

Administrative management in the development of SMEs: A systematic literature review

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Abstract: Small business organizations play a strategic role in socioeconomic development, but they face strong structural challenges that limit their growth, competitiveness, sustainability, and innovation. The objective was to systematically identify studies on administrative management in the development of SMEs between 2021 and 2025, which includes the collection, analysis, and synthesis of documents. The method was descriptive and was applied through a PRISMA systematic review, analyzing 85 articles from the Scopus, ScienceDirect, and SciELO databases. The results reveal that managerial competencies, organizational knowledge, management practices, digitalization, and innovation are decisive for performance, sustainability, and organizational innovation. It is concluded that administrative management plays a strategic and integral role in the development of SMEs, by articulating human, digital, financial, and cultural aspects, which is essential to strengthen the competitiveness of these organizations. Administrative management; economy; innovation, small and medium-sized enterprises. (UNESCO Thesaurus).

Keywords: Administrative management; economy; innovation, small and medium-sized enterprises, (UNESCO Thesaurus)

1. INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the foundation of global production systems, generating most of the employment, supply and value added. But its success and survival depend on good administrative management (OG), which goes beyond operational coordination to include leadership, organizational learning, digitalization, and innovation (Holovnia et al., 2024; Quiroz-Flores et al., 2024).

In developing economies, the literature finds that institutional informality and low human capital limit technological absorption and sustainability (Salas et al., 2021; Ouédraogo & Gansonré, 2023). This creates a paradox: although digitalisation and innovation are strategic vectors, it is precisely SMEs that have the least capacity to adopt them due to a lack of financial resources, governance weaknesses and lack of managerial capacities (Dinku et al., 2024; Mathushan & Shantha, 2024).

Therefore, analyzing administrative management with a critical eye does not only mean describing empirical associations, but also discovering causal mechanisms that explain why some SMEs survive and grow, while others are trapped in vicious circles of informality and low productivity. In this context, the purpose of this article is to critically review the 2021-2025 scientific evidence, recognizing convergent patterns, contradictions, theoretical gaps, and future lines of research on the influence of GA on the business development of SMEs.

METHOD

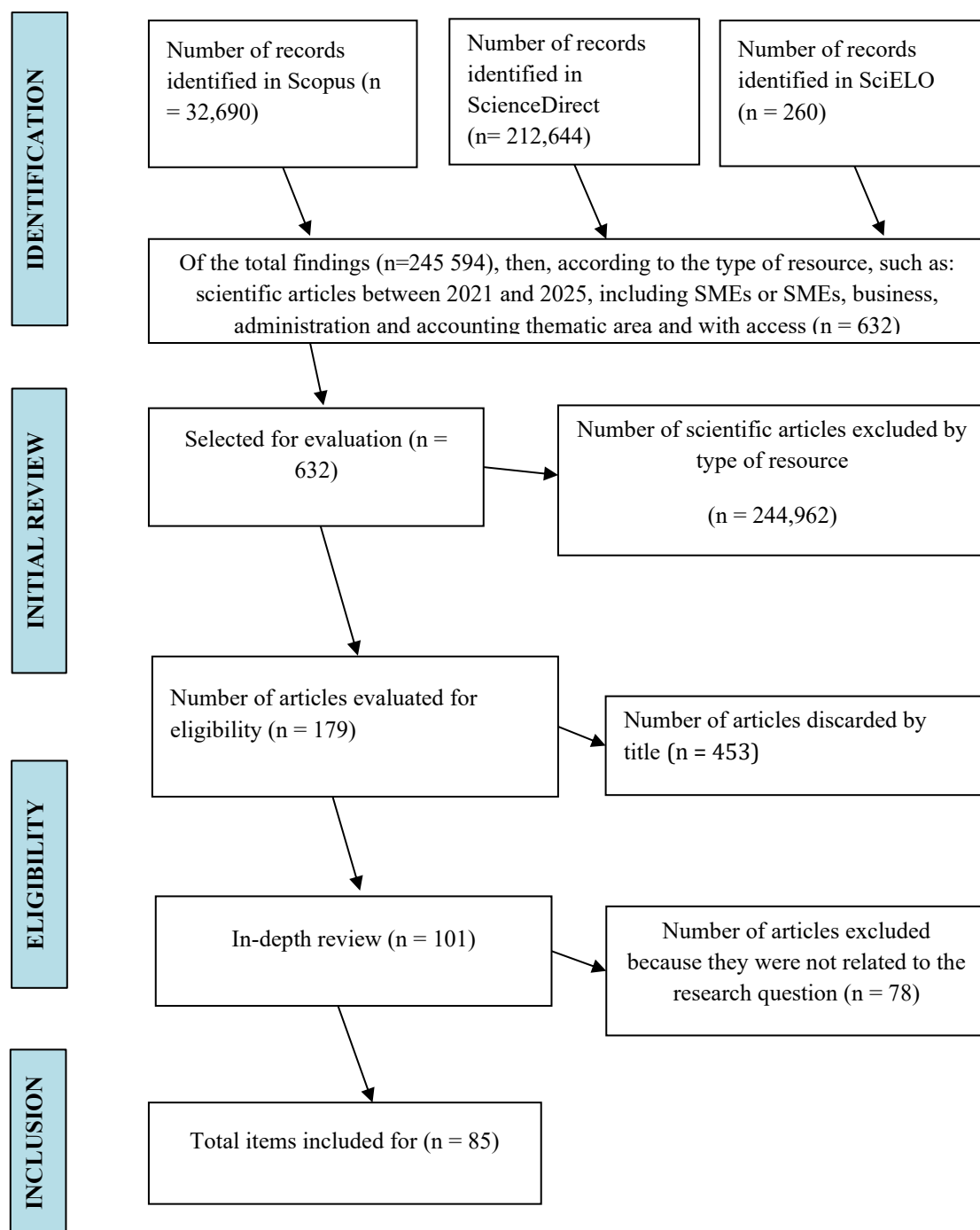


The study was carried out as a systematic literature review, following the PRISMA 2020 guideline, to find evidence on administrative management and its impact on the development of SMEs in the period 2021-2025. The search was carried out in the Scopus, ScienceDirect and SciELO databases, using Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" to combine keywords in Spanish and English related to administrative management, business performance and SMEs. This design made it possible to investigate expressions such as "administrative management", "administrative management", "management practices", "business development", "business development", "performance", "SMEs" or "SMEs", among other terminological equivalents.

In a first search, 245,594 records were identified. To ensure thematic relevance, it was filtered by publication time range, business area, administration and accounting, type of academic document and full text. Under these criteria, 632 studies were retained. Then, the titles were read to eliminate those articles that did not fit the objective of the research, for a total of 179 articles. With this game, an exhaustive review of summaries, theoretical frameworks, methodologies and findings was made, excluding repeated, marginal studies or without verifiable empirical evidence on administrative management in SMEs.

The process ended with the selection of 85 articles that met the criteria of relevance, methodological rigor and link to the object of study. From them was derived the analytical synthesis that supports the results of this research.

Figure 1.



Systematic Review Flowchart – Prisma

Elaboration: The authors.

After proceeding with the examination of the selected articles, they have been read, analyzed, and transferred according to their relevance to the subject studied. Similarly, during the process, annotations were made in a Word file and the log in an Excel file, version 2016. This helped for a better literary understanding from the filtering of precise data and validity of each selected article, subsequently the extraction, analysis and interpretation of all the relevant information was executed in order to respond to the proposed objective. The analytical exploration of this research is consolidated and summarized (Table No. 1), where it was specified according to the criteria of the thematic fields proposed to give the most relevant findings.

2. RESULTS

In the review, 85 scientific articles were identified from 2021 to 2025, which were classified into 11 thematic axes that account for how administrative management influences the growth of SMEs. The results indicate that the most researched factors are: talent management and managerial competencies, financial management, digitalization, logistics, circular economy and sustainability, innovation, strategic planning, performance measurement, organizational culture, and inter-institutional collaboration.

Table 1. Analytical synthesis of findings by thematic axis (2021–2025)

Axis of analysis	Predominant type of evidence	Key findings	Implications for SMEs
HR Management and Leadership	Quantitative and mixed (PLS-SEM; surveys; interviews)	Selection, training, internal communication and transformational leadership practices favor innovation and business performance.	Human capital is a strategic asset: it generates adaptive advantages and reduces structural vulnerability.
Management skills and knowledge management	Case and mixed studies	The formalization of knowledge (continuous learning, mentoring, networking) increases efficiency and productivity.	Knowledge is a lever for expansion: it converts operational experience into organizational capabilities.
Financial and accounting management	Quantitative (financial modeling, SEM)	Managerial accounting, prudent leverage and control systems improve solvency, profitability and survival.	SMEs with mature financial culture have lower mortality and more efficient access to capital.
Digital transformation	Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods	Digitization of processes and use of ICT strengthen organizational resilience and increase performance.	Technology adoption requires management maturity; in the absence of it, it generates limited or negative impact.
Logistics management	Multiple cases, surveys	Logistics integration, alliances with suppliers and digitized chains increase competitiveness.	Efficient logistics creates economies of scale and opens up external markets.
Circular economy and sustainability	Qualitative and quantitative	Green HRM, eco-innovation and circular practices improve reputation and performance.	Sustainability is not a cost: it is a strategy that increases legitimacy and brand value.
Innovation and entrepreneurship	Quantitative; SEM	Entrepreneurship and emotional-cognitive engagement stimulate growth and resilience.	SMEs that innovate in business model survive external shocks better.
Strategic planning and management	Case Studies and PLS-SEM	Formal planning and technical direction favor stability and long-term results.	Managerial informality reduces the capacity for adaptation and expansion.

Performance Measurement and Intellectual Capital	Quantitative; Interviews	Formal indicators allow rational decisions and continuous improvement.	Metrics strengthen organizational learning and reduce operational ambiguity.
Organizational culture	Casos y PLS-SEM	Shared values, legitimacy and leadership elevate reputation and governance.	Culture is intangible infrastructure: it affects retention, work environment and external trust.
Institutional collaboration and networks	Quantitative	Alliances with universities, clusters and public entities promote innovation and expansion.	Networks expand access to resources, knowledge and markets, mitigating the liability of smallness.

Elaboration: author.

In the set of articles reviewed, human resource management and leadership are the pillar with the greatest empirical evidence. Studies show time and time again that SMEs that invest in training, internal communication and transformational leadership perform better in innovation, staff satisfaction and business performance. It is not enough to hire talent, we must institutionalize practices that convert individual knowledge into organizational capacity, especially in contexts of high uncertainty. Digitalization is an enabler, but not an independent factor. Studies show that the benefits of ICT are achieved only when there is administrative maturity, performance measurement systems and organizational culture of learning. Without these elements, digitalization becomes superficial or reactive, without achieving sustainable improvements.

In finance, the articles agree that managerial accounting, smart leverage, and treasury management practices define long-term survival. Studies of Africa and Latin America show a paradox: credit is not a condition for growth; financial knowledge does, by preventing over-indebtedness, bad investments and reactive management. Sustainability and innovation are the new vectors of competitiveness. SMEs with green, circular and responsible practices not only reduce regulatory risks, but also gain legitimacy, attract talent and strengthen their reputation, for long-term business benefits. Finally, the evidence of networks and interorganizational collaboration shows that the performance of SMEs is not determined by their size or internal resources, but by the richness of their relationships with other organizations. Companies associated with universities, value chains, and public programs are more resilient and grow more in uncertain environments.

In relation to the literature examined, a greater number of publications were found in the English language, with a total of 79 articles. Likewise, the database that predominated with the highest number of published articles was Scopus with 60 studies, followed by ScienceDirect with 23 studies and finally SciELO with 2 studies. This specifies that most researchers publish in English, so there is little literature in the Spanish language on the subject addressed (Table No. 2).

Table 2.

Distribution of articles according to database and language.

Language	Scopus	ScienceDirect	SciELO
English	55	23	0
Spanish	5	0	2
Total	60	23	2

Elaboration: The authors.

3. DISCUSSION

The review of the scientific literature (Table No. 1) shows that administrative management in SMEs is a topic studied from different strategic approaches, all related to the improvement of organizational performance. In view of this, one of the discoveries of great importance is that of the importance of human management and organizational design. In addition, leadership, internal communication, and organizational structure practices reinforce innovation, job satisfaction, and business performance (Salas et al., 2021; Kravariti et al., 2021; Muenjohn et al., 2024; Mathushan & Shantha, 2024).

Added to this is the effect of managerial competencies and organizational empowerment, which influence operational efficiency and productivity, so that knowledge creation became an essential mechanism for innovation and business sustainability (Quiroz-Flores et al., 2024; Dinku et al., 2024; Holovnia et al., 2024; Riascos & Aguilera, 2024).

In finance, good management with managerial practices of using accounting systems and financial leverage helps the solvency and profitability of SMEs (Metzker et al., 2023; Ouédraogo & Gansonré, 2023; Basha et al., 2025). This requires moving from informal models to structured financial management systems.

Digitalization is presented as a cross-cutting element, where the digitization of processes and the use of ICT reinforce efficiency, organizational resilience, and innovation (Zimmermann et al., 2024; Heredia et al., 2024; Seppänen et al., 2025). Along the same lines, digitized logistics management strengthens sustainable competitive advantages, creating a more efficient value chain (Saunila et al., 2024; Manville et al., 2021; Singagerda et al., 2024).

In addition, sustainability is present with circular economy, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and environmental management practices, which strengthen corporate commitment and improve the company's performance and image (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Prieto-Sandoval et al., 2021; Altassan, 2024; Sohns et al., 2023).

Another key factor is the innovative capacity and affective-cognitive commitment of human teams as engines of organizational growth, especially in challenging or emerging environments (Fernandes et al., 2023; Sang et al., 2024; Oduro Owusu & Gil, 2025).

In strategic planning, studies reveal that its correct application, together with technical direction, strengthens business structure and performance (Mashingaidze et al., 2021; Gamboa et al., 2023), complemented by formal performance measurement systems and intellectual capital for rational decision-making (Bag, 2024; Naeem & Garengo, 2022).

In the end, Aparicio et al. (2025); Zau and Antunes (2023) point out that to develop an organizational culture, government agencies work together with other institutions, strengthening the image in the market and promoting the growth and innovation of MSMEs. Likewise, Flechsig et al. (2022) and Ciff et al. (2024) indicate that financial literacy, automation, and connections allow successful digitization by avoiding negative disruptions and improving organizational processes.

4. CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed on the GAD of SMEs indicates that management is decisive for institutional development, such as the skills of its personnel, leadership and innovation. In addition, it was discovered that managerial skills and knowledge management strengthen operations to be efficient in any complex market situation.

On the other hand, it was found that consolidating the dimensions of the financial guideline and digital usability lead to competitive advantage, organizational culture, circular economic sustainability and comprehensive and inclusive management.

Latin American MSEs are growing, but without sustainability, because they are affected by informal structures, inefficient administrative models, so they need to insert themselves with innovative, digitized administrative models and organizational culture, to formalize themselves and thus efficiently face difficulties and new opportunities.

Finally, it is that future studies delve into analyzing and as a theoretical framework to build new knowledge that serves as tools for updating, overcoming, formalizing SMEs and thus strengthening a sustainable business ecosystem over time.

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