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Evaluating Financial Support of Governmental Institutions and Private Banks to SMEs and Farmers: Case of Tokat City

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Abstract: Small–medium enterprises (SMEs) are one of the essential building blocks of the economy in every country. The ratio of these enterprises to employment is very high. The number of studies dealing with loans and grants efficiency or exploring problems in reaching funds is limited. In addition, there is no study comparing governmental and private loans and funds, and no study explicitly focusing on the Tokat region to explore the issues in the loan and funds mechanism. This study evaluates the financial support of governmental authorities and private banks to SMEs using the SERVQUAL scale in five dimensions. First, the method is applied to structured surveys with SMEs and farmers in Tokat. In this regard, *financial support* is defined as a service evaluated by a gap analysis. As a result, we show a lack of empathy and efficient communication between SMEs and supporting authorities, namely between KOSGEB and SMEs and between private banks and SMEs. The study is unique in bringing farmers and SMEs together and raising voices on the problems not mentioned previously by governmental and private authorities.

Keywords: financial support, SME credits and grants, business economics, SERVQUAL

1. Introduction

Small–medium enterprises (SMEs) play a significant role in a country's economy. There are many classification factors for SMEs, such as techniques, methodologies used in production, the product's characteristics, and the industrialization level. Still, the roles of SMEs in a nation's economy are more important than their classification. They combine all regions of a country and thus remove all boundaries between different areas.

SMEs support democratic life and help sustain political balance with widespread job opportunities and trade potential effects. This is why their efficiency in using loans and funds provided by financial authorities should be investigated and improved when these resources are not used for a sustainable economy or if SMEs cannot reach them.

While there is no definition that all authorities in the world agree on, there should be a description for management purposes. Table 1 reflects the Turkey's perspective [1].

SME entrepreneurs are responsible for sustaining their businesses and developing them further to the next level in scale. Especially in the early stages of its establishment, a manager may require financial support to fund the activities and operations of the business. There are many reasons why SMEs fail and cannot recover quickly [2], and financial management plays an essential role among these reasons.

Table 1
SME definition in Turkey

Type	Employees	Revenue (million TL)	Net sales (million TL)
Micro	<10	≤3	≤3
Small	<50	≤25	≤25
Medium	<250	≤125	≤125

KOSGEB was established in 1990 to serve this purpose: "to increase the share of SMEs and entrepreneurs in economic and social development by providing support and other services to improve their competitive power" [3]. This follows the purposes of a social state that seeks to promote any entrepreneurship activity to boost regional development and create employment. However, financial resources are always scarce, and the effectiveness of the grants provided to entrepreneurship should be considered while assessing an SME's performance. For example, credit risk is a critical factor in giving a loan to SMEs. A quick ratio of SMEs and the features of their goods play a role for authorities in providing financial support [4]. So SMEs should be well analyzed by economic measures and must meet specific

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criteria before they can be considered candidates for financial support.

This study deals with the efficiency issue by asking the other way around. Can the authorities efficiently choose the correct SME to provide financial support? Are they providing an excellent service to SMEs regarding providing grants and funds? What do SMEs think of financing authorities as service providers? Accordingly, the study answers the following questions:

1) What difficulties do SMEs face if they want to obtain information about loans and grants they can take?
2) How is the feedback and quality of service of governmental authorities (KOSGEB in our study) and private banks perceived by SMEs and farmers?
3) Can we numerically measure the rate of SMEs and farmers' satisfaction with the financial support mechanism as a service?
4) Can we estimate the general awareness of SMEs and farmers about financial support channels?

The study focuses on the city of Tokat. This city is outside the DOKAP region (Black Sea Regional Development Administration) but resides in the Black Sea Region and acts as a bridge between the inner parts of Turkey and the Port of Samsun. Another reason we consider Tokat is that the city has a warm climate, and many products, such as vine leaves, apples, grapes, tomatoes, thin-skinned peppers, peaches, and cherry, can be produced efficiently. This gives us the advantage of asking different producers of many different products.

Financial support of authorities to producers should be evaluated using scientific methods. There should be a mechanism or evaluation criteria to determine if an SME or farmer is using the support for sustainable, durable production if they have sufficient knowledge, and awareness about funds and supports they can use and what should be done to sustain the production economy in smaller cities.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, the number of studies dealing with loans and grants efficiency or exploring problems in reaching funds is limited. In addition, there is no study comparing governmental and private loans and funds, nor is there a study specifically focusing on the Tokat region to explore the loan and funds structure.

The rest of the study is further developed as follows: Section 2 provides the recent literature on SERVQUAL and financial support authorities, Section 3 introduces and justifies the materials and methods, Section 4 presents the results, and finally, Sections 5 and 6 give further insights and discussion, and possible ways of improvement for future studies.

2. Literature Review

As a relatively new approach in quality management, Parasuraman et al. [5] first pioneered SERVQUAL in service industries in ten dimensions. Since 1985, it has reached its form of five dimensions that we also used in this study. The dimensions of SERVQUAL are reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. The first letters of each dimension form the second name of scale, RATER, used extensively in many studies.

Reliability refers to the trustworthiness of the service provided. It shows how consistently we provide the service correctly and at the correct time. Assurance relies on employees' skills and capabilities to transfer information to customers and get the job done in the best way. Tangibles mean all the things seen and observed by the customers that only employees can access. Among the tangibles are websites, offices, tools, equipment, buildings, sales points, and customer service centers. Empathy refers to understanding customers' needs and proactively meeting their demands. Finally, responsiveness is how fast workers respond to their customers. It measures the tendency and willingness to serve customers even when performing tedious and non-value-added tasks.

SERVQUAL compares a service's perceived and expected quality and demonstrates the gap between them to improve the service further. Service quality may be poor, moderate, or any level specified within a range of numbers. It is an adaptive application method in combination with structural equation modeling (SEM). SEM and SERVQUAL are used in sports [6] to analyze the relationship between service quality, value, and satisfaction.

SERVQUAL is also used to assess perceived quality concerning the demographic profiles of healthcare consumers [7]. In healthcare services, demographic factors such as gender, education, and income also affect patient satisfaction [8]. Another study by Camgöz-Akdağ et al. [9] combines SERVQUAL with quality function deployment (QFD). The study suggests that modern equipment ownership and staff behavior are also effective in high customer satisfaction. Another QFD-based approach is introduced by Cho et al. [10]. All five dimensions can be evaluated correctly using additional consistency tests like Wilcoxon and Kruskal–Wallis tests, and improvements can be incorporated accordingly [11]. Cronbach's alpha value is used extensively for analyzing the internal consistency of SERVQUAL-based methods [12].

The method of SERVQUAL is combined with the fuzzy set theory and analytic hierarchy process in two dimensions to measure the in-service performance of employees [13]. The issue of uncertainty is modeled as a result of partial ignorance and incompleteness.

Measuring service quality is crucial in the education sector. Learning techniques are dynamically affected by technological changes and student profiles [14]. SERVQUAL incorporates the integration of students through dialogue, inquiry, and reflection. For more studies concerning measuring service quality in education, kindly refer to Akhlaghi et al.'s [15] and Ilyas et al.'s [16] work.

Another area where SERVQUAL is used for measuring the quality of service is information gathering and information systems. Jiang et al. [17] define a derived version of SERVQUAL for measuring the quality of marketing services in a company. They call their method IS SERVQUAL and show the efficiency of this method's efficiency in measuring the quality of marketing service. Ilhan et al. [18] define the concept of a u-city for cities that can provide information to people in the proper context and at the right time. They analyze two methods in combination with SERVQUAL to evaluate these cities.

SERVQUAL is used in the European quality assessment tool EFQM. The so-called EFQMQual is investigated in Shahin et al.'s [19] work. Certification authorities and inspection bodies also employ SERVQUAL within fuzzy set theory [20].

Combining cross-cultural issues that determine customer satisfaction may lead to pretty different results, as in Basfirinci and Mitra's [21] work, where Turkish and US passengers show pretty different perceptions. Another study in tourism and accommodation is conducted by Gong [22], who use SERVQUAL to assess the service quality of 36 hostels in the USA. The dynamics may also change within a single country [23].

Similar to many of the methodologies, SERVQUAL also has some concerns. For example, it suffers from reliability and validity [24] and is therefore compared to other scales, such as

SERVPERF in terms of its definition and measurement procedure [25].

Haming et al. [26] use SERVQUAL to measure service quality by means of customer perception in a retail firm. They illustrate that tangibles and empathy dimensions should be prioritized as a result of their survey that they applied to 150 housewives during their shopping time.

Shi and Shang [27] analyze and evaluate the success of SERVQUAL through an extensive literature search. They include many industries, such as retail, medical, e-commerce, and tourism. They also compare SERVQUAL and SERVPERF and mention to studies that combine SERVQUAL with fuzzy theory.

Yüksel and Dinçer [28] provide an essential fuzzy TOPSIS-based approach to evaluate commercial banks in Turkey in agricultural financing. Three parallel findings demonstrate that flexibility of needs, branch availability, and qualified personnel are essential for the effectiveness of commercial banks. These criteria relate to the access to information in the first criteria and communication in the third, and it points out the need for training bank personnel for agricultural financing.

Jonkisz et al. [29] show the efficiency and extensive usage of SERVQUAL in their study. They use empirical evidence from medical services and data from databases including Scopus, Cochrane, Medline, and PubMed to show that the method can provide insights to understand a customer's perceptions of a service, thus allowing quality measurement of the service.

Jankelová and Joniaková [30] analyze the power of information sharing among agricultural companies and also among employees and managers within a company to see its effect on production performance. They use Cronbach's alpha to measure the internal consistency of their study. It sets up a benchmark for our study as it mentions the importance of sharing information and also doing it transparently for clear communication.

Vrabcová and Urbancová [31] determine key factors for sustainable development as process-based management, non-financial business performance, and sector stability. They apply a survey and interviews to analyze these factors for sustainable development.

Properties and characteristics of financial institutions and their loan mechanism play a crucial role in SME loan applications [32].

Alicioğlu and Küçükkocaoğlu [33] examine the impact of loans coming from private and state banks on the SME growth. They show that loans are crucial for SME growth and loans used efficiently promote sustainable growth. In addition, private banks have a greater impact than the state banks when it comes to SME growth.

Saud et al. [34] investigate the roles of private banks on financing SMEs using a questionnaire with 335 participants. They find out that there is lack of understanding and failure to provide the required information to private banks.

Rakshit and Bardhan [35] conduct a study to see the effects of bank competition on the tendency of firms to apply for loans using the Herfindahl Hirschman index and three bank concentration ratios (CR3). They show that bank competition increases the rate at which firms are applying for loans. This effect is, however, significantly larger for SMEs than big-scale firms.

Liu et al. [36] deal with technological SMEs and the relationship between their business environment and economic growth. Using a binary logistic test, they show that funding through banking systems and tax regulation increases standard credit and lower casual credit applications.

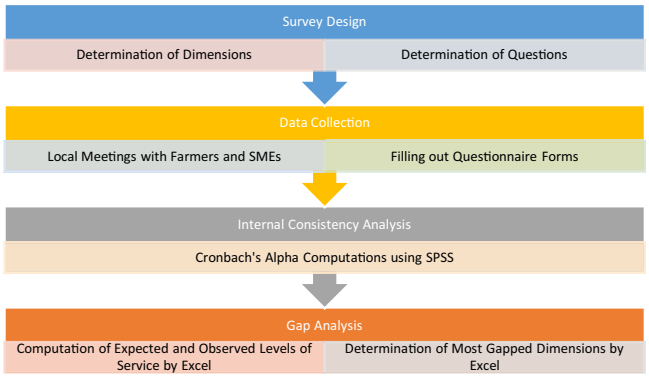
Bulut and Celik [37] look at the banks and loan structure in terms of Islamic banking and show that 60% of all SMEs and farmers do not know anything about Islamic banking, and their tendency to take loans does not depend on Islamic aspects. In addition, only 10% are using Islamic banks.

While SERVQUAL is used extensively in literature, number of studies dealing with banks and governmental support channels at the same time are limited. In addition, SMEs and private banks and government funds are not investigated in any study together, leading to a research gap in exploring the relation between different loan mechanisms.

3. Methodology

Figure 1 summarizes the methodology of the study. Accordingly, survey design, data collection, internal consistency analysis, and gap analysis are conducted in a series of four steps.

Figure 1
Methodology



3.1. Data collection and survey design

Farmers and SMEs are our study group. We communicate with farmers and SMEs as long as they are willing to cooperate by registering their names in the focus group meetings that we arranged before conducting the study. However, we consider only the firms with at least ten workers because nine employees or fewer classify a firm as a micro-enterprise. They are producers who sell their products to intermediate actors in the supply chain, or they go to the bazaar and sell their products directly in the local market. The age of the study group ranges from 30 to 67. All interviewees have lived in Tokat for more than ten years. They sell their products within Tokat and to neighboring cities such as Amasya and Sivas or other cities in Turkey. They do not export their products. Based on these characteristics, we arranged meetings with 60 firm managers. Four managers decided not to join the meeting when we arrived at their facility, five managers were not available at their facility, and there was no one to substitute them. Five managers gave biased answers that cannot be used in our study. For example, there were cases where all perceived and expected quality questions of KOSGEB and the banks were answered 1 out of 10. Even though this case has a likelihood to occur in practice, it does not seem logical and does not reflect an objective point of view.

We created 17 questions for our survey. We denote every dimension by a letter and assign three to four questions to each dimension. The questions are given in Table 2. All questions have a scale of 1–10, with 1 showing the minimum and 10 the

Table 2
Survey questions

	Statements
	Reliability
L1	Promised amount of credit/grant is received on time
L2	Announcements stick to pre-defined time intervals
L3	Credits/grants are satisfying in terms of pay-back/usage
L4	I can effectively comprehend the information regarding credits/grants
	Responsiveness
R1	Authorities provide quick responses to my queries
R2	Authorities try to understand my questions and my problems
R3	Authorities are keen to provide their support
	Assurance
A1	I know the amount I will pay once I receive a credit/grant
A2	Authorities seem to know what they are doing at all services
A3	Any payment process and information is secured
A4	I can trust authorities regarding security issues
	Empathy
E1	Authorities answer my questions politely even if they are busy
E2	I am behaved positively in my phone calls or e-mails to KOSGEB or banks
E3	Staff notifies me in case of any situations concerning me
	Tangibles
T1	Application offices are user-oriented
T2	Waiting rooms and areas are designed ergonomically
T3	Buildings and other tangibles assure of professionalism

maximum. Participants were asked to evaluate the services of KOSGEB and the banks based on this scale.

There is no open-ended question in our survey because we focus on gap analysis and will not consider qualitative analyses for an open-ended question.

We use the SERVQUAL scale in five dimensions to analyze our data. These dimensions are reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness, also known as RATER. In that sense, we define *financial support* as a service, and we further define a system with service seekers and service providers. Our study is unique in considering such a system as a service. To the best of our knowledge, no study has compared governmental and private authorities as sources for grants and credits at the same time.

3.2. Internal consistency

Cronbach's alpha is calculated using SPSS to assess the internal consistency of our study in each of the five dimensions. The threshold value is 0.7 [38]. For any dimension, if the value of Cronbach's alpha is less than 0.7, we remove the questions in that dimension one by one, and we repeat the consistency analysis to remove the question that yields the lowest value of Cronbach's alpha. If any dimension has a Cronbach's value less than 0.7, then the item causing the lowest value is removed.

3.3. Gap analysis

All participants are equally important. We compute the average of their answers for every question in every dimension and look at the difference between perceived and expected quality. We assess and rank each dimension and question separately to analyze the problems. Suppose the difference in a question is high between the perceived and expected quality values. In that case, that question is discussed more with the participant to understand the reasons and to find out more about that question. Even though we did not analyze any open-ended questions, the statements of participants we recorded during our interviews shed light on their perceptions and expectations we try to analyze.

4. Results

Cronbach's alpha is a reliable measure of assessing the internal consistency of our dimensions [12, 39]. We compute Cronbach's alpha values for each dimension for KOSGEB and private banks. Table 3 shows these values. The parentheses indicate the number of questions the dimension contains for the given value. For example, the assurance dimension has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.69 if we compute the value for four questions and 0.79 with three questions. Table 3 indicates that all our dimensions show consistency, and we can continue with the gap analysis in the next step.

Table 3
Internal consistency of dimensions

Dimension	KOSGEB Cronbach's alpha	BANKS Cronbach's alpha
Reliability	0.79 (4)	0.78 (4)
Responsiveness	0.70 (3)	0.70 (3)
Assurance	0.65 (4) 0.79 (3)	0.74 (4)
Empathy	0.78	0.73 (3)
Tangibles	NA	0.78 (3)

The values for tangibles are discarded because of two reasons. This dimension measures the physical appearance, comfort, and appropriate environment in the facilities. During our interviews, while conducting the survey, SMEs and farmers stated that they had not been to KOSGEB before:

> "I do not know where KOSGEB is, I only talk to them on the phone."

> "How will I go to Ankara and ask them to give me money?"

> "No, no, instead of paying money to go there, I will use the money myself."

Therefore, we have reliable answers for private banks for the tangibles direction, but the answers for KOSGEB rely on assumptions rather than actual observations. This is why we remove the tangibles dimension from our study and do not include it in the gap analysis.

The assurance dimension for the KOSGEB data first yielded a value of 0.65 that was smaller than the threshold value of 0.70. We conduct the analysis for this dimension by removing each question and obtain the values shown in Table 4. Accordingly, if question 4 is removed, we obtain the highest consistency with a value of 0.79, which is also higher than the threshold value.

Therefore, we put the results of A4 for reference only but do not consider them in further steps of the analysis.

The gap analysis results of each dimension for KOSGEB and the banks are given in Table 5. For each dimension, the column "Per" denotes the perceived quality, the column "Exp" denotes the expected quality, and the column "Gap" shows the difference between perceived quality and expected quality. The row "Avg" shows each dimension's average value of participant answers.

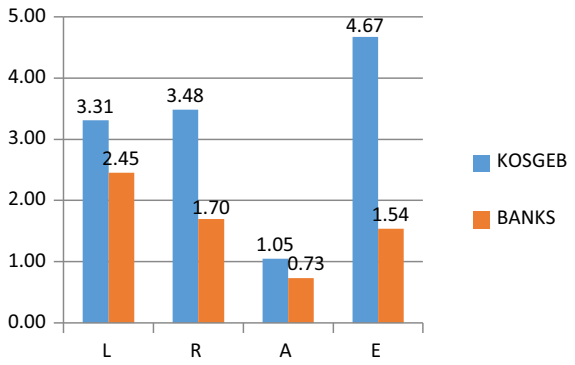
Table 4
KOSGEB assurance consistency

Items in assurance	Cronbach's alpha
All items	0.65
A1 excluded	0.68
A2 excluded	0.28
A3 excluded	0.27
A4 excluded	0.79

Larger values show larger gaps between the perceived quality and the expected quality.

Accordingly, empathy is the dimension with the largest gap in KOSGEB. It has a value of 4.67. All three questions of the empathy dimension yield large differences as well. The first question has a gap value of 3.74, the second question has a gap value of 4.75, and the final question has a gap value of 5.51. The gap averages for each dimension are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Gap averages for each dimension



As can be inferred from the figure, the gap is larger for KOSGEB than the banks for each dimension. If we look at the statements from interviews for KOSGEB, we see lack of communication, poor behavior, or giving general answers instead of addressing a specific issue of SMEs and farmers:

> "I always regret when I call them because my time is wasted but my problems are not resolved."

> "I could not help but shouting at them as they repeat the same sentence over and over again."

> "What are you talking about? They do not even pick up the phone let alone answering my questions."

Banks do not yield a big difference in the gap values of empathy dimension. Owing to the fact that private firms are more customer-oriented, we see an average gap of 2.54 in the empathy dimension for the banks:

> "Banks are everywhere and service has the same quality. So I better go to the banks to ask for money."

> "Banks are 1000 times better, at least they do their job."

> "I am very happy with . . . Bank, Mr . . . always helps and answers the questions of the entire organized industrial zone."

The second dimension with the highest gap is responsiveness for KOSGEB with an average gap value of 3.48. It is followed by the reliability dimension for KOSGEB that has an average gap value of 3.31. For the private banks, these gap values are 2.45 and 1.70, respectively. For both dimensions, there is a big difference between the gaps of KOSGEB and the gaps of the banks.

In the reliability dimension for KOSGEB, the highest gap is seen in L4 with a value of 4.27. It is only 2.25 for the banks. L4 is about the access to information. This high value for KOSGEB

Table 5
Gap analysis results

	KOSGEB			BANKS		
	Per	Exp	Gap	Per	Exp	Gap
L1	5.67	9.84	4.17	7.56	9.89	2.33
L2	7.54	9.49	1.95	8.31	8.82	0.51
L3	6.26	9.13	2.87	4.64	9.36	**4.72**
L4	5.15	9.42	**4.27**	7.28	9.53	2.25
Avg	**6.16**	**9.47**	**3.31**	**6.95**	**9.40**	**2.45**
R1	6.24	9.44	3.21	8.34	9.27	0.93
R2	5.80	9.36	3.56	7.33	9.13	1.80
R3	5.65	9.33	**3.68**	7.06	9.42	**2.36**
Avg	**5.90**	**9.38**	**3.48**	**7.58**	**9.27**	**1.70**
	KOSGEB			BANKS		
	Per	Exp	Gap	Per	Exp	Gap
A1	8.76	9.07	0.31	8.69	9.29	0.6
A2	7.21	9.29	**2.08**	8.06	9.16	**1.10**
A3	8.82	9.40	0.58	9.26	9.42	0.16
A4	8.38	9.62	1.24	8.65	9.71	1.06
Avg	**8.29**	**9.34**	**1.05**	**8.67**	**9.39**	**0.73**
E1	5.52	9.27	3.74	7.27	9.36	**2.09**
E2	4.76	9.51	4.75	8.03	9.56	1.53
E3	4.04	9.56	**5.51**	8.05	9.07	1.02
Avg	**4.78**	**9.44**	**4.67**	**7.78**	**9.33**	**1.54**

indicates that SMEs and famers cannot obtain information easily, but they can get better information from the banks. As for L3, the value is 2.87 for KOSGEB and 4.72 for the banks, indicating the opposite situation to the case of L4. The question L3 is about payback of the loans and credits. SMEs and farmers find it cheaper to take loans and credits from KOSGEB as indicated by the value. However, for private banks, the value of 4.72 means that their loans are unfavorable and SMEs do not prefer to take loans from private banks as the interest rate and/or commissions and extra fees will cost too much for them.

SERVQUAL scale provides many valuable insights about the financial support of governmental authorities and banks. It is convenient to see financial support as a service in our study. There are two sides, service providers and consumers. Consumers are the producers of other goods and services. We assume a supply chain mechanism in terms of money flow because support comes from service providers; firms use this support to produce goods and services and pay back their suppliers. This mechanism should have an assessed fill rate to see if its functioning is efficient. Our study assessed this fill rate using the five dimensions in SERVQUAL. We obtain the following results:

1) Producers want to take a loan from KOSGEB since their payback is more favorable than banks. However, they are very unsatisfied with the communication and interaction with KOSGEB about reaching financial support.
2) Banks are much better than KOSGEB in terms of access to information, but their interest rate is higher, which makes them unfavorable.
3) KOSGEB employees do not help access information, and firm managers cannot find information easily. Firm managers also think that they have to be notified or sent some brochures to know more about the support of KOSGEB. They do not think the same about banks. They think banks always provide enough information regarding their services.
4) KOSGEB and banks are trustable institutions, and people feel secure about payback policies and credits they apply for.
5) Empathy issues of employees of KOSGEB damage KOSGEB's reputation. We understand from the statements that producers prefer banks more, even if banks' interest rate for the payback period is higher than KOSGEB.

5. Discussion

SMEs are essential in a country's gross domestic product and employment capability. Especially in developing countries with a limited number of world brands, the effect of SMEs on micro- and macro-economy is large. Their capability to cover demand and contribute to the economy will depend on how they sustain their business. It is inevitable to apply for a loan and financial support to sustain the business, but locating and possessing funds is not easy due to a lack of communication, information, and awareness.

Our study analyzes the financial mechanism of receiving these funds within the 2018–2023 strategic development plan system. Boundary judgments are comprised of all laws and regulations of the Turkish Republic, and the objective of the system is sustainable growth in gross domestic product and total labor force. To the best of our knowledge, there has not been any study that focuses on KOSGEB and private banks simultaneously. The study is also unique in using local producers instead of a central authority to analyze the city of Tokat. Tokat is significant for agricultural activities, thanks to its warm climate, and has excellent potential in elevator production and other subparts production for the automotive industry. However, since it is not on the seaside and is not very populated, the city remains a bridge between the Black Sea region and internal parts of Turkey rather than being considered the main actor in the strategic plan of Turkey. These were the main reasons we chose the city of Tokat to analyze the financial support of KOSGEB and private banks.

Another tool for validating our results is the SERVPERF scale, used extensively for analyzing and evaluating customer perceptions rather than expectations, and is dependent on less data for one survey than SERVQUAL. Fewer data may be misleading in service industries; however, it also allows for obtaining more data from more participants and includes a larger portion of the population of interest.

After discussing analysis results, we would like to give further insights on the assurance dimension and explain the gap in question A1. We see a gap of 0.60 in banks and 0.31 in KOSGEB in question A1. Culture and education level are essential in classifying a service good or bad. Banks show better performance in reliability dimension (2.45 compared to 3.31 for KOSGEB), and they are more clear when it comes to reaching the information. However, A1 suggests the opposite. The reason is the higher interest rate of banks than KOSGEB but also the lack of knowledge of Turkish people about financial mechanism of loans and funds. When we asked about this to SMEs, we obtained the following statements in our records:

> "I take loan from banks but I pay more than I take."

> "I apply for a loan but they want more money, they abuse our situation of needing money."

> "I am buying a car for myself, and another for the bank."

These statements are not financially adjusted as the money has a time value and the interest rate is inevitable. In addition, financial expertise and knowledge of Turkish people about bank loans are very low [40]. A loan is used for replacing a car or buying property instead of investing in technology or other investment opportunities. As a result, the benefits of a loan significantly diminish.

In addition, it is essential to mention why these support instruments play a significant role in Turkey's low-carbon economy policy. Turkey defines many updates on its regulation of organic agriculture to cope with the European Union and relates its support mechanism to a low-carbon economy by encouraging organic agricultural production [41]. Accordingly, two main problems should be addressed while planning for any support mechanism.

First, there is no energy balance between production and consumption, and SMEs and farmers suffer from high electricity and watering costs. However, out of all the farmers interviewed, none of them have information about the organic agriculture support Turkey is providing to entrepreneurs. Their concern is solely cheap production and profit. Therefore, there is no public awareness, as Sahzabi et al's study proposes, and financial support applications are classified as agricultural production and livestock rather than organically performing them.

Another reason why Turkey still has increasing demand for imported energy is the insufficient domestic energy production. While Turkey installs a significant number of wind turbines and sources of renewable energy, Turkey's population and, therefore, SMEs and farmer's demand for energy are on the rise, making it necessary to rely on fossil fuels to meet the energy demand [42]. This is why nuclear and renewable energy planning is currently incapable of providing solutions for fossil fuels, and more research and practice are necessary in these areas.

This lack of practice is reflected in Ari and Yikmaz's [43] study, where Turkey's intended nationally determined contribution (INDC) is analyzed to meet the Paris Agreement in monitoring and updating the INDC level. The study suggests that Turkey has to set new low-carbon and renewable energy targets for the period finishing in 2030.

Considering all these facts and the fact that solar energy and wind-based energy sources can meet up to 21% of Turkey's total energy demand by its current state [44], it is evident that Turkey's support instruments to help and sustain SMEs and farmers should be introduced in a way that low-carbon economy and green environment aspects are mentioned in any guideline, public statements, and sources of information accessed by applicants. Only this way, as a future improvement of our study, the low-carbon economy aspect can be incorporated into sustainability as a whole, and SMEs can wisely and effectively consider which government grants and private subventions to choose from.

6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This study evaluated the financial support of governmental authorities and private banks to SMEs using the SERVQUAL scale in five dimensions. First, the method is applied to structured surveys with SMEs and farmers in Tokat. Then using a gap analysis method, we showed a lack of empathy and efficient communication between authorities and producers. The study is unique in bringing farmers and SMEs together and raising voices on the problems not mentioned previously by governmental and private authorities. It is also significantly contributing toward loan and funds knowledge by specifically focusing on the Tokat region and creating awareness among local producers.

One limitation of the study is that the data can come from KOSGEB and private banks and can serve as another supporting point for our results. We surveyed and interviewed SMEs in our study. By the term "soft system of interest," we define the opinions, emotions, and other qualitative data of people that participated in our study. Within the soft system of interest, SMEs act as customers/consumers. We used their objective opinions, but since they are service users, there may still be subjectivity or missing points in their evaluation of services even after we eliminate all biased surveys and interviews.

In further studies, surveys can also be applied to the service providers of the soft system of interest. For our study, service providers are KOSGEB and private banks. Therefore, employees who are responsible for communicating with SMEs for financial support should take a survey regarding the quality of this service. In our case, we found out that there is a lack of empathy and communication with KOSGEB employees. However, what do KOSGEB employees think about this situation? Do they think there is a lack of communication with SMEs? Who has the more significant responsibility in communication, SMEs or KOSGEB employees? These questions can be asked to further analyze and evaluate the financial support mechanism for SMEs. Moreover, the design of a second survey we mention for KOSGEB and private bank employees can play a crucial role in comparing and crosschecking the perceptions and expectations of SMEs and farmers.

The number of dimensions is five in our study. For future studies, it is recommended to increase them in such a way that they encompass more directions for the specific needs of SMEs. To illustrate, it is a fact that SMEs need financial support, but the question of whether they need it for a machine or whether they need it for certain raw materials is not completely answered by our study. If the survey can be branched based on the type and the amount of support, there can be a better understanding of gaps between perceptions and expectations.

Ethical Statement

This study does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects performed by any of the authors.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to this work.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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