

Interactive Effects of entrepreneurial and Learning Orientation on Firms' Performance: Evidence from Malaysian Exporters

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Abstract

Building on the resource-based view (RBV), this paper articulates an integrative approach to explicate the interactive effects of two strategic orientations, i.e. entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and learning orientation (LO), to offer nuanced explanations of firms' export performance from a developing country perspective. Adopting a quantitative approach, the proposed relationships are explored via partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) in a sample of 69 exporters from the state of Sabah in Malaysia. The results indicate that EO has a significant positive effect on the firms' export performance. Further, the results reveal that the positive association of EO on export performance is enhanced when moderated by a high level of LO. The data was collected using a single key informant, i.e. exporter from a single country, Malaysia; therefore, some limitations might present in terms of generalisability and response bias. The findings contribute to the extant literature on the relationship between strategic orientations and internationalisation. Notably, the study articulates an integrative approach to explain the EO's interaction effects with LO, creating a synergistic and complementary effect on export performance. It further elucidates the need to

embrace an integrative approach in understanding exporters from a developing economy context. Practical implications of this study to managers and policymakers are discussed.

Keywords: export performance, entrepreneurial orientation, learning orientation, developing country, Malaysia

1. Introduction

It is generally agreed that international business offers firms wider business opportunities for growth and opens access to an enlarged customer base. A more significant and promising customer base assists firms in raising sales and productivity to improve firms' overall profitability, which eventually has a significant contribution to a country's social and economic development (Chandra et al., 2020). Nevertheless, given the steady rise of competition in international markets, the growth and development of firms depend greatly on better comprehending the determinants of export performance (Bhat and Momaya, 2020; Chandra et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2016).

Accordingly, extant studies have attempted to explain various internal firm factors and external environment characteristics that affect firms' export performance (Bhat and Momaya, 2020; Chen et al., 2016; Haddoud et al., 2019). Notably, much of the extant empirical research focuses on the direct effects of strategic orientations of the firms on their export performance (Adams et al., 2019). Moreover, these direct effects of various strategic orientations on firms' performance are commonly being studied individually (Boso et al., 2013; Deutscher et al., 2016).

However, the interactive and complementary effects of different strategic orientations on firm performance have received relatively less attention (Adams et al., 2019; Nasir et al., 2017; Zacca and Alhoqail, 2021). Additionally, most empirical studies on export performance are derived from firms in developed economies, yet many firms from developing economies are increasingly active and have become critical international players (Chandra et al., 2020; Cui et al., 2018). A gap thus exists in current understanding of how different types of strategic orientations that exist simultaneously can interactively influence firms' export performance based on a developing economy context. Thus, this study aims to unravel this research gap by examining two specific types of strategic orientations, i.e. entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and learning orientation (LO), in the context of export performance of firms from a developing economy context, Malaysia.

The main research question of this study is: *“What are the interactive effects of EO and LO on export performance?”* while the main objective of the study is to examine two core sets of associations: (1) the direct association between EO and export performance; and (2) the moderating effect of LO on the relationship between EO and export performance. EO is a firm's entrepreneurial attribute that underpins entrepreneurial decisions and actions (Covin and Wales, 2019). In contrast, LO is a firm's learning activities in creating and utilising knowledge (Sinkula et al., 1997). It is asserted that EO is a learning-based construct (Baker and Sinkula, 2009; Wang, 2008). It is thus noteworthy studying the moderating role of LO on the effect of EO on firms' export performance. Accordingly, this study aims to introduce a

boundary condition to the relationship between EO of the firm and its' export performance.

In terms of context, this study focuses on the manufacturing companies that have been involved in exporting, irrespective of whether they are small and medium enterprises (SMEs) or large companies. Sabah is one of the states in Malaysia that is highly export-oriented. Many Sabah companies in the plantation, wood, food and fishery industries exported a significant percentage of their products to the international markets. In this study, a sample of these exporting companies is examined for their EO and LO on export performance.

Correspondingly, this study extends internationalisation literature and research on the role of strategic orientations on firms' export performance. The contribution is twofold. First, this study answers the recent call to investigate the under-explored phenomenon of the interactive effects between various strategic orientations on firm performance (Adams et al., 2019; Boso et al., 2013; Zacca and Alhoqail, 2021). While previous studies addressed different types of strategic orientations in separation, this study embraces an integrative approach to examine the complementary and interactive effects of EO and LO on export performance. By addressing this aim, this study integrates two different streams of literature, i.e. entrepreneurship and organisational learning, in advancing the knowledge on export performance. Second, this study spurs empirical investigations to enrich the understanding of the interactive effects of various strategic orientations, particularly in developing economy contexts, i.e., Malaysia.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: Section 2 discusses the relevant literature review pertaining to the study. Section 3 presents the study's theoretical argument and hypotheses development. Section 4 discusses the research methodology adopted, whereas Section 5 indicates the statistical analysis results. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper with the discussion of implications and limitations of the study.

2. Literature review

2.1 The Resource-Based View (RBV): EO and LO

This study is underpinned by the RBV that has been widely employed in internationalisation studies (Elia et al., 2021; Keskin et al., 2021). The key idea of the RBV posits that firms are different due to the inherent resources they possess, and these differences subsequently explain differences in firms' competitive advantages (Barney, 1991). Extant studies acknowledged that internal factors of the firm, rather than external environment factors, are more likely to determine firms' internationalisation processes and outcomes (Elia et al., 2021; Keskin et al., 2021). Barney (1991) explained that resources could be categorised into two major groups: (1) tangible (e.g. physical assets – land, machine, cash, etc.), and (2) intangible (knowledge, process, etc.). Strategic orientations of the firms fall under the latter group, i.e. intangible resources.

Building on the RBV, this study focuses on two strategic orientations of the firms and examine their influence on export performance: EO and LO. In the extant literature, EO encompasses firms' strategic postures that support value creation in their processes, practices, or activities by engaging in entrepreneurial endeavours (Wales, 2016; Covin and Wales,

2019). EO is reflected via three dimensions, namely innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking (Miller 1983; Covin and Slevin, 1989; Covin and Wales, 2019). The construct of EO is applied not only limited to the entrepreneurship field but also other fields such as marketing (Boso et al., 2013; Cui et al., 2018), management (Chew et al., 2021) and international business (Acosta et al., 2018; Thanos et al., 2017).

Innovativeness, the first dimension, indicates firms' tendency to promote and support creative ideas that contribute significantly to new products or enhance existing products, processes, or technologies (Adams et al., 2019; Aloulou, 2019; Knight, 2000; Lumpkin and Dess, 1996). Knight and Cavusgil (2004) explained that firms with higher innovation tendencies enable their firms to nurture and cultivate unique knowledge and capabilities, leading to enhanced performance. The second dimension, proactiveness, indicates the firms' forward-looking and opportunity-seeking behaviour that enable them to be forthright in the competition (Acosta et al., 2018; Lumpkin and Dess, 1996). Proactive firms, thus, have the advantage to become the leader in their industry (Cui et al. 2018; Lan and Wu, 2010; Zahra and Covin, 1995). Risk-taking as the third dimension indicates firms' tendency to embrace risk and uncertainty. Further, firms with higher tolerance towards risk are more likely to dedicate resources to activity that entails a substantial possibility of failure, along with chances of high return (Chew et al. 2021; Knight, 2000). Lumpkin and Dess (1996) clarified that risks are subjective and can be associated with varying contexts. In the international business context, risk can be viewed through the uncertainties of operating in foreign markets. The international market presents significantly different challenges than the domestic market. Hence, firms with higher risk tolerance can embrace the uncertainty raised in international operations. In short, the international activity of the firm can be considered as an entrepreneurial act because it involves firms' actions in identifying and exploiting new business opportunities in a foreign market that are associated with liabilities of foreignness (Acosta et al., 2018; Lan and Wu, 2010; Thanos et al., 2017).

LO is a firm's learning activities in creating and utilising knowledge to enhance its competitive advantage and position in the market (Abiodun and Mahmood, 2015; Calantone et al., 2002; Sinkula et al., 1997). Sinkula et al. (1997) explained that the components associated with LO revolve around three dimensions: (1) commitment to learning, (2) shared vision, and (3) open-mindedness. The first dimension, commitment to learning, indicates firms' tendency to support and foster a learning culture (Calantone et al., 2002). Firms committed to learning understand that their actions are underpinned by cause and effect. Hence, it is necessary to identify errors regularly in their products, processes, or activities (Baker and Sinkula, 1999). Shared vision, the second dimension, indicates firms' tendency to ensure that the focus and idea of learning are communicated throughout the firms and become the firms' agenda (Baker and Sinkula, 1999; Calantone et al., 2002). A shared vision ensures that all employees in the firm have the same dominant logic (e.g. business objectives) to achieve the firm's desired outcomes (e.g. market shares, sales, etc.) (Baker and Sinkula, 1999). The third dimension, open-mindedness, indicates the tendency of firms to be readily and willingly in critically evaluating their current processes, practices and embrace new ideas or changes in the markets (Calantone et al., 2002; Sinkula et al., 1997). Additionally,

open-mindedness involves firms' willingness to unlearn old processes or practices in order to give way to a new knowledge base (Calantone et al., 2002).

The construct of LO has received much attention in various fields of study, such as in international business (Abiodun and Mahmood, 2015; Li et al., 2010), management (Aloulou, 2019; Dutta et al., 2016) and marketing (Long, 2013). Although LO has been studied in different fields, extant studies reveal a positive association between LO with firm performance (Wang, 2008). Moreover, efforts to associate LO with performance generally indicated that firms with high levels of LO are more likely to outperform their rivals, particularly in turbulent and intensely competitive environments such as international markets (Aloulou, 2019; Slater and Narver, 1995; Wang, 2008). Firms with high LO are more likely to learn about the differences of foreign countries and adapt to those differences in their business processes, activities and products or services offered. Further, firms equipped with a high knowledge-based capability can support not only their initial internationalisation but also a subsequent expansion in the global market. Therefore, a firm's capability to continuously learn and acquire information on foreign markets enables firms to obtain competitive advantages in the marketplace compared to competitors and, in turn, have greater performance (Abiodun and Mahmood, 2015; Dutta et al., 2016).

3. The Development of Research Hypotheses and Theoretical Framework

3.1 EO and Export Performance Relationship

How a firm operates in today's fast and rapidly changing business environment, remain a critical question. This is because such environmental conditions, specifically international environments, place intense demands on firms to actively interpret opportunities and threats (Brouthers et al., 2015; Karami and Tang, 2019; Thanos et al., 2017). Therefore, firms with a high level of EO are commonly presumed to be more proactive and assertive to scan for and identify new business opportunities, develop innovative solutions to problems, and be willing to take risks to pursue untapped and unproven market prospects to reap targeted outcomes than their competitors (Acosta et al., 2018; Covin and Slevin, 1989; Cui et al., 2018; Rauch et al., 2009). In an international context in which market conditions and resource needs are significantly different from and present higher risks than the domestic market, EO's effect on firms' performance is expected to be enhanced (Brouthers et al., 2015; Thanos et al., 2017).

Extant studies provide empirical evidence to support the argument that internationalised firms tend to have a higher level of EO than their non-internationalised counterparts (e.g. Donbesuur et al., 2020; Karami and Tang, 2019; Thanos et al., 2017). Previous findings show that international markets consist of customers with various tastes and preferences; thus, firms with greater creativity in their products developments (i.e. innovativeness) are able to fulfil and satisfy consumers' demands in different countries (Adams, 2019; Aloulou et al., 2019; Knight, 2000; Zhang et al., 2012). Moreover, firms that are eager and forefront in seeking opportunities (i.e. proactiveness) in international markets could gain a significant advantage ahead of their competitors (Thanos et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2012). The main distinction between domestic and international markets lies in the external business environment whereby the international market is exposed to a different set of cultural,

political, economic, and legal systems (Lan and Wu, 2010). This distinction presents additional risks, and hence, only firms with greater willingness to tolerate such risks (i.e. risk-taking) can boldly pursue the vast opportunities in the international markets.

In light of the above arguments, the following hypothesis is developed.

Hypothesis 1: EO of the firm is positively associated with export performance.

3.3 The Moderating Effect of LO on the EO-export Performance Relationship

Firms with an EO are characterised as innovative, proactive, and risk-taking tolerant. Such characteristics could be amplified when the firms exhibit a higher commitment to learning (Boso et al., 2013; Dutta et al., 2016; Karami and Tang, 2019; Wang, 2008). Hence, instead of articulating a direct effect of LO of the firms on their export performance, this study argues that LO plays a moderating role in the EO-export performance relationship for three main reasons as follows.

First, as aforementioned, LO is a firm's learning activities in creating and utilising knowledge to enhance its competitive advantage and position in the market (Calantone et al., 2002; Sinkula et al., 1997). Such learning activities promote the manifestation of EO's innovative characteristic because it encourages creative ideas that lead to improved firms' innovation and business enhancement (Adams et al., 2019; Bhat and Momaya, 2020; Miller and Friesen, 1983).

Second, firms with an EO are proactively seeking new market opportunities. Hence, learning activities in the firms allow them to learn about the latest market outlooks that subsequently enable them to grab the available opportunities and stay ahead of the competition than their competitors. Additionally, continuous learning activities in the firms enable them to be alert to any changes in international markets and take immediate actions when needed (Thanos et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2012).

Third, firms with an EO are risk-taking tolerant because they believe that high risk is associated with a high return of investments (Chew et al., 2021; Knight, 2000; Thanos et al., 2017). However, firms could embrace risk by constantly environmental scanning and being well informed with the latest information about their markets and competitors. Thus, learning activities enhance firms' ability to take greater calculated risks (Abiodun and Mahmood, 2015; Dutta et al., 2016; Lan and Wu, 2010).

Based on these arguments, LO creates a conducive environment for EO to take place. Accordingly, this study expects that the positive influence of EO on export performance increases in the presence of greater LO. As such, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 2: The EO-export performance relationship is moderated by LO of the firms; firms with high levels of LO show stronger associations on the EO-export performance relationships.

Overall, this study proposes that EO directly affects export performance whilst LO has a moderating effect on the EO-export performance relationship, as depicted in Figure 1.

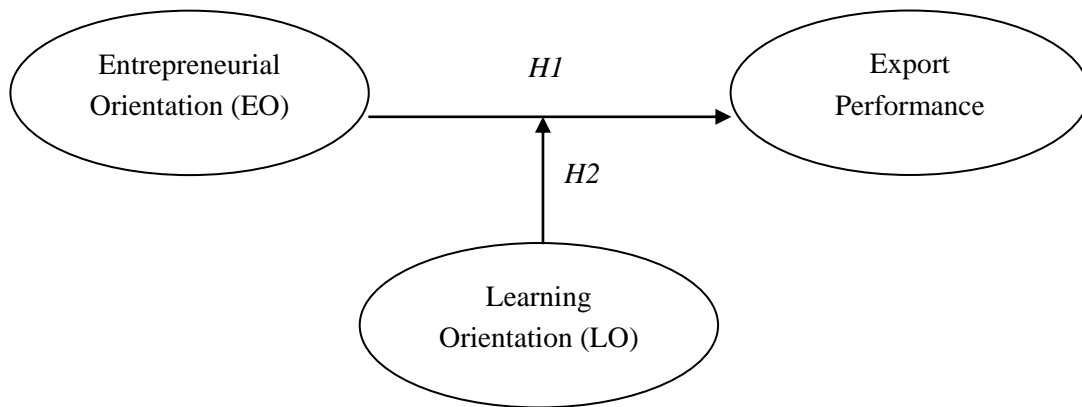


Figure 1. Research Model

4. Method

4.1 Sample and Data Collection

In accordance with the research aim to examine the interactive effects of EO and LO on export performance, this study employed a quantitative approach and collected data through a survey using a self-administered questionnaire. This study focuses on the manufacturing companies in the state of Sabah in Malaysia that are also engaged in exporting activities. The list of companies was selected from two directories of Sabah exporting companies provided by the Federation of Sabah Manufacturers (FSM) and Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE), Sabah Regional Office.

A total of 169 exporting companies were obtained. All companies were contacted to verify their status as exporting companies and solicit cooperation in the survey. Through the verification process, only 116 companies were identified as exporting companies that meet the following criteria for the sample: (1) the exporting company must also be a manufacturing company; (2) the exporting company must have exported to at least one foreign country, and (3) the company must be registered in Sabah. The remaining 53 companies indicated that they were no longer doing any exporting activities, thus not meeting the criteria set by this study.

The survey was addressed to the key informants of the firms, e.g. owners, directors, managers, etc., to ensure the right person with comprehensive knowledge and information about their firms in answering the questionnaire (Covin and Wales, 2019; Chew et al., 2021). From the 116 questionnaires distributed, 69 completed and useable questionnaires were obtained, with a response rate of 59.48 per cent. Table 1 provides the summary of the descriptive data of the respondent firms. Furthermore, Harman's one-factor test was assessed to ensure the collected data has no common method bias issues. The results indicate no common method bias detected in the sample (Podsakoff et al., 2013).

4.2 Measures

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, established scales from the previous study

were employed for all the variables in this study. All questions related to EO, LO and export performance were anchored from 1 (strongly disagreed/dissatisfied) to 7 (strongly agreed/satisfied).

EO. The most extensively used measures of EO came from Covin and Slevin (1989) and was based on earlier conceptualisations of EO by Miller (1983), which consisted of three fundamental characteristics; innovative attitude, pro-activeness, and the willingness to take risks. Many studies have adopted their measure of EO in different fields and contexts, and their results demonstrate high validity and reliability (e.g. Chew et al., 2021; Thanos et al., 2017). Thus, the three-dimensional construct of EO was applied in this study. Each dimension consisted of three items, giving a total of nine items for the EO construct.

LO. To measure LO, this study employed the LO scale developed by Sinkula et al. (1997) that consisted of three dimensions; commitment to learning, shared vision, and open-mindedness. Each dimension consists of four items, giving a total of twelve items. The measure of LO shows high validity and reliability in different research contexts and setting (e.g. Real et al., 2014; Wang, 2008).

Export performance. This study employed four subjective items in assessing the performance of firms in the international business in terms of export sales, export growth, export profitability, and perceived export success. These measures have been commonly adopted and reported with high validity and reliability in extant studies (e.g. Thanos et al., 2017).

Control variables. Two variables were controlled as it is expected to influence the study results. These variables were the age and size of the exporting companies. Prior studies found that export performance may vary with the age of a company (Chew et al., 2021; Thanos et al., 2017), whereas size has regularly been used as an indication to measure the resource availability of a firm, which influences the firm's ability to compete in international markets (Chew et al., 2021; Thanos et al., 2017).

Table 1. Descriptive data of the respondent firms

Profile	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Position of the key respondents in the firm	Owner	15	22
	General Manager/CEO	12	17
	Export Manager	19	27
	Operation Manager	8	12
	Others (e.g., R&D manager, human resource manager, etc.)	15	22
Gender of the key respondents in the firm	Male	45	65
	Female	24	35
Firm age (in years)	Less than 5	13	19
	5 – 10	5	7
	11 – 15	12	18
	16 – 20	6	8

	21 – 25	11	16
	26 – 30	4	6
	More than 30	18	26
Firm size	Less than 50 employees	23	33
	51 – 100 employees	10	15
	101 – 200 employees	17	24
	201 – 250 employees	2	3
	More than 250 employees	17	25

N = 69

5. Results

This study employed partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to test the proposed hypothesised relationship as outlined in the research model (see Figure 1). According to Chin (1998) and Hair et al. (2017), PLS-SEM is suitable to examine research models with multiple relationships (e.g., interactive relationships), and it accommodates small sample sizes that enable data to achieve high levels of statistical power. Hence, this method is robust to this study for two main reasons: first, the proposes interactive relationships among EO, LO, and firms' export performance, and second, only a small sample of 69 responses was obtained from the survey.

The analysis of PLS-SEM consists of two stages: (1) measurement model and (2) structural model. The first stage of analysis is to assess the measurement model in terms of validity and reliability. In contrast, the second stage of analysis is to assess the structural model in order to examine the relationships among variables.

5.1 The Measurement Model

Several tests were carried out to analyse the measurement model. First, the composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha were assessed. Both CR and Cronbach's alpha were above the accepted rule-of-thumb of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017; Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Nunnally, 1978). Second, the average variance extracted (AVE) was examined to assess the convergent validity. The results show that all variables have AVE above the recommended rule-of-thumb of 0.50 (Hulland, 1999). Table 2 summarises the results of CR, Cronbach's alpha and AVE. Finally, the research model is assessed for discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker test. To ensure that the research model has no discriminant validity issues, the value of diagonal elements should be larger than the value of off-diagonal elements in the corresponding rows and columns, as shown in Table 3 (Barclay et al., 1995).

Table 2. Results summary of the measurement model

Variables	Cronbach's alpha (>0.70)	Composite reliability (>0.70)	AVE (>0.50)
Entrepreneurial orientation (EO)	0.864	0.879	0.714
Learning orientation (LO)	0.894	0.913	0.714
Export performance (EP)	0.900	0.929	0.766

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

	EP	EO	LO
EP	0.769		
EO	0.473	0.714	
LO	0.520	0.579	0.713

Note: Numbers in bold indicate the square root of the AVE for each variable.

5.2 The Structural Model

Once the validity and reliability of the measurement model are confirmed, the structural model is assessed to examine the significance of the proposed hypothesised relationships and the predictive power of the research model. Following Hair et al. (2017), bootstrapping technique with 500 sub-samples is applied to test the hypothesised relationships in the research model.

Analysis of the structural model demonstrates that EO has a significant positive effect on firms' export performance ($\beta = 0.422$, $p < 0.01$, $t = 4.986$). Hence, Hypothesis 1 is supported. Further, this significant direct effect of EO explained 17.8 per cent of export performance variance (see Table 4).

Hypothesis 2 is to assess the moderating effect of LO on the EO-export performance relationship. The analysis shows that LO is positively and significantly moderates the EO-export performance relationship ($\beta = 0.157$, $p < 0.01$, $t = 2.013$). Hypothesis 2, thus, is supported. The moderating effect of LO increases the variance on export performance to 19.6 per cent (see Table 4). Additionally, the size of moderating effect of LO is moderate ($f^2 = 0.23$).

To better understand the moderation effect of LO, the interaction plots were created. Figure 2 shows export performance increases with a simultaneous and combination of high levels of EO and LO of the firms. The result suggests that the relationship between EO and export performance becomes stronger with high levels of LO.

Table 4. Results summary of the structural model

Structural path	Path coefficients	T-values	Hypothesis Supported
<i>H1</i> EO – export performance	0.422	4.986***	Yes
<i>H2</i> EO*LO – export performance	0.157	2.013**	Yes
	Direct effects model		Interaction effects model
R^2 in export performance	0.178***		0.196***
Adjusted R^2 in export performance	0.161***		0.184***
ΔR^2			0.018***

Note: ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

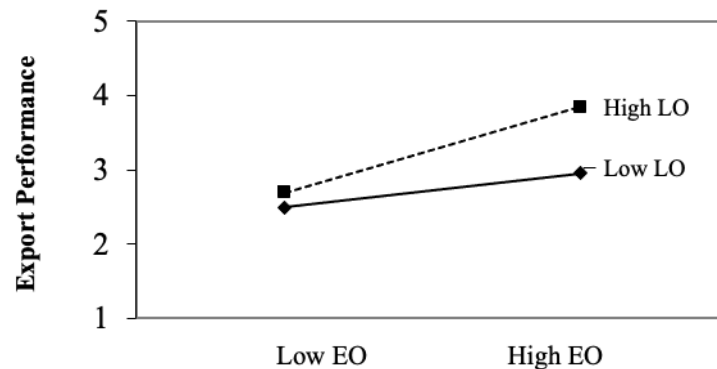


Figure 2. Sloped plot for EO X LO

6. Discussion

6.1 Theoretical, Practical, and Managerial Implications

There are important theoretical, practical, and managerial implications derived from the findings of this study.

First, this study extends internationalisation literature by examining firms' export performance. This study responds to the recent calls to investigate the interactive effects of different strategic orientations of the firm on export performance (Adams et al., 2019; Nasir et al., 2017; Zacca and Alhoqail, 2021). Accordingly, this study proposes an integrative approach to explicate the synergistic and complementary effect of two specific strategic orientations, i.e. EO and LO, on export performance. The findings support the RBV, which underpinned this study that performance is enhanced by leveraging the impact of resources. This study focused on the intangible resources of entrepreneurial and learning activities of the firm, and findings confirm the effect of EO and LO on export performance. More importantly, the findings underline the notable salience of LO as a vital moderator of the EO-export performance link in a developing country context. The findings enrich the knowledge of how the impact of EO on export performance is enhanced through LO. Additionally, the findings provide support for these tenets in the context of international business.

Second, the findings also provide important implications for business practitioners (e.g. exporting firms). This study highlights that the EO's effect on export performance can be enhanced with high levels of LO. Business practitioners, thus, are suggested to nurture a firm that values and promotes innovation, pro-activeness, greater tolerance of risk, commitment to learning, shared vision and open-mindedness. By doing so, they cultivate an organisational environment that supports all firm members to develop greater proclivity towards entrepreneurial and learning attitudes (Gerschewski et al., 2015; Karami and Tang, 2019).

Third, this study offers implications for policymakers in redefining of government policies supporting the manifestation of firms' strategic orientations. The Malaysian government, in specific, could have greater insights into the specific aspects of EO and LO that the government agencies could facilitate in assisting the exporting companies. Accordingly,

policymakers should provide the necessary support that encourages the firm to actively engage in entrepreneurial and learning activities such as providing R&D grants which encourage firms to be more innovative in their product development and/or organising workshops and seminars which can encourage firms to seek more information and knowledge about the rapidly changing business world (Freixanet, 2012).

6.2 Limitations and Suggestions

There are some limitations to this study. First, the data employed to test the proposed hypotheses were collected from only one key informant in each exporting company. While Harman's one-factor test indicated no issue raised from the common method bias, yet the potential for this threat cannot be ignored completely. A multiple informants approach that can reduce the possibility of single-respondent bias and attaining reliability and validity of findings can be applied in future research (Chew et al., 2021; Covin and Wales, 2019). Additionally, the data collected was limited only to exporting companies. To further advance the knowledge based on the current findings, future research should consider firms internationalised via other foreign entry strategies than exporting, such as licensing, joint venture, etc. Second, the sample size is relatively small because this study had viewed export performance from only one state in Malaysia, i.e. Sabah. While the response rate in this study is comparable to some earlier export and international business performance studies (e.g., Farrell et al., 2008; Thanos et al., 2017), future research could have more extensive coverage in the country or replicate the study to other countries to increase the generalisability of the current research findings. Third, this study only focuses on the internal factors of the firms. It is also important to acknowledge that external factors (e.g. environmental and institutional) could lead to further insights and enrich the current findings. Thus, future research could examine how internal and external factors jointly in explicating the firms' competitiveness and performance (Haddoud et al., 2019).

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