, P1 complained about customs fees, “Sudan is the only country in the world who charge customs fees not less than 20% to 25% from the total value of the exports while other countries exempted exports from customs fees as an incentive to promote exports.” P2 talked about changing the collateral policy,

We take money from the bank, and the actual guarantee would be the medication itself or the product themselves, they would be kept at the bank, and later on, they are released as we pay back our dues, but this does not work, it has now stopped about five or seven years.

The government policies and restrictions adversely impact export growth and have often resulted in a negative trade balance as imports exceed exports as shown in Figure 10 (Central Bank of Sudan, 2017b). Imposing high taxes, customs fees, and reducing export proceeds discourage export small business owners. Waiving unnecessary fees and providing incentives would attract small business owners to grow businesses.

Year	Total Exports	Total Imports	Trade Balance
2002	1,949,115	2,446,384	(497,269)
2003	2,542,176	2,881,915	(339,739)
2004	3,777,764	4,075,230	(297,466)
2005	4,824,278	6,756,820	(1,932,542)
2006	5,656,568	8,073,498	(2,416,930)
2007	8,879,250	8,775,457	103,793
2008	11,670,504	9,351,540	2,318,964
2009	8,257,105	9,690,918	(1,433,813)
2010	11,404,280	10,044,770	1,359,510
2011	10,193,432	9,235,860	957,572
2012	4,066,499	9,230,318	(5,163,819)
2013	4,789,732	9,918,068	(5,128,336)
2014	4,350,210	9,211,300	(4,861,090)
2015	3,169,011	9,508,653	(6,339,642)

*Figure 10.* Sudan trade balance (2002-2015)—value in U.S. \$000s.  
*Adapted from: Central Bank of Sudan.*

**Relying on trust and partnership with the clients.** All participants have established strong business relationships with clients, which has promoted a high level of trust and in some cases, there were partnerships created between participants and their clients. For example, P1 has mutual business interest with a stakeholder. “The contract is between the company in London and the importer; we agree on the contract with a CC to

us, and we agree on that because Migana and we, are big shareholders in the company in London. This practice is going smoothly with no problems for 10 years.” P4 noted, “We deal with offshore companies we have outside in one or two convertible currencies like Emirates Dirham, and Saudi Riyal.” P5 described the role of partners in financing. “In some cases, we also obtain financing from our partners. They can pay us advance payments.” Due to the financial restrictions of the economic sanctions, import and export small business owners have trade deals with fewer long-term clients, which helped in building trust and confidence between both sides. As shared by participants, there were forms of partnerships and some contributions in financing.

**Needing to lift the sanctions for local businesses to flourish.** All participants considered sanctions as one of other factors that restrict the growth of individual businesses. For example, businesses cannot enter new markets, send and receive money easily for import and export business transactions. All participants believe that lifting sanctions would open new business opportunities and increase the import and export volumes. P1 noted, “I believe that the sanctions may have effects, but there another factor has larger effects, which the governmental impact concerning the export issues.” P2 added, “... It is going to open because a lot of the markets are right now closed.” P6 continued, “I believe, for more development and growth, the sanctions should be lifted; this is our opinion. However, under the current economic sanctions, people will continue working, but achieving progress will be slow.” All participants agreed that economic sanctions among other challenges had restricted business growth and resulted in lost opportunities.



For example, as shown in Figure 11, U.S. imports from Sudan in 2016 was a little over \$26 million (U.S. International Trade Administration, 2017b), while Figure 12 showed U.S. exports from Sudan around \$59 million (U.S. International Trade Administration, 2017a). Import and export volumes between Sudan and the United States seemed to be below expectations, however, with more effort and strategies and after finding solutions to the business restrictions, import and export small business owners could increase the volume of trade transactions and reach higher benchmarks.

<b>Product</b>	<b>Value US\$</b>	<b>Percent</b>
TOTAL ALL MERCHANDISE	\$15,327,823	58.6%
NON-MANUFACTURES	\$10,811,952	41.3%
MANUFACTURES	\$14,612	0.1%
DURABLE MANUFACTURES	\$14,612	0.1%
NON-DURABLE MANUFACTURES	\$0	0%
Grand Total	\$26,168,999	100%

*Figure 11. 2016 U.S.A. Total imports from Sudan.  
Adapted from: U.S. International Trade Administration.*

Product	Value US\$	Percent
AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS	\$42,728,147	75.7%
FOOD MANUFACTURES	\$7,345,780	12.5%
MACHINERY, EXCEPT ELECTRICAL	\$3,761,754	6.4%
CHEMICAL	\$3,130,835	5.3%
ALL OTHERS	\$1,775,618	3.0%
Grand Total	\$58,742,134	100%

*Figure 12. 2016 U.S.A. Total exports to Sudan.  
Adapted from: U.S. International Trade Administration.*

Participants have implemented three strategies used to sustain business under economic sanctions. However, the average monthly volume of exported U.S. goods to Sudan in 2017 was less than 11 million U.S. dollars, and imports were less than a million, which is poor (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2017). The three strategies were themes derived from the emergent theme, representing interview question 6. The conceptual framework for this study was the systems theory. Van Lier (2013) described the results from the application of systems theory in exemplifying the interactions of people, networks, or communities. Using the systems theory helped as a theoretical reference to aid in the identification of the strategies import and export small business owners used to sustain business under economic sanctions. The data analysis also involved evaluation in light of systems theory. Using the lens of the systems theory, indicated that it takes different strategies to increase the survivability of business consistent with the postulation, of the synergy of individual components contributing to organizational

effectiveness. Innovative strategies support a business to traverse the restrictive landscape of business sustainability under punishing and difficult economic sanctions.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Import and export small business owners in Sudan strive to expand businesses, increase sales, add new products, enter new markets, generate more profits, and sustain businesses. Sudanese import and export small business owners have experienced different and unusual challenges. The economic sanctions have restricted businesses from transacting in the U.S. dollar and dealing with American companies, in addition to constraints imposed by the government of Sudan. The strategies to minimize or resolve these challenges may include forging partnerships with clients overseas, seeking to finance from trusted sources domestically, and negotiating better trade policies with the Central Bank of Sudan. The findings of this study could apply to all import and export small business owners in the state of Khartoum, Sudan, and benefit small businesses in Sudan.

Qualitative case studies by nature involve a small sample size, which does not guarantee the generalization of findings to the entire population of import and export small business owners in Sudan. However, the findings may shed light on strategies used by import and export small business owners for business sustainability, as there are similarities across the country, notably in living standards, government policies, corruption, business climate, and business restrictions. The study findings and knowledge could, therefore, benefit small businesses owners in Sudan as well. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa first formulated

in 1996 and included eight members, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, South Sudan, and Uganda (IGAD, 2017). The IAGD countries share some similarities in respect of poverty, Gross National Income (NGI) per capita, economic climate, geographic and cultural closeness, corruption, low volumes of exports, and weak domestic institutions (Desta & Hirsch, 2012). The findings would also likely hold value for small business owners in the IGAD countries.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify the strategies import and export small business owners use to sustain businesses under economic sanctions. The findings of this study may potentially contribute to positive social change, exemplified by possible improvement in the welfare of the owners, employees, stakeholders, and families in the region. The experiences and lessons learned from the discoveries can serve import and export small business owners with knowledge and strategies to overcome the adverse business environment, consequent to the restrictions and constraints arising from economic sanctions. Business sustainability offers some security against poverty and unemployment (Alvarez & Barney, 2014; Bruton et al., 2013). Practical strategies and practices applied by small business owners can have a favorable effect on enterprise sustainability, which may reduce the risk of business failure (Bamiatzi & Kirchmaier, 2014; Furlan et al., 2014). Small businesses contribute to economic growth by creating jobs (Mann, 2014).

In conclusion, the findings and the insightful knowledge provided by participants in this study may aid small business owners, employees, and communities, to facilitate

positive social change. The contribution of the study findings holds to improved living standards of individuals, employees, families, communities and the associated population spheres, which may indicate the potential to transform lives and make a worthy contribution to the positive social change in the area.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The study findings may serve to highlight sustainability strategies for import and export small business owners in Sudan. Import and export small business owners have shared views about the current business environment, which included strategies for (a) increasing the volume of business transactions, (b) funding, (c) fluctuation of foreign exchange rates, (d) securing payments for import and export transactions, (e) government policies and regulations, and (f) sustaining business under economic sanctions. Import and export small business owners in the state of Khartoum, Sudan have done an excellent job in finding options and creative solutions to surmount some of the challenges experienced over the past years. The following recommendations may advance the aspirations of small businesses towards the quest for continued business sustainability:

The first recommendation is that import and export small business owners need to consider establishing joint ventures and partnerships in the countries where no trade constraints limit association with clients. Through these joint ventures, overcoming some of the issues related to country of origin restrictions may be possible, to facilitate funds to move with greater freedom. All participants in the study expressed the difficulties associated with entering some markets and dealing in the U.S. currency.

The second recommendation addresses the challenge of securing financing and funding, which concerns all import and export small business owners. Funding is critical for small business owners to achieve business growth and sustainability (Feenstra, 2014). Import and export small business owners need to consider new sources of financing such as crowdfunding, VC, bootstrapping, and IPO. The diversification of funding sources provides a wide range of options in a changing business climate.

The third recommendation is that import and export small business owners need to consider mergers within the import and export business sector. Although mergers do not always have positive results, mergers remain as an option for two or more entities to produce effective operations methods, add new resources, increase capital, create business opportunities, reduce barriers to entry, and maximize returns (Uhlenbruck, Hughes-Morgan, Hitt, Ferrier, & Brymer, 2017).

The fourth recommendation is that import and export small business owners need to reach out to the government to establish a new agency fully-funded by the government to offer financing to import and export small business owners in both local and foreign currencies at affordable interest rates and flexible forms of collateral. All participants shared that the government policies are not stable and do not provide official channels for funding. Import and export small business owners do not receive support from the Central Bank of Sudan specifically in securing foreign currencies, which have multiple exchange rates every day as shared by participants.

The consequences of the dissemination of the research findings are the essence to the appreciation of the study quality and impartiality (Barton, Tam, Abbott, Hall, & Liaw,

2017). The application of the interpretation of findings is important, which makes the dissemination among the proper audience a high scholar recommendation (Barton et al., 2017). Each participant in this study will receive a summary of the study findings. There is a little knowledge about import and export small business owners who operate under restricted financial environments. There are organizations specialized in providing support for U.S. small businesses in international trade who could benefit from the results and findings of this study. The following organizations will receive a copy of the final research after publication: (a) The Sudanese Businessmen and Employers Federation, Khartoum, Sudan, (b) The International Trade Center at UTSA, (c) Texas International Business Accelerator (TIBA), and (d) International Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify the strategies import and export small business owners used to sustain businesses under economic sanctions. The sample for the study was a subset of a population of import and export small business owners in the state of Khartoum, Sudan. Participants were import and export small business owners who live and operate businesses in Khartoum, Sudan for a minimum of 5 years.

The first recommendation is to replicate this study to include import and export small business owners in other big cities in Sudan, such as Port Sudan, El-Obeid, Wad Medani, and Nyala. Participants in these cities may have additional insights, and the experiences may be unique and different. The second recommendation is to replicate this

study to cover small business owners in the pharmaceutical industry, automobile dealerships, department stores, travel and tourism, and spare parts.

The findings of the current study showed that all participants have identified that access to funding was hard. The third recommendation is to replicate this study to focus only on funding strategies for the sustainability of small businesses. The findings also showed that the fluctuation of the exchange rate is difficult to handle; therefore, the fourth recommendation is to replicate this study and concentrate only on the factor of exchange rate strategies, insofar as increasing small business sustainability. The business climate in Sudan is not quite different from the countries in the region. However, the challenges of small business may differ. The fifth recommendation is to replicate this study to include IGAD countries in East Africa such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Uganda, Kenya, Djibouti, and South Sudan as economic environment, culture, and trade restrictions are common as noted by Desta and Hirsch (2012). Future researchers may consider other methodologies and designs to study small business strategies to achieve sustainability.

### **Reflections**

The doctoral journey at Walden University is a great opportunity to fulfill my dream of achieving higher education and step into a new academic career. I have a passion for the research topic, which involved traveling overseas. The interview stage was useful and led to meeting with new people, who openly shared experiences. The interview transcription, data analysis, and presenting of research findings were all new experiences, which I enjoyed. There were times of frustration, especially when I received



the study back with recommendations for minor changes and edits, and there were times of happiness and joy each time I reached a milestone. The DBA experience overall has been full of knowledge and an opportunity to connect with highly intellectual people either virtually in the classroom, or face-to-face during academic residencies.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to identify the strategies import and export small business owners used to sustain businesses under economic sanctions. Systems theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Six import and export small business owners who resided and operated a business in the state of Khartoum, Sudan for a minimum of 5 years, participated in this study. The method of primary data collection entailed using face-to-face semistructured interviews, to record, transcribe, and analyze verbatim transcriptions using NVivo Pro 11. The analysis of data yielded six emergent themes: (a) strategies used to increase the volume of business transactions, (b) strategies used to secure funding for business, (c) strategies used to secure payments for import, or export business transactions, (d) strategies used to mitigate the risks associated with fluctuations in foreign exchange rates for the import, export business transactions, (e) strategies used for payments made or received involving foreign currencies, and (f) the strategies used to sustain business under economic sanctions.

The findings and knowledge from this study may benefit small business owners in the state of Khartoum, Sudan in finding and applying new strategies to sustain business under the prevailing economic sanctions. Researchers may furthermore replicate the

study in different regions or countries and apply the knowledge to other small business activities. The findings may also contribute to better business practices and positive social change. A successful sustainable business can offer better salaries and payments to employees, thereby elevating the quality and standard of life standards for small business owners, employees, families, and communities. The results from this study showed that import and export small business owners in Khartoum, Sudan have despite the business restrictions implemented creative and innovative strategies to negate the financial restrictions, displaying ingenuity and resourcefulness in sustaining businesses. Import and export business owners in Khartoum, Sudan shared novel ideas and strategies to overcome the current business environment, which constrained business activities in domestic and international spheres. These strategies depicted some approaches in increasing business transactions, financing, mitigating foreign currency fluctuation rates, and ensuring payments in foreign currencies. The study findings may contribute new knowledge in highlighting the challenges Sudanese import and export small business face, wherein the only choice of these individuals reflects the need to resort to ingenious strategies in revenue management, to survive crippling economic sanctions.

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## Appendix A: Semistructured Interview Protocol

<b>Semistructured Interview Protocol</b>	
<b>Step</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Selecting Participants</b>	Will contact participants by e-mail or phone.
<b>Explaining the Research Study and Objectives</b>	Will e-mail the Introduction Letter (Appendix B) to each potential participant.
<b>Informed Consent Form</b>	Will e-mail to each participant requesting to reply back by typing " <i>I consent</i> " if they decided to participate.
<b>Setting Time and Place for Interview</b>	Will set interview date, time, and location as agreed with participants.
<b>Thank participants, start interview</b>	Ask interview questions (Appendix D).
<b>Recording the Interview</b>	Will record each interview using a digital voice recorder. A thank you e-mail will follow after the completion of the interview.
<b>Follow-up Questions</b>	Will ask participants a couple of follow-up questions as needed by e-mail or phone.
<b>Transcribing the Interview</b>	Will transcribe each interview within 24 hours after completion of the interview.
<b>Transcript Review</b>	Will e-mail the transcribed transcript to each participant requesting to check for accuracy (Appendix F).
<b>Member Checking</b>	Will e-mail data analysis results to each participant to provide feedback whether the findings are reasonable (Appendix G).
<b>Final Study</b>	Will offer each participant a copy of the final study by e-mail if they are interested.

## Appendix B: Introduction Letter

You are invited to participate in an interview session for my doctoral research study titled “Exploring Importers and Exporters Strategies for Business Sustainability under Economic Sanctions.” If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked eight semi-structured questions during the interview, which should last between 30 to 45 minutes. Follow-up questions may be asked to seek clarification or additional information. The purpose of this qualitative single case study is to determine the strategies Sudanese import and export business owners need to sustain businesses under economic sanctions. Your in-depth responses to the interview questions would significantly contribute to my research findings. Once this study is approved by Walden University, and upon your request, you will be provided an electronic copy of my dissertation manuscript as long as you provided a valid e-mail address. The interview session will be recorded. Data collected from the interview session will only be used for purposes of this study. Your identity, or your organization identity, and your responses to the interview questions will remain anonymous. If you are willing to participate in this study, please authorize the attached Informed Consent Form, and return to me via e-mail [essam.abdalla@waldenu.edu](mailto:essam.abdalla@waldenu.edu) or by hand. After I receive the authorized form, I will contact you to schedule an interview. Please feel free to contact me by e-mail if you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study.

Best regards,

Essam Abdalla, Doctorate Candidate, Walden University

Dr. Lionel de Souza, Dissertation Committee Chair

### Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to increase the volume of your business transactions?
2. What strategies do you use to secure funding for your business?
3. What strategies do you use to secure payments for your import, or export business transactions?
4. What strategies do you use to mitigate the risks associated with fluctuation in foreign exchange rates for your import, export business transactions?
5. What strategies do you use for payments made or received involving foreign currencies?
6. What information would you like to add about sustaining your business under economic sanctions?

## Appendix D: Certificate of Ethical Compliance



## Appendix E: Transcript Review E-mail

Subject: Interview Transcript Review

Hello, (Participant's Name),

In my effort to enhance the reliability of the research study, attached is the transcript of the recorded interview I had with you recently. Please go over the content, check the accuracy of the information you provided, and feel free to make corrections as needed. I have turned-on the tracking function, which will make it easy to capture the changes you will make in a different underlined color.

If you find no errors in the content, please reply to this e-mail by typing "*Accepted.*" If I did not receive your response within two days from the date of this e-mail, I would consider that as an acceptance, and the interview transcript will remain unchanged.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Essam Abdalla

Walden University

## Appendix F: Member Checking E-mail

Subject: Member Checking

Hello, (Participant's Name),

Attached are the results of the data analysis from the data collection sources including the interviews I had with all participants in the study. This step is called *Member Checking*, which allows the participants to review the findings and provide their reflections on the reasonability of the findings. Member checking, therefore, is a validation practice between the researcher and participants to ensure dependability and transferability, enhance creditability and validity of the study. Please go over the content and reply back to this e-mail either by typing "*I accept*" or present your argument if you disagree in the body of the e-mail.

If I did not receive your response within two days from the date of this e-mail, I would consider that as an acceptance of the findings.

Once again, I would like to thank you for your time and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Essam Abdalla

Walden University