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## REVIEWER'S REPORT

**Manuscript No.: IJAR-58122**

**Title: The Economic Effects of Import Dependence on SMEs in Afghanistan- A Systematic Review**

**Recommendation:**

Accept as it is .....

Accept after minor revision.....

**Accept after major revision .....**

Do not accept (*Reasons below*) .....

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓		
Techn. Quality			✓	
Clarity			✓	
Significance		✓		

**Reviewer's ID: JPR-002**

### *Detailed Reviewer's Report*

Overall Evaluation:

The manuscript addresses an important and policy-relevant topic by examining how import dependence influences the survival and sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Afghanistan. The topic is timely and significant because Afghanistan's economic structure remains highly dependent on imports and SMEs contribute substantially to employment and economic resilience. The manuscript attempts to synthesize existing academic and policy literature and provides practical recommendations for reducing dependence on imported inputs. However, while the study has potential, the current version requires substantial revision before it can be considered suitable for publication. Major concerns relate to methodological rigor, systematic review procedures, quality of academic writing, source reliability, analytical depth, data presentation, and consistency between objectives and findings.

Abstract:

The abstract provides a broad overview of the study and introduces the importance of SMEs and import dependence in Afghanistan. However, it lacks the structure generally expected in academic publishing. The abstract should clearly separate background, objective, methodology, findings, and conclusion. The methodology section remains vague and does not explain how studies were identified, screened, or selected. Statements such as "This study result will discover" should be revised because systematic

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reviews synthesize existing evidence rather than generate new empirical findings. The conclusion should present precise insights instead of general observations.

### Title:

The title is relevant and aligned with the study objective. However, the phrase "Economic Effects" suggests broad economic measurement, while the manuscript mainly examines business survival and operational vulnerability. Consider revising the title to better reflect the scope, such as "Import Dependence and SME Survival in Afghanistan: A Systematic Literature Review."

### Introduction:

The introduction establishes the significance of SMEs in Afghanistan and explains the country's import dependency. It effectively creates contextual relevance. However, several statements require stronger citation support and clearer academic expression. The literature review component embedded within the introduction remains descriptive rather than analytical. There is insufficient engagement with existing theories related to trade dependence, supply chain resilience, SME vulnerability, and economic sustainability. The research gap should be articulated more clearly by identifying exactly what previous studies failed to examine.

### Objectives:

The objectives are clear and understandable. However, Objective 2 ("measure how import dependence affects survival") creates methodological inconsistency because a systematic review does not directly measure relationships unless meta-analysis or quantitative synthesis is performed. The objective should instead state "examine" or "evaluate" the relationship.

### Methodology:

This section represents the manuscript's most significant weakness. The paper claims to adopt a systematic review approach but does not fully follow accepted systematic review standards such as PRISMA. Critical methodological elements are missing, including:

- Search strategy and search strings.
- Inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- Number of articles identified and selected.
- Screening and quality assessment process.
- Time period covered.
- Data extraction and synthesis procedures.

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The authors cite PRISMA (2021), but the manuscript does not demonstrate actual implementation of PRISMA guidelines. Inclusion of a PRISMA flow diagram and detailed review protocol is strongly recommended. Without methodological transparency, reproducibility is limited.

Data Sources and Evidence Quality:

The manuscript combines academic literature with institutional reports. While this approach can strengthen contextual understanding, excessive dependence on policy reports reduces academic rigor. More peer-reviewed journal articles should be included. Several references appear descriptive rather than analytical. The balance between empirical studies and institutional publications should be improved.

Findings and Analysis:

The thematic findings identify supply disruptions, exchange rate volatility, and cost instability as major mechanisms through which import dependence affects SMEs. These themes are relevant and logically presented. However, the discussion lacks deeper synthesis across studies. Much of the section summarizes existing reports rather than critically comparing findings or identifying contradictions in the literature.

Tables and figures improve readability but require stronger methodological explanation. Table 1 and Table 2 raise concerns because the process used to compile and aggregate data from multiple institutional sources is unclear. Figure quality should be improved, labels standardized, and trends interpreted more critically rather than descriptively.

Discussion:

The discussion appropriately links findings with SME vulnerability and structural trade constraints. However, it should engage more deeply with theoretical perspectives and international comparisons. The discussion would benefit from connecting Afghan findings with studies from other fragile economies to strengthen generalizability.

Conclusion:

The conclusion aligns with the overall argument but repeats earlier sections rather than presenting concise scholarly implications. The authors should clearly distinguish between findings, implications, limitations, and future research directions. Statements should remain cautious because causality cannot be fully established through literature review alone.

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Recommendations:

The recommendations are practical and policy-oriented. However, they would be stronger if linked directly to reviewed evidence. Recommendations should distinguish between short-term interventions and long-term structural reforms.