4. Methodology

4.1. Literature review

We adopted two parallel approaches to study the topic of the differences in the characteristics between sporadic and regular exporters.

Chapter 2 "General background of the problem" established an overall background for the whole topic. We emphasized the recent developments in International Economics, the financial crisis and its impact on export oriented countries. The focus was on the comparative advantage of the manufacturing sector of emerging economies with respect to their export orientation in comparison with their main competitors as late entrants in international markets.

The rising competition with China in international markets, especially for the U.S. market, has strengthened the impact of the financial crisis on the Mexican foreign trade economy, which will be of high interest for further investigation. Therefore, Chapter 2 concentrated on sources extracted from reliable newspapers such as The Economist and El Financiero, research papers from the Banco of México and the OECD, to name but a few, and on secondary quantitative data of Mexican foreign trade provided by online sources like the Secretaría de Economía, CEPAL, US-China Business Council and The Global Competitiveness Report.

Our intention is to illustrate the question of how the Mexican government can intervene in the export process of companies in order to strengthen their level of exports of its companies to face the growing threat of rising competitors in the international market.

Chapter 3 proposes a literature review in order to define the different possible characteristics differentiating sporadic and regular exporters. It provides different points of view concerning the definition of sporadic and regular exporters. Research Papers were very helpful as they showed existing studies over similar topics and therefore, provide very valuable information for our work. Key studies for this work were predominantly the main authors of this research field consisting of June Francis, Colleen Collins-Dodd, Constantine S. Katsikeas and A.K. Shamsuddoha, M.

Yunus Ali for instance. Articles and published studies from the Mexican magazine "Comercio Exterior" were extracted and integrated into the theoretical framework.

The purpose is to gain a general view over the topic and to make sure that our work integrates the most recent insights coming from the existing literature.

4.2.Research design

The interviews have the purpose to identify the different characteristics between sporadic and regular exporters. We will concentrate on the internal companies´ factors and characteristics which influence the export performance.

We will conduct semi-structured interviews with open questions. A semi-structured interview will help to adapt the interview to the participant in order to obtain a relaxed atmosphere and with it, the possibility to receive answers of a better quality. We are looking for a detailed description (Geertz, 1973), which is based on the interviewees' firsthand experience. Instead of analyzing the existence of sporadic exporters and their characteristics, we are more interested in figuring out the reasons of the existence of sporadic exporters and gaining broad explications and different points of view to enrich the existing studies.

Our research can be categorized as a qualitative study. Through the interview guide, we are able to guide the discussion during the interview in order to obtain answers to the prepared questions on the base of our previous research in the theoretical part (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The core of the topical interview is a set of linked and focused questions stimulated by the literature review and the established categorization of table 7.

Following Fernández Collado, Hernández Sampieri, & Baptista Lucio (2006) the following order of the interview guide line will be taken into consideration:
1. Generic questions
2. Complex questions specifying the topic
3. Sensitive questions which means that the personal view of the participant will be emphasized including its own experience
4. Closing questions which will give a logic end to the interview

In addition to the pre-planned questions, we will apply follow-up questions in order to get richer and more in-depth answers, testing and modifying emerging themes. Through follow-ups, we will be able to detect missing details therefore, trying to achieve a picture of sporadic exporters as comprehensive as possible.

We will apply a tree-and-branch model (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Our main topic is the identification of special characteristics belonging to sporadic exporters; the interview questions have been elaborated on the base of table 7. Therefore, we can recognize a certain categorization of different characteristics rooted in the main topic, from the contents of the interviews. The categorization has the intention to facilitate data analysis at a larger stage, due to the clustering of questions belonging to one identified category as well as, to help keeping a specific focus during the interview. However, this does not indicate that the interviewer cannot establish its own chronology of questions in order to adapt the interview guide line to the development of the conversation.

The questions have been elaborated partially on already conducted questionnaires and interviews: Altintas et al. (2007), Doole et al. (2006), Cadogan et al. (1999).

Although the interview questions have been elaborated in English, they have been translated into Spanish and corrected by a Spanish native speaker.[1]

The interviews will have following chronology:

It is important to explain the purpose of the study to the participant as well as, to clarify the intention of the declaration of consent stating that the whole conversation will be recorded for data analysis likewise indicating that the interviewer can take notes. This formality is necessary to clear up the issue of data protection and thus, having the opportunity to establish a relaxed atmosphere of trust between the interviewer and the participant.

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[1] Both interview guide lines have been added to the appendices

The second step is not less significant, consisting of the explanation of the interview guide-lines to the participant and making clear to the same that there are not correct or incorrect answers (Fernández Collado et al., 2006).

If open questions will not be answered fully or according to the interviewer, important details have not been mentioned, follow-up questions will be applied to gain more information and to deepen the analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

After having realized the interview, the interview partner will be given insight into the report of interview on the following days, having the right to delete paragraphs which are not in the interest of the interviewed partner for data analysis. The report needs to be signed and sent back to the interviewer. Of course, the interview participant will receive a letter of thanks immediately after having conducted the interview.

The intention is to implement individual interviews with the companies' decision makers on exporting issues. Nevertheless, if the executive director refuses to give an interview due to lack of time or other reasons, exporting employees or sales employees with executive functions will be accepted as well, and included into the analysis.

Each interview session should not last more than 30–40 min. to avoid weariness of the interviewee.

Five interview partners have been obtained from the "Catálogo de la Oferta Exportable de Productos Poblanos – Puebla/México" sponsored by the Secretaría de Desarrollo Económico, Pymexporta, COMCE, Fondo PYME and the Secretaría de Economía. Nevertheless, two more sporadic exporting companies have been taken from my internship experience which turned out to be very interested in participating in the study and hence complementing my data. In total, 7 interviews consisting of 5 sporadic exporters and 2 regular exporters have been implemented. As the proposals are based on the investigation of characteristics differentiating sporadic exporters from regular exporters, we make a special emphasis on sporadic exporters in the qualitative data recollection process. We also need to control the information

obtained about sporadic exporters, consisting of two examples of regular exporting companies, which will allow the comparison between the two groups of exporters.

Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, consisting mainly on open questions, we expect to gain a rich picture of the recent environment of sporadic and regular exporters. We will also have the possibility to include personal views in the discussion of the results and hence reflect on the recent situation of the firms under scrutiny. Thanks to the personal interviews, we will be able to gain some further insights about the recent problems Mexico is facing.

4.3. Data Analysis

While reading the interviews, we will mark off each time a new idea or concept that appears. It is important to revise again already analyzed interviews whether new ideas have been detected in order to be sure that all ideas have been taken into consideration.

The following step consists in the coding and the categorization of similar ideas, concepts and themes that we have discovered through the interviews.

Fernández Collado et al. (2006) emphasized that the most challenging but important part of the qualitative analysis is to give structure, consequently, we will rearrange the ideas and concepts detected to cross check with the categorization elaborated in the literature review.

Existing ideas and concepts as well as completely new ones will be added to table 7. After filtering ideas and arranging them into the existing table, we will have to separate the characteristics of sporadic exporters and of regular exporters in order to be able to filter out critical characteristics separating both exporter types. This process includes the detection of characteristics that both exporter groups share and do not share.