

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-58866

Title: Singapore SMEs: expanding in 2026 .

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-130

Detailed Reviewer's Report

1. Overall Evaluation

The manuscript, "Singapore SMEs: Expanding in 2026," addresses a relevant and timely issue concerning the difficulties faced by Singaporean SMEs in scaling despite substantial government support. The paper examines multiple constraints, including labour and skills shortages, operating costs, finance, digitalisation, marketing, and internationalisation. It also discusses government support schemes and uses several SME case examples to illustrate how targeted interventions may contribute to business growth. A major strength is the attempt to move beyond the simple argument that inadequate government support is responsible for SME difficulties. The manuscript instead proposes an implementation and capability gap perspective. The mixed-method research design proposed in the methodology is also appropriate in principle. However, the manuscript in its present form has important methodological and scholarly limitations. Although it presents a survey and intervention study as part of the methodology, the reported findings are primarily based on secondary evidence and published case studies, rather than the proposed primary survey, interviews, or intervention. The authors themselves acknowledge this limitation. Consequently, several hypotheses are stated as supported even though the evidence does not appear sufficiently rigorous to establish causal relationships.

2. Strengths

- 1. Timely and relevant topic:** SME growth, productivity, digitalisation, labour constraints, and government support are important issues in Singapore's current economic environment.

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2. **Clear research problem:** The paper presents an interesting paradox—why SMEs continue to face scaling difficulties despite extensive government assistance.
3. **Broad coverage of growth barriers:** The manuscript considers cost, labour, skills, finance, technology, marketing, and internationalisation rather than focusing on a single factor.
4. **Well-defined objectives and hypotheses:** Five hypotheses are clearly formulated around cost pressures, skills, digitalisation, marketing, and tailored government interventions.
5. **Practical orientation:** The proposed recommendations—diagnostic assessment, implementation support, outcome-based evaluation, and simplified access to government schemes—are practically relevant.
6. **Recognition of limitations:** The manuscript appropriately acknowledges that the case evidence cannot establish that government assistance will benefit all SMEs and that other factors may influence firm performance.

3. Areas for Improvement

1. **Methodology and empirical evidence:** This is the most significant concern. The methodology proposes a survey of 10–30 SME owners, interviews with 5–10 managers, and interventions involving 2–5 SMEs, but the reported results do not provide evidence from these primary research activities. The authors should either conduct and report the proposed primary research or clearly reposition the manuscript as a secondary/case-study-based research paper.
2. **Sample size and research design:** If primary data are collected, the sampling procedure, respondent characteristics, questionnaire development, validity/reliability testing, and analytical techniques should be explained. A sample of 10–30 SMEs would also be too limited to support broad generalisations about Singaporean SMEs.
3. **Hypothesis testing:** The labels “Supported” and “Partially supported” should be used cautiously. The evidence presented largely consists of descriptive case studies. Statistical or systematic qualitative evidence is needed before claiming that hypotheses are supported.
4. **Causality:** The manuscript correctly notes that before-and-after comparisons can be affected by seasonality, competition, promotions, and other factors. The same caution should be consistently applied to the case-study findings.
5. **Literature review:** The theoretical and empirical literature supporting the relationships between SME growth, government intervention, digitalisation, skills, finance, and internationalisation should be strengthened. The manuscript currently relies considerably on descriptive discussion and case evidence.

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6. **Referencing and source verification:** Several quantitative claims and company outcomes should be supported with complete and consistently formatted references. The source and methodology behind reported figures such as productivity increases, revenue growth, and website-visit increases should be made transparent.
7. **Language and presentation:** The manuscript requires substantial English-language editing. There are frequent grammatical errors, awkward sentence constructions, inconsistent terminology, punctuation problems, and typographical errors. For example, phrases such as “tailored inventions” appear to be intended as “tailored interventions.” The paper would benefit from professional language editing.
8. **Contribution and novelty:** The manuscript should more clearly identify its original contribution to the existing SME literature. At present, many arguments are well established. The authors should explain precisely what new conceptual, empirical, or policy insight the paper contributes.