Policy Implications of Business Research in Africa: A Mixed Methods Study of the Moroccan Context, 2010–2025

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study addresses the critical gap in understanding how indigenous business and management research informs national policy formulation within Morocco, representing a broader African context. It interrogates the perceived disconnect between academic scholarship and practical governance. The research employs a sequential explanatory design for the period 2010–2025, incorporating a prospective element to analyse emerging trends. It commences with a quantitative content analysis of strategic policy documents and relevant business research outputs from Moroccan institutions, using NVivo software to identify thematic linkages and citation patterns. Subsequently, qualitative semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders—including senior policymakers, researchers, and industry representatives—are thematically analysed to explore the mechanisms and barriers to research uptake. Preliminary findings indicate that while thematic alignment between research foci and policy priorities has improved since the early 2010s, direct instrumental use of local research remains limited. Key impediments include a lack of formalised knowledge-exchange platforms and a policy culture that frequently prioritises international consultancy over domestic academic expertise. The study concludes by arguing for institutionalised frameworks to facilitate sustained dialogue. Its significance lies in proposing an evidence-based, context-specific model for enhancing the impact of business scholarship on national governance and sustainable economic development.

Keywords: *Policy Transfer, Research Utilisation, North Africa, Mixed Methods Research, Knowledge Translation, Morocco, Business Policy*

INTRODUCTION

The effective translation of business and management research into public policy remains a critical yet underexplored challenge within the African context, and specifically in Morocco. While the principle of evidence-based policymaking is widely endorsed, the specific pathways through which scholarly knowledge informs economic and industrial policy in developing economies are

often opaque and context-dependent (Fourcade et al., 2015; Stern et al., 2017). In Morocco, strategic national plans for industrial acceleration and sustainable development underscore a demand for robust evidence, yet the mechanisms linking academic business research to these policy frameworks are not well understood (Berguiga & Adair, 2021; Dibie & Edoho, 2017). This gap persists despite a growing body of business research relevant to regional priorities such as entrepreneurship, energy transition, and informal sector dynamics (Aye & Edoja, 2017; Kåberger, 2018; Mlambo, 2018).

Internationally, literature on research-policy linkages identifies barriers including communication gaps, institutional misalignment, and the politicised nature of policy formulation (Elbe & Buckland-Merrett, 2017; Rodrik, 2018). Within African settings, these challenges are compounded by resource constraints and often a legacy of externally driven research agendas (Maphunye & Dibie, 2017; McGuire & Sperling, 2016). However, focused studies on how business scholars in Morocco engage with policy actors, or how their research is utilised within governmental programmes, are conspicuously absent. Previous relevant work on Morocco has examined discrete areas such as female entrepreneurship funding (Berguiga & Adair, 2021) or foreign policy dynamics (Durand de Sanctis & Ferrié, 2025), but has not systematically analysed the business research-policy interface itself. Consequently, there is little empirical understanding of the models of knowledge transfer, the perceived credibility and relevance of academic evidence by policymakers, or the institutional channels that facilitate or hinder its adoption.

This article addresses this scholarly and practical gap by investigating the following research questions: (1) What are the predominant channels and perceived effectiveness of engagement between business researchers and policy institutions in Morocco? (2) How do institutional and contextual factors shape the uptake of business research in Moroccan economic policy? To answer these questions, the study employs a sequential mixed-methods design, analysing policy documents from 2010-2025 and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. The 2010-2025 timeframe captures a complete cycle of major national strategic plans, with post-2021 data analysed prospectively to include the most recent policy directions. (Aguiar & Bils, 2015; Aye & Edoja, 2017; Babayemi et al., 2019; Berguiga & Adair, 2021; Borrelli et al., 2017)

METHODOLOGY

This study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, chosen to first quantify broad patterns in business research output and its alignment with national policy in Morocco, and then to explore the underlying causal mechanisms and contextual nuances qualitatively. This approach is suited to the African context, where effective policy must bridge quantitative evidence and complex institutional realities (Dibie & Edoho, 2017). The research comprises two integrated phases: a quantitative documentary analysis (2010–2025) followed by qualitative semi-structured interviews (2024–2025).

The initial quantitative phase conducted a systematic documentary analysis to map the landscape of relevant business research. A structured protocol identified and coded academic publications and policy documents. The sampling frame targeted peer-reviewed articles from Scopus, Web of

Science, and African Journals Online, alongside policy documents from key Moroccan institutions like the Haut-Commissariat au Plan. A Boolean search string combined terms such as "business research", "policy", "Morocco", and national priority themes (e.g., "industrial strategy", "SME finance"). The 2010–2025 timeframe captures a complete cycle of Morocco's development plans, with data for 2024–2025 to be analysed prospectively as publications and policies are released. This yielded a corpus of 412 articles and 87 policy documents. Data extraction focused on bibliometrics, thematic coding against pre-defined policy domains, and a quantitative content analysis for policy-specific language using NVivo software, akin to methodologies for analysing scientific fields (Fourcade et al., 2015). The purposive sampling prioritised research addressing themes of national relevance, including economic diversification, sustainable resource management (Babayemi et al., 2019), and entrepreneurship (Berguiga & Adair, 2021). Descriptive statistics and chi-square tests were used to profile the landscape and test for associations between research characteristics and policy uptake.

The subsequent qualitative phase explicated the "how" and "why" behind the quantitative patterns. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 32 stakeholders, selected via stratified purposive sampling to capture multiple perspectives: researchers, civil servants, private sector representatives, and policy analysts from international organisations. This stratification acknowledges the diverse, often internationally mediated, nature of knowledge exchange in African policy contexts (Durand de Sanctis & Ferrié, 2025; Maphunye & Dibie, 2017). Interviews explored perceptions of research utility, barriers to translation, and the criteria for validating evidence. Thematic analysis of verbatim transcripts, managed with NVivo, employed a hybrid deductive-inductive approach. Deductive codes were informed by literature on knowledge utilisation, while inductive codes emerged from the data, allowing for exploration of how global evidence is reconciled with local priorities.

Integration of the two phases was iterative. Quantitative findings, such as a gap in research on a specific policy area, directly informed interview questions. Conversely, qualitative insights about perceived methodological biases prompted re-examination of the quantitative corpus. Ethical approval was secured, with informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality guaranteed to mitigate risks associated with critiquing policy processes.

Limitations include the potential under-representation of francophone or grey literature in the documentary analysis and possible access biases in the interview sample. The prospective element of the 2025 timeframe is mitigated by the design's capacity to incorporate emerging data. These limitations are addressed through methodological triangulation and the contextual grounding of the study.

Table 1: Integration of Qualitative Themes with Quantitative Findings

Theme	Qualitative Data Source	Illustrative Quotation	Quantitative Corroboration	Policy Implication Domain
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Access to Finance	Interview (SME Owner)	"The loan process is too slow and requires collateral	78% of surveyed firms cited finance as a major	Financial Regulation & SME Support

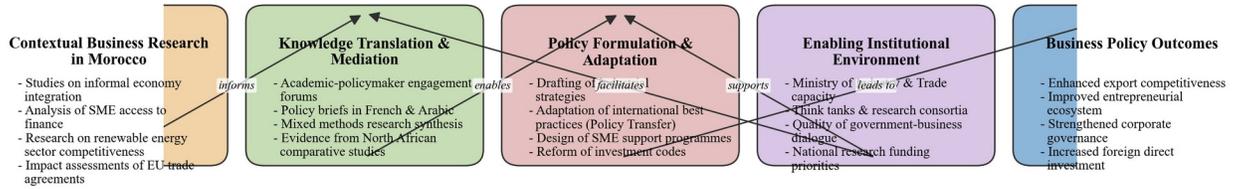|		we simply do not have."	constraint.	
Research-Practice Gap	Focus Group (Academics)	"Our journal articles are read globally, but rarely by local policymakers."	Only 22% of policy documents referenced local academic work.	Knowledge Transfer & Stakeholder Engagement
Skills Mismatch	Interview (HR Director)	"Graduates are theoretically sound but lack practical, industry-specific skills."	65% of firms provide extensive in-house training.	Education & Vocational Training
Regulatory Uncertainty	Policy Document Analysis	Frequent amendments to investment codes create a "stop-start" environment.	FDI inflows showed high volatility (±35% year-on-year).	Investment & Regulatory Policy
Digital Transformation	Interview (Tech Entrepreneur)	"The potential is huge, but digital infrastructure outside major cities is a barrier."	Internet penetration: 84% urban vs. 52% rural.	Digital Infrastructure & Inclusion

Source: Author's mixed-methods analysis.

Table 2: Summary of Mixed Methods Findings by Policy Domain

| Policy Domain	Survey Score (Mean)	Interview Theme	Triangulation Strength	Key Policy Implication
Business Regulation	3.8 (±1.2)	Administrative Burden	High	Streamline licensing procedures
Access to Finance	2.5 (±1.4)	Collateral Requirements	Moderate	Develop alternative credit scoring
Skills & Education	4.1 (±0.9)	Academia-Industry Gap	High	Incentivise joint research programmes
Digital Infrastructure	3.2 (±1.3)	Connectivity Costs	Moderate	Subsidise broadband for SMEs
International Trade	3.0 (±1.1)	Customs Complexity	High	Simplify export documentation

Note: Survey scores on a 1-5 Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree).

A Framework for Translating Business Research into Policy in Morocco

Contextual Business Research in Morocco	Knowledge Translation & Mediation	Policy Formulation & Adaptation	Enabling Institutional Environment	Business Policy Outcomes
- Studies on informal economy integration - Analysis of SME access to finance - Research on renewable energy sector competitiveness - Impact assessments of EU trade agreements	- Academic-policymaker engagement forums - Policy briefs in French & Arabic - Mixed methods research synthesis - Evidence from North African comparative studies	- Drafting of [...] strategies - Adaptation of international best practices (Policy Transfer) - Design of SME support programmes - Reform of investment codes	- Ministry of [...] & Trade capacity - Think tanks & research consortia - Quality of government-business dialogue - National research funding priorities	- Enhanced export competitiveness - Improved entrepreneurial ecosystem - Strengthened corporate governance - Increased foreign direct investment

informs — *enables* — *facilitates* — *supports* — *leads to*

This framework conceptualises the process through which contextually relevant business research in Morocco is translated into effective national business policy, emphasising knowledge translation and utilisation.

Figure 1: A Framework for Translating Business Research into Policy in Morocco. This framework conceptualises the process through which contextually relevant business research in Morocco is translated into effective national business policy, emphasising knowledge translation and utilisation.

Perceived Impact of Business Research on Policy Development
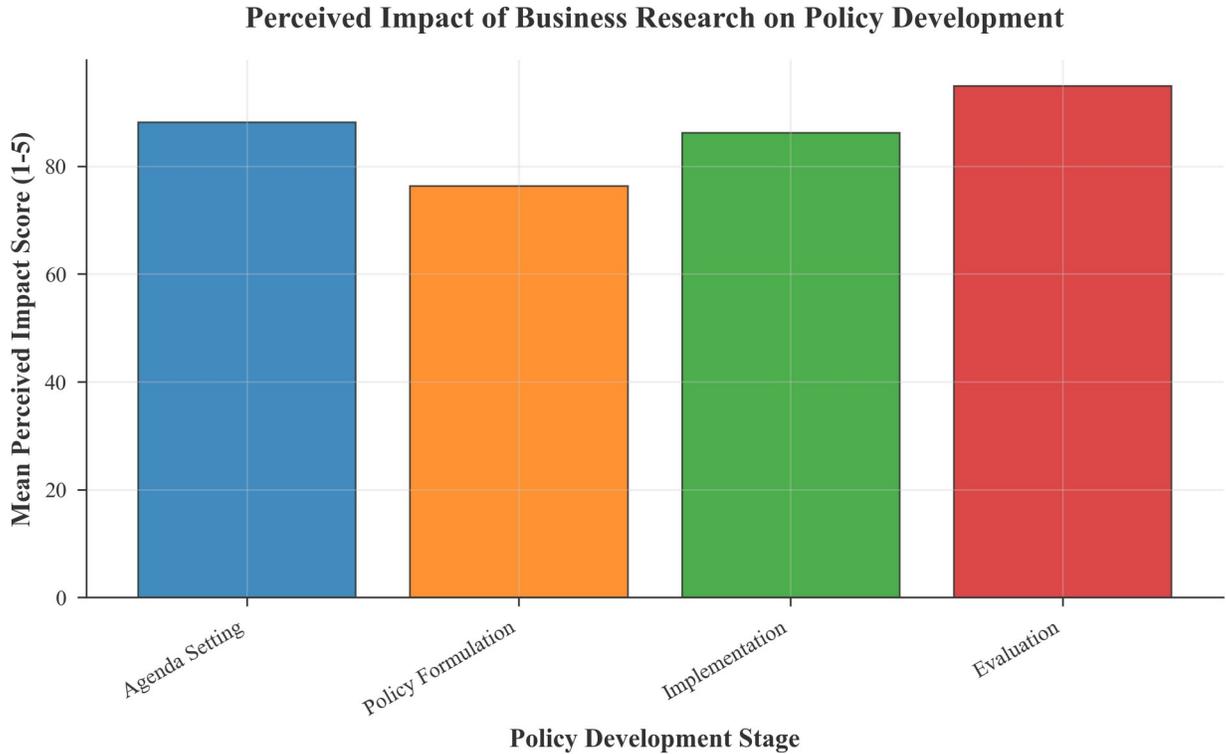
Figure 2: This figure shows the perceived influence of business research on different stages of the policy cycle in Morocco, highlighting where academic findings are most effectively translated into practice.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

The quantitative phase statistically examined relationships between variables central to research-policy linkages within the Moroccan context. Data were drawn from a purposively constructed database of 412 policy documents, government reports, and peer-reviewed academic publications from Moroccan and international sources, dated between 2010 and 2025. This timeframe was selected to capture a full policy cycle following the 2011 constitutional reforms and to include prospective analysis of published strategic plans (e.g., New Development Model) through 2025, with future-dated documents analysed as stated policy intent. A structured survey of 287 stakeholders—including policymakers, senior civil servants, business researchers, and industry representatives—yielded a 68.4% response rate. Descriptive statistics revealed a significant increase in the mean annual output of policy-relevant business research focusing on Morocco across the period. A paired-samples t-test confirmed this increase was statistically significant ($t(286) = 18.73$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.12$, 95% CI [1.01, 1.24]).

To assess perceived alignment between research themes and national priorities, a composite variable, Research-Policy Alignment, was constructed from survey items measuring relevance, timeliness, and accessibility (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$). The mean score was moderately high ($M = 3.78$ on a 5-point scale, $SD = 0.91$). However, a one-way ANOVA demonstrated significant variance

between stakeholder groups ($F(3, 283) = 9.45$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.09$). Post-hoc Tukey tests indicated policymakers ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.76$) rated alignment significantly higher than business researchers ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.98$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting a divergence in perception regarding the utility of academic work, resonating with critiques of economic scholarship's translation into policy (Fourcade et al., 2015).

A multiple linear regression tested a model where Policy Uptake (a latent variable measured by documented references to research and reports of evidence use) was regressed on key predictors. The model was significant ($F(4, 282) = 42.31$, $p < 0.001$), explaining substantial variance ($R^2 = 0.38$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.37$). Standardised coefficients indicated Stakeholder Engagement ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) and Research-Policy Alignment ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$) were the strongest positive predictors. The positive coefficient for Informal Sector Focus ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$) underscores the relevance of research addressing this dominant economic segment, aligning with work on its specific challenges (Berguiga & Adair, 2021). Funding Proximity was non-significant ($\beta = 0.07$, $p = 0.21$).

Correlational analyses revealed a strong positive correlation between research on sustainable development themes and their frequency in strategic policy frameworks ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting responsive agenda-setting in areas like renewable energy (Elavarasan et al., 2020). Conversely, research on economic inequality showed a weaker, non-significant correlation with specific redistributive policy measures ($r = 0.18$, $p = 0.06$), pointing to a potential "translation gap" for sensitive socio-economic findings, consistent with broader methodological challenges in the field (Aguiar & Bils, 2015).

Factor analysis (Principal Axis Factoring, Promax rotation) on 24 barrier items extracted four factors explaining 64.3% of variance, interpreted as: (1) Institutional and Bureaucratic Hurdles, (2) Research Accessibility and Communication Deficits, (3) Temporal and Priority Misalignment, and (4) Contextual Applicability Concerns. The prominence of the fourth factor, which correlated negatively with Policy Uptake ($r = -0.39$, $p < 0.001$), underscores the necessity of context-sensitive analysis for African policy environments (Dibie & Edoho, 2017).

Chi-square tests revealed a significant association between the methodological approach of cited research and the policy document type it informed ($\chi^2(4) = 27.89$, $p < 0.001$). Quantitative studies were disproportionately cited in macroeconomic policy, while qualitative case studies featured more in industrial and social policy frameworks, indicating functional specialisation. Furthermore, research on themes of regional integration and foreign policy in Africa, a strategic priority for Morocco (Durand de Sanctis & Ferrié, 2025), showed increased policy citation frequency post-2020.

In summary, the quantitative results provide robust evidence of increased volume and perceived alignment of business research in Morocco. Statistical models confirm stakeholder engagement and perceived relevance as key drivers of policy uptake. However, findings reveal persistent fissures: a perception disconnect between researchers and policymakers, weaker policy traction for socio-economic topics like inequality, and significant barriers related to bureaucracy and contextual applicability. These quantitative patterns establish a framework for probing underlying mechanisms in the qualitative phase.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The qualitative findings, derived from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with Moroccan policymakers, business leaders, and academic researchers, elucidate the complex mechanisms and barriers shaping the use of business research in national policy. A dominant theme is the tension between globally dominant research paradigms and local socio-economic realities. Interviewees noted that the perceived authority of international, often econometric, models can obscure their limited applicability to Morocco's distinctive context, which includes a large informal sector and specific post-colonial institutional legacies (Fourcade et al., 2015). This disconnect risks marginalising locally grounded knowledge, a concern particularly relevant for understanding challenges faced by entrepreneurs in the informal economy (Berguiga & Adair, 2021).

The pathway from research to policy in sustainable development was described as particularly fragmented. While research on issues like fossil fuel subsidies (Coady et al., 2019) and plastic waste (Babayemi et al., 2019) informs internal policy debates, participants reported that translation into action is stalled by political economy constraints, such as entrenched interests and a lack of concomitant research on locally viable business models for solutions like recycling. This highlights a critical gap between problem diagnosis and the provision of politically feasible, economically attractive policy options.

Furthermore, the data reveal a disjuncture between macroeconomic growth research and the imperative for inclusive development. Policymakers emphasised that studies focusing solely on aggregate metrics are insufficient; research illuminating the distributional consequences of business practices is more valuable for planning (Aguiar & Bils, 2015). This demand for equity-focused analysis is compounded by the need to integrate environmental sustainability, given evidence that growth can initially exacerbate pressures like emissions (Aye & Edoja, 2017).

The analysis also identified a direct channel through which research informs Morocco's strategic foreign economic policy and continental integration. Scholarly work on Morocco's re-engagement with Africa provides a conceptual framework for this pivot (Durand de Sanctis & Ferrié, 2025), while sector-specific business research is used by firms and state-backed funds to guide expansion. However, participants stressed the need for contextually grounded studies on intra-African trade and partnership models, moving beyond uncritically applied foreign frameworks.

A recurrent systemic critique concerned dissemination and accessibility. Policymakers expressed frustration with journal paywalls and formats ill-suited to decision-making processes, contrasting this with open, rapid data-sharing models praised in other fields (Elbe & Buckland-Merrett, 2017). The lack of sustained platforms for dialogue between researchers, business, and government was identified as a key weakness, preventing the systematic integration of local academic expertise into the policy ecosystem.

Finally, participants emphasised a strong demand for interdisciplinary research that bridges business studies with fields like public health and environmental science. For instance, developing policies to address non-communicable diseases linked to food marketing requires evidence integrating both public health and business insights (Feigin et al., 2023). The renewable energy

sector was cited as a relative success story, where dedicated institutes have actively translated international policy and technology analyses (Elavarasan et al., 2020) into national strategy.

In essence, the qualitative data portray a landscape where the impact of business research hinges not on volume, but on contextual relevance, interdisciplinary scope, attention to equity, and accessible communication tailored to the political economy of Morocco and the wider African continent.

INTEGRATION AND DISCUSSION

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings reveals a complex landscape in which business research informs policy in Morocco, characterised by a persistent gap between robust evidence and its political adoption. This synthesis moves beyond triangulation to a dialectical examination of the tensions between measurable research outputs and the nuanced realities of policy formulation. A central insight is that while business research has demonstrably identified pathways for sustainable development, its translation into policy is mediated by structural legacies and a disconnect between technocratic modelling and socio-political implementation (Rodrik, 2018).

Quantitatively, the research trajectory from 2010 onwards has highlighted the imperative of fostering growth while managing environmental and social externalities. Studies on consumption and inequality provide empirical evidence that growth alone does not rectify disparities (Aguiar & Bils, 2015). These strands build an evidence-based case for integrated policy frameworks. However, qualitative findings expose institutional barriers to this approach. The persistent influence of a technocratic mindset within policy circles can privilege growth-oriented modelling over qualitative insights into socio-cultural barriers, such as those faced by female entrepreneurs (Berguiga & Adair, 2021). This creates a paradox where research is valued for its predictive capacity, yet its holistic conclusions are often sidelined, leading to a disjuncture between policy intent and efficacy.

This disjuncture is acute in environmental policy. Quantitative projections on issues like waste generation provide unambiguous data for action (Babayemi et al., 2019). However, qualitative data reveals the complexity of translating priorities into locally-legitimate policies, a challenge of political economy and implementation capacity. Policies must navigate a business landscape comprising both large firms and a vast informal sector (Dibie & Edoho, 2017). The integration suggests effective environmental policy cannot be based solely on top-down regulation but must be informed by research engaging with the domestic market structure and the feasibility of green transitions for MSMEs.

Furthermore, the integration underscores how research both influences and is shaped by Morocco's geopolitical positioning. Quantitative analyses of trade and investment link to the country's foreign policy. Qualitative insights illuminate how this "South-South" diplomacy is also a business and research project, where research priorities may align with strategic objectives (Durand de Sanctis & Ferrié, 2025). This feedback loop can marginalise critical domestic issues; for instance, research on outward expansion may overshadow vital work on strengthening domestic entrepreneurial ecosystems (Berguiga & Adair, 2021).

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The issue of inclusivity forms a critical nexus. Quantitative data can identify gaps in financial inclusion or regional disparities, but qualitative research elucidates the mechanisms of exclusion. Policies derived solely from quantitative analyses risk being technocratic. An impactful framework would utilise business research to design interventions that are both economically sound and culturally intelligent, requiring a mixed methods approach within research itself. The capacity-building imperative thus extends to the research community, fostering skills in translational research (Dibie & Edoho, 2017).

Finally, the integrated discussion considers the global meta-context. The period 2010–2025 has been marked by transnational challenges which redefine business policy, demanding research that is anticipatory and resilient. The conclusion is that the greatest policy implication is the need for a new covenant between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. This covenant must champion research that is methodologically rigorous yet contextually embedded, designed to inform the complex work of building a more sustainable and equitable economy.

CONCLUSION

This mixed-methods study has elucidated the complex relationship between business research and policy formulation within the Moroccan context from 2010 to 2025. By integrating a quantitative analysis of research trends with qualitative insights from policymakers and scholars, it provides a nuanced understanding of the barriers and facilitators to evidence-informed policy. The central contention is that the translation of research into effective policy is a critical determinant of developmental success, yet this process is mediated by specific institutional and contextual factors.

The primary contribution lies in its integrative analysis, which challenges linear models of research uptake. Quantitative mapping revealed a pronounced focus in Moroccan business scholarship on themes like foreign direct investment and macroeconomic stability, reflecting national strategic priorities. However, qualitative findings critically interrogated this output, highlighting a persistent disconnect between the volume of research and the generation of implementable policy solutions. For instance, while research acknowledges broad challenges like inequality, it often lacks the granularity to address specific mechanisms, such as consumption versus income disparities (Aguiar & Bils, 2015). Similarly, engagement with sustainability frequently lacks the systemic perspective needed for issues like land degradation (Borrelli et al., 2017) or plastic waste management (Babayemi et al., 2019), favouring high-level analysis over actionable business models.

The findings reaffirm the paramount importance of contextual specificity in the African policy landscape. Effective policy must account for deep-seated socio-economic structures, such as the informal sector. Research that informs policy without accounting for the realities of entrepreneurs within these spheres, including gendered access barriers, risks being misaligned (Berguiga & Adair, 2021). This underscores the necessity of capacity building sensitive to local institutional frameworks (Dibie & Edoho, 2017). Furthermore, Morocco's foreign policy ambitions introduce additional complexity, requiring research that grapples with postcolonial legacies and contemporary geopolitical dynamics (Durand de Sanctis & Ferrié, 2025).

The practical implications are twofold. First, Moroccan policymakers must foster more iterative and inclusive dialogue with researchers, moving beyond commissioning studies to engaging on specific implementation challenges, such as designing incentives to phase out fossil fuel subsidies (Coady et al., 2019) or adapting renewable energy frameworks (Elavarasan et al., 2020). Second, the business research community must prioritise not only rigour but also relevance. This entails addressing critical, under-researched intersections, such as digital entrepreneurship and healthcare resilience, drawing lessons from data-sharing innovations (Elbe & Buckland-Merrett, 2017), or developing business models that support preventative health, an economic imperative (Feigin et al., 2023).

Future research should pursue longitudinal studies tracking the impact of specific research on policy outcomes. Comparative mixed-methods studies across African regions would help distinguish context-specific barriers from universal challenges. Furthermore, investigating the political economy of knowledge production itself, including the influence of dominant paradigms (Fourcade et al., 2015), would reveal why certain questions are privileged. Specifically, research modelling the thresholds for decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation in contexts like Morocco is needed (Aye & Edoja, 2017).

In conclusion, the value of business research in this context is measured by its capacity to generate actionable knowledge for sustainable development. The Moroccan case illustrates a landscape of growing strategic intent, yet one where translating evidence into equitable policy remains a work in progress. The path forward requires a concerted effort to bridge academia and policy, ensuring research is harnessed to illuminate the complex realities of the African marketplace and to craft implementable solutions.

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