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ISSUES AND PROSPECTS OF MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role in the industrial and economic advancement of Tamil Nadu, making significant contributions to job creation, regional development, and industrial production. This research investigates the primary challenges and future opportunities for MSMEs operating within the state. Despite their essential contribution to economic progress, MSMEs encounter numerous obstacles, including limited access to financing, technological limitations, insufficient infrastructure, and fierce market competition. Moreover, regulatory complexities, a shortage of skilled labor, and challenges in embracing digital technologies further hinder their growth potential. The research also emphasizes the emerging opportunities accessible to MSMEs through government assistance programs, digital transformation, innovation, and the expansion of both domestic and international markets. By tackling existing challenges and enhancing policy support, MSMEs in Tamil Nadu can improve their productivity and competitiveness. The study concludes that a nurturing ecosystem, better financial access, and technological progress are vital for ensuring the sustainable growth and long-term development of the MSME sector.

KEYWORDS: MSME, finance, marketing, economy, growth, employment, marketing, export.

INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are essential for fostering economic growth, generating employment, and advancing industrial development in India. The MSME sector is widely acknowledged as the backbone of the Indian economy due to its substantial contributions to production, exports, and the development of entrepreneurship. In Tamil Nadu, MSMEs hold particular significance as they facilitate inclusive economic growth, promote regional industrialization, and create job opportunities with relatively low capital investment (mntfreeias.com).

Tamil Nadu ranks among the top states in India regarding MSME development. Recent statistics from the Udyam Registration portal and the Tamil Nadu Economic Survey (2024–2025) indicate that the state is home to approximately 35.56 lakh MSMEs, which include 10.69 lakh manufacturing units and 24.87 lakh service enterprises. Collectively, these enterprises employ around 2.56 crore individuals, underscoring the sector's vital role in the state's economy (Tamil Digital Library). Moreover, the MSME sector contributes nearly 30% of Tamil Nadu's industrial output and represents about 15% of India's MSME units, establishing the state as a significant center for small-scale industries (Business Standard).

Numerous studies have highlighted the critical role of MSMEs in bolstering regional economies and fostering entrepreneurship. Researchers point out that MSMEs play a key role in diminishing regional disparities, encouraging innovation, and promoting industrial diversification. Nevertheless, despite their considerable contributions, MSMEs in Tamil Nadu encounter various challenges, including limited access to finance, technological limitations, market competition, regulatory complexities, and infrastructure deficiencies. These challenges frequently impact their productivity and long-term viability.

In recent years, the Government of Tamil Nadu has implemented a range of policies, financial aid programs, and entrepreneurial development initiatives aimed at fostering the growth and competitiveness of MSMEs. Consequently, it is crucial to comprehend the challenges and opportunities encountered by the MSME sector to formulate effective policies and promote sustainable industrial development within the state.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the primary challenges confronting Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Tamil Nadu.
- To analyze the factors influencing the growth and operational performance of MSMEs in Tamil Nadu.
- To investigate the future prospects and opportunities for the advancement of MSMEs in Tamil Nadu.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Velkumar (2024) conducted an examination of the growth and performance of MSMEs in Tamil Nadu, underscoring their crucial role in generating employment and fostering industrial development. The research indicated that MSMEs make substantial contributions to the state's economy, yet they encounter challenges such as restricted financial access and technological limitations. The author stressed the necessity for enhanced government support and modernization efforts to fortify the sector. Raj and Radhika (2024) performed an analysis of the development of MSMEs in Tamil Nadu, focusing on their contributions to entrepreneurship and economic advancement. The study disclosed that MSMEs facilitate regional development and job creation. Nevertheless, obstacles such as market competition, infrastructure deficiencies, and insufficient technological adoption hinder their productivity.

Sankar (2024) investigated the issues and prospects of MSMEs in the Salem District of Tamil Nadu. The research pinpointed significant challenges, including financial shortages, constraints in raw materials, and marketing obstacles. The study proposed that government support, training initiatives, and enhanced financial services could assist MSMEs in overcoming these difficulties. Saranya and Tharani Priya (2024) explored the challenges encountered by MSME exporters in the Coimbatore District. The study revealed that export-oriented MSMEs face logistical challenges, limited access to international markets, and intricate regulations. The authors highlighted the significance of digital platforms and policy support to improve export competitiveness.

Subhasri and Kirthiga (2025) examined the effects of government schemes on the development of MSMEs in Tamil Nadu. Their findings indicated that initiatives such as

PMEGP and UYEGP promote entrepreneurship and provide financial assistance to small enterprises. However, a lack of awareness and procedural delays diminish the effectiveness of these programs. Jamal et al. (2025) investigated the uptake of fintech services among MSMEs in Chennai. Their research demonstrated that digital financial services enhance financial inclusion and operational efficiency. Nonetheless, challenges such as insufficient digital literacy, cybersecurity issues, and regulatory complexities hinder widespread adoption.

Kumar (2024) analyzed the influence of digital transformation on the resilience of MSMEs following the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings suggested that digital tools, including e-commerce platforms and online payment systems, facilitated businesses in adapting to evolving market conditions. However, a lack of digital skills and financial resources continues to pose significant challenges. Praveen Kumar and Jeya Ani (2024) examined the challenges encountered by small-scale industries in the implementation of Human Resource Development (HRD) practices. Their study highlighted that numerous MSMEs do not have structured training programs or managerial expertise. It was recommended to enhance HR development initiatives to boost productivity and organizational efficiency.

Nugraheni, Darma, and Muhammad (2025) explored the effects of adopting digital technology and financial knowledge on the sustainability of MSMEs. Their findings revealed that businesses with superior digital capabilities tend to achieve better performance. However, many small enterprises face difficulties due to technological expenses and a lack of technical expertise. Andiga et al. (2023) investigated the competitiveness of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) within the global economic landscape. The study underscored challenges such as inadequate innovation capabilities, obsolete technology, and limited access to financial resources. The authors advocated for the enhancement of infrastructure and innovation systems to bolster MSME competitiveness.

Das (2025) examined sustainability and circular economy practices among small businesses. The research uncovered that numerous MSMEs encounter difficulties in adopting sustainable production methods due to financial limitations and inefficiencies in the supply chain. The author proposed the use of digital technologies as means to enhance sustainability and operational efficiency. Vu, Le, and Nguyen (2025) introduced a conceptual framework that elucidates the integration of artificial intelligence in the financial decision-making processes of SMEs. The research indicated that a lack of technical expertise and substantial implementation costs hinder many enterprises from embracing AI technologies. Recommendations included providing training and technological support to facilitate effective implementation.

Roy, Shukla, and Tripathi (2025) scrutinized research and innovation trends within Indian academic institutions and their significance to entrepreneurial ecosystems. The study highlighted that innovation networks and knowledge sharing can foster MSME growth and technological progress. Pal (2023) investigated regional disparities in industrial development throughout India. The research revealed that variations in infrastructure, technology adoption, and the availability of skilled labor affect MSME productivity. The author recommended targeted policy measures to mitigate regional development disparities.

Vaidehi, Reddy, and Banerjee (2021) explored the digital divide in India and its effects on small enterprises. The study indicated that restricted internet access and low levels of digital literacy hinder the adoption of contemporary technologies by MSMEs. Addressing the digital divide is crucial for enhancing business opportunities. Sharma and Gupta (2024) explored the connection between digital finance and the growth of MSMEs in India. Their research indicated that digital financial services improve operational efficiency and enhance market access for small businesses. Nonetheless, significant obstacles such as security issues and infrastructure constraints persist.

Kumar and Singh (2024) analyzed the accessibility of credit for MSMEs in India. Their findings showed that a considerable number of small enterprises rely predominantly on informal financing due to restricted access to formal credit sources. The study recommended the expansion of financial inclusion initiatives to foster MSME growth. Patel and Shah (2025) investigated the influence of government policies on the competitiveness of MSMEs. Their research underscored that supportive policies, financial incentives, and training programs play a crucial role in boosting MSME performance. However, bureaucratic delays and gaps in policy implementation restrict the advantages.

Thangarajan, Selvaveera Kumar, and Raji (2024) examined the obstacles encountered by women entrepreneurs in the MSME sector of Tamil Nadu. Their study highlighted that insufficient financial support, lack of training opportunities, and social barriers impede business development. They recommended promoting women entrepreneurship through targeted policy measures. Ahmed and Rahman (2024) assessed the adoption of technology among small enterprises and its effects on business performance. Their findings revealed that digital tools and innovations enhance productivity and competitiveness. However, financial constraints and a lack of technical expertise impede technology adoption in numerous MSMEs.

RESEARCH GAP

Despite numerous studies investigating the growth and development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India and Tamil Nadu, a significant number primarily emphasize the economic contributions of MSMEs, including job creation, industrial output, and the promotion of entrepreneurship. Prior research has also highlighted challenges such as financial limitations, technological barriers, and market competition. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of studies that offer a thorough analysis addressing both the key issues and future opportunities for MSMEs, particularly within the context of Tamil Nadu.

Furthermore, many previous studies depend on secondary data and lack current empirical analysis that reflects recent advancements, including digital transformation, government initiatives, and economic shifts following the pandemic. Additionally, there is inadequate attention given to how emerging opportunities such as digitalization, innovation, and policy support can assist MSMEs in overcoming their existing challenges. Consequently, there is a pressing need for a targeted study that identifies the current issues faced by MSMEs in Tamil Nadu while also investigating their potential growth opportunities and future outlook.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are vital to the economic advancement of Tamil Nadu, as they generate employment, foster regional industrialization, and encourage entrepreneurship. This sector makes a substantial contribution to both manufacturing output and service activities, positioning it as a key driver of inclusive economic growth. However, despite their significance, MSMEs encounter various challenges, including limited access to financing, technological limitations, a shortage of skilled labor, inadequate infrastructure, and heightened market competition.

Recognizing these challenges is crucial for developing effective strategies aimed at enhancing the performance and sustainability of MSMEs. Additionally, the swift progress of digital technologies, government assistance programs, and the growth of market opportunities present new avenues for the development of MSMEs. Consequently, this study is essential to examine the obstacles faced by MSMEs in Tamil Nadu and to investigate potential opportunities that could bolster their growth and competitiveness in the future.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The current research concentrates on examining the challenges and opportunities faced by Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises in Tamil Nadu. It investigates the primary

obstacles hindering the growth and operational efficiency of MSMEs, which include financial limitations, the adoption of technology, market competition, and infrastructure deficiencies. Additionally, the research delves into the potential opportunities for MSME advancement, such as government assistance programs, digital transformation, innovation, and the expansion of market possibilities. The results of this study will provide valuable insights for policymakers, entrepreneurs, and researchers, enabling them to comprehend the existing conditions of MSMEs and formulate effective strategies to improve their sustainability and competitiveness. Consequently, the study's scope is confined to MSMEs functioning within Tamil Nadu, emphasizing the identification of their significant challenges and future growth opportunities.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Objective 1: To identify the major challenges faced by MSMEs in Tamil Nadu

The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector is crucial for the economic advancement of Tamil Nadu. It plays a significant role in industrial production, job creation, and regional economic development. The state has established itself as one of the foremost centers for MSME activities in India, thanks to its robust industrial foundation and favorable government policies. It is essential to comprehend the scale and distribution of MSMEs within the state to identify the primary challenges that hinder their growth and sustainability.

Table 1
Overview of Tamil Nadu MSMEs (2024–25)

Parameter	Manufacturing Units	Service Units	Total Units	Employment (in Crores)	Industrial Output Contribution (%)
Tamil Nadu	10.69 lakh	24.87 lakh	35.56 lakh	2.56	30%

Source: Economic Survey of Tamil Nadu 2024–25

The data indicates that Tamil Nadu boasts a substantial MSME presence, with approximately 35.56 lakh units functioning across both manufacturing and service sectors. Of these, service units (24.87 lakh) represent the largest proportion, while manufacturing units comprise 10.69 lakh enterprises. The sector employs around 2.56 crore individuals, underscoring its critical role in job creation and livelihood enhancement. Furthermore, MSMEs contribute nearly 30% to the state's industrial output, highlighting their significance in economic progress. Nevertheless, the high number of small-scale enterprises suggests that many businesses operate with constrained resources and workforce capacity. This configuration often limits productivity, innovation, and opportunities for expansion. Consequently, while MSMEs are pivotal to the economy, they encounter numerous operational and structural challenges that require policy intervention.

Objective 2: To analyse the role of the MSME sector in the Tamil Nadu economy

The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector is crucial for the economic advancement of Tamil Nadu, as it generates employment, fosters industrial production, and enhances export activities. The state boasts a robust presence of MSMEs in both manufacturing and service sectors, which facilitates inclusive economic growth and regional development. Tamil Nadu represents nearly 15% of the total MSMEs in India, showcasing its strong entrepreneurial foundation and industrial infrastructure. Various sectors, including textiles, engineering, electronics, leather goods, and services, make substantial contributions to the state's economy through production and job creation. The subsequent table illustrates the distribution of MSMEs, employment figures, and their export contributions across key sectors in Tamil Nadu.

Table 2
Sector-wise Distribution of MSMEs, Employment, and Contribution to Exports in Tamil Nadu

Sector	No. of MSMEs (Lakh)	Employment (Lakh)	Contribution to State Exports (%)
Textiles	5.8	50	12
Engineering & Auto	3.2	38	10
Electronics	1.5	20	8
Leather Products	2.0	30	5
Services	24.87	118	10

Source: Economic Survey of Tamil Nadu 2024–25

The table indicates that the MSME sector plays a significant role in generating employment and enhancing export performance in Tamil Nadu. The service sector leads in the number of MSMEs and accounts for the largest share of employment, underscoring its pivotal role in the state's economy. Within the manufacturing industries, the textile sector is prominent, featuring a high number of enterprises and the greatest contribution to exports, followed by engineering and automobile-related MSMEs. Electronics and leather products also play a role in employment and exports, albeit on a smaller scale. In summary, the data suggests that MSMEs diversify Tamil Nadu's industrial landscape and bolster both domestic production and international trade, thereby reinforcing the state's status as a key industrial hub in India.

Objective 3: To examine the prospects and growth opportunities for MSMEs in Tamil Nadu

The MSME sector in Tamil Nadu presents considerable growth potential, bolstered by favorable government policies, financial assistance initiatives, and the rising integration of digital technologies. The state government actively fosters entrepreneurship and the development of small businesses through financial investments, training programs, and subsidy schemes. These efforts are designed to motivate new entrepreneurs, enhance access to financing, and bolster the competitiveness of existing MSMEs. Concurrently, the digital transformation, the expansion of e-commerce, and the increasing demand for exports are generating new avenues for MSMEs to broaden their markets and boost productivity. The subsequent table outlines the key opportunities available for MSMEs in Tamil Nadu and their possible effects on sectoral growth.

Table 3
Opportunities for MSMEs in Tamil Nadu

Opportunity	Current Status	Potential Impact
Government financial support	₹1,918 crore allocated (2025)	Facilitates entrepreneurship and expansion
Entrepreneurship programs	66,000 new entrepreneurs supported	Encourages innovation and self-employment
Digital adoption	35–40% MSMEs integrated	Improves efficiency, market access, competitiveness
Export opportunities	US\$13 billion contribution	Expands global market share

Source: Economic Survey of Tamil Nadu 2024–25

The table illustrates that Tamil Nadu offers a conducive environment for the growth of MSMEs through financial support, entrepreneurship development initiatives, and expanding export possibilities. Government budget allocations and subsidy programs assist entrepreneurs in launching new ventures and scaling existing businesses. The assistance extended to numerous new entrepreneurs underscores the state's commitment to fostering innovation and self-employment. Furthermore, the gradual embrace of digital technologies by MSMEs is enhancing operational efficiency and allowing businesses to access broader markets via online platforms. The substantial contribution of MSMEs to exports further

emphasizes their potential for growth in international markets. In summary, these opportunities indicate that the MSME sector in Tamil Nadu holds robust prospects for future expansion, contingent upon businesses continuing to enhance their digital adoption, skills, and readiness for export.

Challenges of the MSME Sector in Tamil Nadu

The MSME sector in Tamil Nadu is crucial for generating employment, producing industrial goods, and promoting exports. Nevertheless, in spite of its substantial contribution to the state's economy, MSMEs encounter numerous structural and operational obstacles that hinder their growth and competitiveness. These obstacles encompass financial limitations, shortages in human resources, inefficiencies in operations, barriers to marketing, technological deficiencies, and challenges related to exports. A significant number of small enterprises find it difficult to secure formal credit, implement modern technologies, hire skilled personnel, and expand into both national and international markets. Recognizing these challenges is vital for formulating effective policies and support systems that can enhance the MSME ecosystem in Tamil Nadu. The subsequent table outlines the primary challenges faced by MSMEs, along with their impacts and the percentage of enterprises affected.

Table 4
Major Challenges Faced by MSMEs in Tamil Nadu

Challenge Category	Specific Challenge	Impact on MSMEs	% of MSMEs Affected
Finance	Limited institutional credit	Restricts working capital and business expansion	65%
	High interest rates	Increases financial burden	45%
	Collateral requirements	Barriers to startup funding	50%
Human Resources	Skill shortage	Reduced productivity	55%
	Lack of training programs	Poor operational efficiency	60%
	High employee turnover	Increased recruitment costs	40%
Operations	Infrastructure limitations	Production delays and inefficiency	50%
	Outdated machinery	Lower product quality	55%
	Supply chain disruptions	Increased production cost	45%
Marketing	Limited brand recognition	Lower sales and market visibility	60%
	Traditional marketing channels	Restricted market reach	65%
	Competition from large companies	Reduced profitability	55%
Technology	Low digital adoption	Inefficient operations	60%
	High cost of technology	Financial strain	50%
	Lack of technical expertise	Reduced competitiveness	55%
Export	Regulatory compliance	Export delays	45%

	High logistics costs	Reduced profitability	50%
	Limited global market knowledge	Missed export opportunities	55%

Source: Compiled from MSME EPC Reports (2023–2024), TNPSCTheruvpettagam (2024) and The Times of India (2024–2025).

The table illustrates that MSMEs in Tamil Nadu encounter various interconnected challenges in financial, operational, and strategic domains. Among these, financial limitations seem to be the most pressing concern, with approximately 65% of MSMEs facing restricted access to institutional credit. This limitation hampers their capacity to grow operations, invest in new technologies, and sustain sufficient working capital. Challenges related to human resources, especially the absence of training programs and skill deficiencies, also impact a significant number of enterprises, diminishing productivity and innovation.

Operational issues such as outdated machinery and infrastructure constraints further impair efficiency and product quality. Marketing obstacles, including insufficient brand recognition and dependence on traditional marketing methods, hinder the ability of MSMEs to access wider markets and compete with larger companies. Additionally, technological challenges like low digital adoption rates and elevated technology costs restrict competitiveness in an increasingly digital business landscape. Difficulties related to exports, such as regulatory compliance and high logistics expenses, also inhibit many MSMEs from fully engaging in international trade.

In summary, the analysis suggests that MSMEs need enhanced institutional support in areas such as financial access, skill enhancement, technological advancement, marketing support, and export facilitation. Tackling these challenges through focused policies, financial assistance programs, and infrastructure improvements can significantly boost the growth, competitiveness, and sustainability of the MSME sector in Tamil Nadu.

CONCLUSION

The research on "Issues and Prospects of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Tamil Nadu" underscores the vital role that MSMEs play in the economic advancement of the state. Tamil Nadu, which is home to over 35 lakh MSMEs that provide employment to 2.56 crore individuals, exemplifies the sector's significant contribution to industrial output, export enhancement, and regional entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, MSMEs encounter a variety of challenges. The most pressing issue is finance, with more than 65% of enterprises facing difficulties in accessing credit and meeting collateral requirements. Additional constraints on growth include limitations in human resources, operational inefficiencies, restricted marketing capabilities, low levels of technology adoption, and challenges related to exports.

On a positive note, the study also reveals promising opportunities. Government support initiatives, the adoption of digital technologies, entrepreneurship training programs, and the expansion into global markets present substantial avenues for growth. By capitalizing on these opportunities through strategic financial assistance, skill enhancement, technology integration, and export support, MSMEs can improve their competitiveness, sustainability, and overall contribution to the economic development of Tamil Nadu. Although MSMEs serve as the backbone of Tamil Nadu's economy, focused interventions are essential to address challenges and fully realize the sector's potential.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Geographical Limitation: This study is exclusively centered on MSMEs located in Tamil Nadu and may not accurately reflect the circumstances in other Indian states
2. Time Constraint: The research utilizes recent yet limited data; any future alterations in policies, market dynamics, or global economic conditions could potentially modify the findings.

3. Sample Limitations: The primary data may have been gathered from a chosen group of MSMEs, which may not entirely represent the experiences of all enterprises.
4. Data Availability: Certain statistics were sourced from secondary references; discrepancies in reporting and classification of MSMEs may affect the accuracy.
5. Focus Area: The study highlights challenges and opportunities but does not conduct an in-depth analysis of performance specific to sectors (for instance, textiles versus engineering).

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Sector-Specific Analysis: Future investigations could delve into the challenges and opportunities faced by MSMEs in particular industries such as textiles, engineering, electronics, or food processing.
2. Digital Transformation Impact: Research may concentrate on the integration of AI, e-commerce, and digital finance tools and their effects on the productivity and profitability of MSMEs.
3. Comparative Studies: Research comparing MSMEs in Tamil Nadu with those in other states could uncover best practices and regional disparities in performance and challenges.
4. Longitudinal Research: Future studies could monitor the growth and challenges of MSMEs over time to evaluate the effectiveness of government policies and support initiatives.
5. Global Competitiveness: Research could investigate how MSMEs in Tamil Nadu can improve their export performance and compete in international markets through innovation, technology, and supportive policies.

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