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Unraveling the Key Determinants of SME Failure in Africa: Insights from a Systematic Literature Review and Sector-Specific Analysis

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Abstract. This study aims to identify the common factors contributing to the failure of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Africa through a systematic literature review and descriptive statistical analysis. Focusing on the post-Covid-19 period, the study examines the challenges faced by SMEs in three sectors: agriculture, trade and services, and industry. The systematic review reveals that SME failure is influenced by a combination of factors related to the entrepreneur, management process, organizational characteristics, and environmental variables. The descriptive analysis highlights sector-specific issues, such as limited access to technology and the internet in the agricultural sector, high levels of informality and corruption in the trade and services sector, and significant management difficulties in the industrial sector. The study also finds that African SMEs are poorly connected to international knowledge networks and face challenges in market integration. The findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address the identified failure factors and promote SME growth in Africa.

Keywords: Failure, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, Africa, difficulties, financing, markets, sectors.

1. Introduction

According to the experts at Allianz Trade, business insolvency is set to grow by 10% in 2024. This is due to a recession in corporate revenues following a slowdown in global demand, and a weakening of pricing power. Because of their fragility and small size, small and medium-sized enterprises are particularly prone to default.

The Small and Medium Enterprise has long been considered a fragile entity. However recently it is emerging as a catalyst for economic development Zhou and Gumbo (2021). The change in perception in favor of the small and medium enterprise is due to its flexibility, as well as its ability to contribute to economic growth, job creation, wealth, income and poverty reduction (Manzoor and al. 2021). SME failure has become an important topic due to the phenomena of increased business competition and globalization (Chinomona 2013; Masroor and Muhammad 2019; Yang and al. 2017). However, for every 100 small and medium-sized enterprises, only 90 can exceed two years of survival (Cabello, Conde, & Reyes).

Due to their size and ownership structure, small and medium-sized businesses experience profitability and liquidity difficulties, making them particularly vulnerable to external shocks (European Commission, 2019). Governments need to ensure the resilience of small and medium-sized enterprises in their mandates (Nurunnabi, 2020; Fath and al., 2021; Taneo and al., 2022). Indeed, a company's access to incentives, subsidies and financial support strengthens its ability to adapt to disturbances (Sauser and al., 2011; Gunartin and al., 2021).

Entrepreneurial failure is a phenomenon with consequences for the community (Klimas, Czakon, Kraus, Kailer and Maalaoui, 2020). The consequences are economic, with loss of value and innovation. Failure is an important topic in entrepreneurship that needs to be understood in more detail (Jenkins and McKelvie, 2016).

Research has focused on the impact of public aid on the viability of businesses, with several studies carried out in Bangladesh (Pu and al., 2021), China (Wang and al., 2021), Saudi Arabia (Nurunnabi, 2020) and the UK (Belghitar 2021). According to the International Monetary Fund, global public aid has reached over $11,000 billion, with 50% allocated to education and training. Research on the subject has presented the causes of SME failure at the start or during growth (Farja and al. 2017; Otto 2018). However, few failure factors include finance (Feng and al. 2020), managerial incompetence (Abham and al. 2015), lack of government support (Xiang and Worthington 2017; Lee and al. 2011), lack of infrastructure (Ajidé 2020) and environment (Haman and al. 2015; Ogujiuba and al. 2021b).

The aim of this work is to contribute to the existing literature on SME failure in a specific context. In addition, it provides information on the determinants of failure, and offers prospects for decision-makers to better master the phenomenon of SME failure.

The choice of analyzing the determinants of failure is justified by the finding that Morocco, an African country, showed between the years 2021 and 2022, the decline in business start-ups in the "trade" and "manufacturing" sections recorded drops of 8.5% and 3.4% respectively, as well as the small increase in start-ups of only 6.5% in the agricultural sector. According to the annual report published in 2023 by the Moroccan Observatory for Very, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. These statistics demonstrate the difficulties encountered in these sectors.

Table.1: Aims and results of some articles in our systematic review

Authors	Aims	Results
Obinna Alo and al (2023)	The study of failure according to the deterministic approach in relation to macroeconomic forces (Amankwah-Amoah & Zhang, 2015). And according to the voluntarist approach, it is microeconomic forces that condition company	Based on qualitative data from Ghana and Nigeria, the results show that following the COVID-19 pandemic, the continuation of business activities has become difficult due to the lack of technological know-how and the absence of commercial activities.

	survival (Habersang, Küberling-Jost, Reihlen & Seckler, 2019).	
Nhamo Mashavira and at al (2022)	The study of survival and performance based on the approach of managerial skills, leadership, and value creation strategies.	The study adopted an analytical approach of structural equation modeling. The results of this research stipulate that interpersonal skills are factors of managerial skills, but not conceptual skills. These competencies were correlated with innovation and return on investment. The study states that these skills and practices are fundamental to the survival of SMEs.
Syed Asad Abbas Bokhari and at al (2022)	The study of the company's sustainable competitive advantage based on the approaches of dynamic capabilities, managerial capabilities and a resource-based view of competitive advantage.	The results of the study based on a multiple regression model demonstrated strong effects of dynamic capabilities on sustainable competitive advantage, providing justification for the company's resource-based view (RBV).
Nawal Abdalla Adam and Ghadah Alarifi (2021)	The study of survival and performance based on innovation practices with presentation of the role of external support.	The study of survival and performance based on innovation practices with presentation of the role of external support. The results of the study based on structural modeling of a survey of SMEs in Saudi Arabia define the positive impact of innovation practices to cope with the repercussions of COVID-19 on firm performance and survival probability. According to this study, external aid has a greater impact on a company's survival than on its performance.
Valentina A. Assenova (2020)	The analysis of survival and performance based on trait approaches, personality and managerial competencies.	The study examined the relationship between managerial personality and the performance and survival of cybercafés operating in the telecommunications services sector in South Africa. The results of the study showed that the traits of conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness are positively correlated with the performance of cybercafés.
Sasha Boucher and at al.,(2023)	The study of business survival and performance in Sub-Saharan Africa through the mobilization of ecosystem and entrepreneurial culture approaches.	The results, based on a survey of businesses in Sub-Saharan Africa, indicated the motivation of necessity as the main cause of entrepreneurship. This situation is defined by low systemic levels of innovation, low business competitiveness and an inability to evolve. The inability to evolve is justified by dependence on government, risk aversion and fear of failure, as well as a weak entrepreneurial heritage.
Joseph Amankwah-Amoah (2023)	The study of the influence of the macroeconomic framework, in particular the institutional environment in Sub-Saharan Africa, on business failure. The study was based on a case study of Virgin Atlantic's failed venture in Sub-Saharan Africa, through an analysis of the company's creation policies, the country's macroeconomic mutations, and the causes of the company's loss of legitimacy.	According to the study, the company's failure can be caused by both internal and external factors. The study's findings suggest that resisting institutional dysfunction requires government efforts. Moreover, the accumulation of political capital in the start-up phase (subsidies, support) helps to accelerate failure.
Tiziana La Rocca, and at al, (2023)	A study of the survival and performance of European SMEs in the energy sector through the mobilization of government policy variables, cash	The results of this study show the positive correlation between performance and holding cash reserves. Reserves enable companies to

	flow management and company financial difficulties.	invest, meet contingencies and grow. However, the company's commitment to environmental regulation reduces liquidity. The country must therefore enable growth and financial support for SMEs.
Holienka, M. ,and at al, (2022)	Analysis in Slovakia of the influence of the emotional aspect particularly the fear of failure on the entrepreneurial path.	Based on data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2019 for Slovakia and ordinal logistic regression confidence and ease when starting up allow a reduction in fear of failure. Fear of failure was presented as a self-assessment resulting from the individual's expectations. Fear of failure is therefore one of the obstacles to starting up a business.
Paula L. Costa and.al, (2023)	Analysis of the phenomenon of entrepreneurial failure based on a systematic literature review.	The results of this study enable a systematic analysis of entrepreneurial failure, through the analysis of the themes of causes, learning, fear and reintegration.
Arsalan Safari & Amit Das (2023)	Conceptualization of the causes of failure based on total quality management methods.	The results of this study present the determinants of failure and practices for overcoming failure. It thus enables the analysis of the factors of entrepreneurial failure on the basis of a failure prediction model based on financial, organizational, product market and legal aspects.

2. Theoretical Background

The small and medium-sized enterprise is defined in two ways: one based on endogenous criteria: size, workforce, balance sheet total or sales (D. Thain, 1969; L. Steinneetz, 1969), the other based on criteria exogenous to the enterprise.

A number of factors characterizes small and medium-sized businesses:

- The owner-manager is at the center of the company's management, organization, decision-making and information system (Annabelle, 2010).
- Subjective decision-making: decision-making is based on the manager's representations and in partnership with family members, suppliers and customers (Annabelle, 2010; Chalus-Sauvannet and Noguera, 2010).
- The weak structuring, task specialization and information system are simple and non-formal (Léger Jarniou, 2013; Filion, Schmitt and Ananou, 2012; Annabelle, 2010).
- Dependence on access to financial resources: SMEs are characterized by their dependence on external financial resources (Marchesnay, 2003).
- Specialization of business activities and personalization of relationships: the SME provides specific products and services. Its sales are based on the owner-manager's personal relationships. Indeed, the "small business has a clientele, not a market" (Marchesnay, 1988, p. 274).
- The strong influence of the business environment on the SME: the environment is made up of market forces, customers, suppliers and competitors, all of which have an impact on the SME, in terms of vulnerability, dependence and aggressiveness (Callot, 2006).
- Entrepreneurial failure is an integral part of every entrepreneurial project (Dutta & Sobel, 2021). Since the financial crises of the 1930s, business failure has become a subject of increasing interest to researchers (Guilhot, 2000).

Default is defined as a company's inability to meet creditors' conditions. From an economic point of view, a company is in default if it is unable to make a profit from its activity and risks becoming insolvent (Combier and Blazy, 1998). Failure is the result of a company's maladjustment to its environment, and hence the need to allocate resources to other, more efficient companies. From 1930 to 1945, research focused more on the correlations between life expectancy, age, size and sector of activity of the company studied.

Research from 1946 to 1965 focused on the causes of entrepreneurial failure through macro- and micro-economic analysis. Studies took into account criteria such as variations in supply and demand, investment levels and entrepreneurial behavior. Research from 1966 to 1985 introduced accounting and financial aspects to explain the phenomenon of failure. The analysis of the phenomenon was also based on the analysis of the entrepreneur and the study of his environment. From the 1980s onwards, business failure was analyzed from the angle of a mismatch between the company's organizational mode and its environment. Studies of large companies have favored the postulate that there is no universal model for studying failure. However, the contextual factors to be taken into account when studying the phenomenon are size, age and sector of activity. Business failure is also the result of the predominance of the environment, Feldbauer-Durstmüller (2019).

The cross-disciplinary approach to failure (Ferrier, 2002; Crutzen, 2006) considers single-discipline models of failure analysis to be incomplete. Drawing on theories of learning and strategic choice, the cross-disciplinary approach focuses on a processual study of the phenomenon, while integrating financial and organizational disciplines (Crutzen and Van Caillie, 2007) or financial and legal disciplines (Fimayer, 2011).

The financial crisis of 2008 led to the development of a new field of research, that of the failure of small and medium-sized businesses, focusing on the analysis of the role of the manager. Several works from the discipline of strategic management have placed the manager at the center of analysis. A chronological study of the concept of business failure has shown that, for each economic crisis, different disciplines take a different interest in analyzing the subject.

The concept of failure, as defined by several disciplines, suffers from a lack of compromise (Koenig, 1985; Morris, 1997). The concept can be studied from legal, economic or financial angles. Failure is defined in terms of its relationship to the company's organizational, commercial or strategic problems.

From an economic perspective, failure arises as a result of difficulties in disposing of inventories and profitability following the accumulation of deficits (Gresse, 1994). Failure is therefore the result of difficulties in remunerating capital commitments, and is also linked to the low level of wealth created by the company. These difficulties may arise from the company's lack of competitive advantage, or from the weight of expenses on operating income (Bescos, 1989).

The financial approach stipulates that failure results from the inability of available assets to meet financial and non-financial commitments (Liang, 2005; Hol 2002). Failure thus follows a deterioration in profitability and an inability to meet the company's financial commitments (Combier and Blazy, 1998). This inability may arise from the scale of the company's debts Séverin (2006).

Business failure can be the result of strategic mismanagement, poorly qualified personnel, lack of mastery of production and marketing tools, or due to the economic context and competition.

2.1. Systematic analysis of the literature on entrepreneurial failure

a) According to managerial theories.

Managerial competencies (Sabiu 2019) impact the entrepreneurial success of the firm (Bulog 2017). There is a direct link between managerial skills, value creation and a company's growth and strategy (Fatoki 2014).

Moreover, leadership, management and digital strategies are levers for the development of African businesses, and consequently their flaws are causes of business failure Obinna Alo (2023). Business success is linked to effective leadership Maman &Yang, 2020, business awareness and a focus on human capital (Yaghtin al, 2022).

Leadership is the process of influencing groups to achieve desired results (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2007), and therefore has an impact on the success or failure of the company. Two categories of leadership can be distinguished: transformational and transactional (Brûlures, 2012; Tal & Gordon, 2016). Transformational leadership is based on inspiration, as well as motivation to maintain resilience during crises (Ma & Yang, 2020). Transformational leadership is based on creating a platform for sharing resources and capabilities, and supporting personal development to overcome crises (Ngo, Le & Doan,2022). However, transactional leadership is based on the exchange between a leader and followers.

b) According to the evolutionary approach to the firm.

Evolutionary theory is one of the most important theories of innovation, enriching the work of S. Winter and R. Nelson. According to evolutionary theory, the firm seeks to acquire the competitive advantage of productive efficiency achieved through economies of scale, and the skills accumulated in the course of carrying out its activities.

Through an evolutionary input-output model, the correlation of the variables of initial investment, R&D experience, and innovation culture with firm performance and growth is confirmed Syed Asad Abbas Bokhari (2022). These variables help reduce slow start-ups and inadequate decision-making. Value creation through innovation is a strategic advantage of firms G.Santos 2019.

The firm presents itself as an entity characterized by its dynamics, enabling evolution and adaptation to external and internal changes. The firm does not seek profits alone, but rather the satisfaction of profit, as well as the management of change that promotes survival. The evolutionary approach has made it possible to analyze the importance of context in business growth. Context brings together different criteria: technologies, opportunities to overcome barriers to entry, competition and public policy. Different variables result from the addition of these criteria: market structure, new market entrants, regulation, financing. This helps to distinguish between different levels of environmental selection. In a context of narrow selection, even less efficient companies can survive for some time.

In general, companies are selected on the basis of their liquidity. The ability to generate investment returns in the early years increases the chances of survival and sustainability. Insufficient financial resources, on the other hand, force companies to resort to debt, which can lead to difficulties in controlling and, consequently, developing the firm.

c) According to the voluntarist approach to the firm.

The entrepreneur is the key nucleus of his company's development, Nthabeleng Tsoai, Crispen Chipunza (2022). The strengths and weaknesses of the entrepreneur are like those of his company. Thus, the skills of the manager (Hashim, Raza & Minai 2018) and the personality of the owner-managers (Ng & Kee 2018, Ncube and Chimucheka 2019) are crucial conditions for the success of his business. Personality is the coherence between feelings, cognition and behaviors, Costa, McCrae and Löckenhoff (2019). Personality is defined according to four criteria: neuroticism, extraversion, openness and conscientiousness (Widiger & Crego 2019). The levels of these criteria impact the level of business success William & Tina (2018).

Scientific work has also introduced the psychological aspect, motivation and intellectual abilities on the chances of business success. Baron 2000, Markman, Swierczek and Thanh Ha (2003), Sternberg (2004).

Social skills are also necessary for entrepreneurial success. These include the ability to understand the environment, the ability to adapt to situations related to the exercise of the function, Markman (2003). Entrepreneurs often make decisions based on relationships, recommendations from colleagues and other connections, which can have an impact on small businesses (Rahmawati 2021).

Many researchers have used strategic choice theory as the basis of their study (Akintimehin 2019; Al Mamun 2018; Jacobs, 2016; Pratono, 2018; Rahmawati 2021). This has enabled the deduction of the relationship between innovation and SME success (O'Cass & Sok, 2014; Oura et al., 2016; Zhang, 2018). The improvement of SME financial indicators finds its source in the development of innovations, Zulu-Chisanga (2016). Indeed, effective implementation of innovation leads to SME success Freeman (2004).

d) According to human capital theory

Research on entrepreneurial failure defines the role of human capital, training, work experience (Davidsson and Honig2003, Unger.2011, Marvel 2016), knowledge, skills and personal initiative (Anderson and Miller2003, Denker.2009, Sambasiva2010) in entrepreneurial success.

Human capital, in Véronique Simonnet's theory, refers to all the skills, abilities and qualifications, whether innate or acquired through training or experience, that a company possesses and mobilizes for productive purposes. Human capital is a crucial organizational variable, and a subject that has attracted a great deal of attention in entrepreneurship research. Human capital is also considered an essential criterion influencing economic development. People with high human capital are more likely to engage in opportunity recognition (Anderson and Miller2003), and to develop high-growth businesses (Eesley2016), as well as achieving higher sales growth and profitability than entrepreneurs with low human capital (McKenzie and Woodruff2016).

e) According to the deterministic approach

In addition to the variables of entrepreneurial traits, the enterprise and management modes, the context of enterprise development and the characteristics of the environment and its evolution also influence the survival and sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises Obinna Alo (2023). Thus, the institutional environment has an impact on the business environment and company strategies Joseph Amankwah-Amoah (2023). In other words, a dysfunctional institutional environment reduces a company's chances of survival (Barnard & Mamabolo, 2022).

In this context, we should mention the notion of environmental hostility, which refers to the risk and stress of the environment (Kach 2016; Khandwalla, 1997). The hostile environment is characterized by competitiveness in terms of access to resources (Mintzberg, 1982), as well as by the presence of negative signals regarding business success, due to inflation, competitive pressure, and regulation (Hall, 1980).

f) According to the competency-based approach.

Managerial skills are determinants of SME success and performance (Sidek and Mohamed 2014; Temtime and Pansiri 2006; Kyobe 2015). Managerial effectiveness requires the development of interpersonal, conceptual and political skills.

Interpersonal skills include general, human or generic skills, as well as group-working abilities (Sidek and Mohamed 2014). These skills are individual, such as motivation, and comprise communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills (Gawrycka 2020).

Conceptual competencies encompass the mental capacity to organize business activities, engage in new processes and modernize operational procedures. Managerial conceptual skills enable strategic planning, the development of action plans and creativity.

Political skills are the ability to manage situations under or out of control, and to take action (Bacharach 2006). This involves the formation of power bases, as well as the development of business networks controlling key resources and possessing essential skills (Bacharach 2006; Zarook 2013). SMEs with political networks have higher reinvestment rates (Zarook 2013).

A typology of entrepreneurial skills can be adopted, Boughattas (2010). A distinction is made between social skills, which are related to identifying professional networks to develop sustainable relationships (Bourdieu, 1980). Social skills are productive (Coleman, 1990). They enable the development of entrepreneurial activity. They refer to the set of relationships maintained by the entrepreneur. These are groups of individuals who maintain relationships with others. The aim of network development is to promote group action, to better perceive the environment (identify stakeholders and develop negotiation and expression).

In addition to social skills, we distinguish interpersonal skills, which, according to Rogers (1966), are presented by three factors: respect, manifested by recognition of the needs, visions and interests of the individual and others within the relationship. Authenticity in the relationship, which must be based on transparency and sharing. In addition, it must promote the integration of mutual commitment between members of the relationship and the consideration of solutions to complex problems.

From this perspective, Lorrain, Belley and Dussault (1998) have presented competencies in terms of management domains, notably finance, human resources, legal and commercial. Entrepreneurial skills are related to entrepreneurial vision, access to professional networks, and exploitation of opportunities offered by the environment. Management skills are linked to the ability to develop strategy, lead staff, solve problems, coordinate, organize and control activities. Entrepreneurial skills must be linked to technical, managerial and value-creation objectives for the company.

g) According to the resource primacy approach

African businesses face the greatest resource deficits, as they have generally been confronted with decades of acute resource constraints (Alo & Arslan, 2021). However, empirical data on the success and survival of African businesses remains scarce, as this requires a great deal of agility in developing resources and new business models (Adomako 2022).

In the post-pandemic period, companies face greater difficulties in developing agility and competitive advantage due to the shortage of financial and managerial resources (Alo & Arslan, 2021). Creating competitive advantage requires networking and the development of technological capabilities (Adomako 2022).

Resource primacy theory is based on the study of the assets owned by companies, and the importance of resources in explaining earnings trends (Barney, 1991). Based on this approach, the company is defined as a unique set of resources and capabilities.

The research of Aspelund et al (2005) focuses on the analysis of success in relation to strategic management, inspired by the resource theory initiated by Penrose (1959). The aim is to provide principles for the efficient growth and development of companies. Obinna Alo (2023) have also defined the approach to resource management efficiency, production and diversification, in its relationship with the capabilities and resources held that can provide a competitive advantage.

h) According to the dynamic capabilities approach.

For Polo García-Ochoa, (2020), the dynamic capabilities approach was developed in response to the inadequacies of the resource-based approach (Wernerfelt, 1984) in studying the strategic adaptation of companies to environmental change (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Winter, 2003). The dynamic capabilities approach is based on an evolving view of the company's resources and capabilities in relation to the environment (Wang & Ahmed, 2007). Dynamic capabilities enable the integration and reconfiguration of internal and external resources (Madsen, 2010). It is thus a development through learning of organizational and strategic routines shaped by complementary assets and sectoral opportunities (Teece 1997) for the generation of value-creating strategies (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). Consequently, dynamic capabilities enable the influence of corporate performance (Hernández-Linares, Kellermanns & López-Fernández, 2018).

3. Methods

The approach followed in this work is of systematic literature review reinforced by descriptive statistical analysis.

The systematic literature review is based on the reproduction of knowledge (Lattacher & Wdowiak, 2020), by identifying flaws in previous research (Paul & Créé, 2020). Before starting the analysis, we browsed and read some of the most important articles in the field to determine the search term. We used the Web of sciences and Scopus databases to find all quality literature (Kraus 2020) on the topic likely to be of interest and suitable for our systematic literature review (Baltazar, 2022). However, although the WOS and Scopus databases are the most comprehensive scientific journal databases, they are not exhaustive. The sample could therefore miss some important contributions and theses. Furthermore, our initial sample of journals does not include books, although some of them provide relevant contributions. However, most of them are included later because the relevant articles cite most of the relevant articles and books initially not included and therefore appear at least once in our sample.

Our general search terms were business OR company AND failure OR failure OR bankruptcy. The aim of diversifying search terms is to reduce the probability of missing relevant literature. This restriction enabled us to exclude over 80,000 articles in other disciplines such as physics, engineering and health. After filtering and refocusing on articles published in journals related to business and management (Theodoraki, Dana and Caputo, 2022), we were left with 1,150 articles. In a second stage, after selecting the journals likely to contain relevant articles. We chose articles dealing with the theme of entrepreneurial failure, and sub-themes derived from the main theme: financing, causes of failure, procedures to encourage business takeovers, network development; among many others. Our sample of articles stopped at 83.

With the aim of examining the variables involved in the failure of small and medium-sized enterprises in Africa, this empirical study analyzes the factors involved in failure in 3 sectors of activity: agriculture, trade and services, and industry.

The aim of this study is also to identify the obstacles to the development of small and medium-sized enterprises in the post-pandemic period, through an analysis of the evolution of difficulties over the period 2019-2023. It focuses particularly on the following aspects: access to financing by Small and Medium Enterprises, the business environment, innovation, research and development, management capabilities and market integration. These data are collected using a stratified random sampling methodology based on a representative sample. As the study excludes data from non-African companies, this document will cover 52 African small and medium-sized enterprises. Data collection was carried out by sending the questionnaire by e-mail to a pre-defined database of Moroccan SME/SMIs, and the companies to their networks carried out distribution in Africa. The initial sample size was 103 companies, 51 of which were excluded due to non-compliance with the geographical variable. After excluding SMEs and SMIs not operating in Africa, our final population was made up of African companies only. Our sample groups are mobilized by the business sector variable. The aim is to understand the specific features of the three business sectors that will be the focus of our study. The study was carried out in October, November and December 2023.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive data

The figure represents the general search on our subject, the first search was carried out by keywords, we therefore found 80,000 articles, we concentrated on those related to business and management, lastly we eliminated the articles that are far from our research subject.

The keywords of our search are of business OR company AND failure OR failure OR bankruptcy , the diversification of the search keywords is justified by the objective of receiving a large number of articles to enrich our search. The first filter excluded articles in the fields of physics, engineering, economics and health, to focus on articles in business and management. The second filter excluded articles that did not deal with the causes of failure. The excluded articles study the legal framework, liquidation procedures and business recovery processes.

General search by keywords of business OR company AND failure OR failure OR bankruptcy in Scopus and Web of Science databases.

80 000 Articles	Articles in physics, engineering, economics and health.
1150 Articles	Articles after refocusing on publications in Business and Management journals.
83 Articles	Articles after filtering out articles that do not deal with the topic of business failure and its causes.

Fig.1: Presentation of the general data of our systematic review

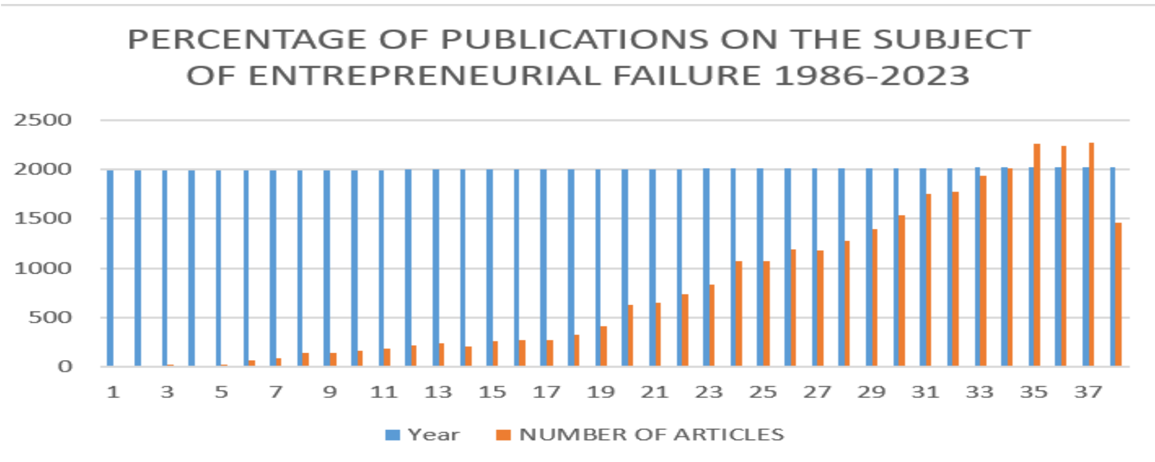


Fig.2: Percentage of publications on the subject of entrepreneurial failure 1986-2023

Fig.3: Presentation of our systematic review articles by country

Fig.4: Most frequently cited keywords in the articles studied in our systematic review.

Fig.5: The number of publications per journal in our systematic review.

For Arsalan Safari & Amit Das (2023) the factors of entrepreneurial failure are internal and external (Klimas 2021; Léonidou,2004; Omorede,2020; Walsh & Cunningham,2016; Yamakawa 2015). Internal factors refer to the individual characteristics of the company and the entrepreneur, while external or environmental factors are beyond the company's control (Cavusgil & Zou,1994; Klimas 2021).

The work carried out by (Muñoz-Izquierdo, Ségovie-Vargas, del Camacho-Miñano, & & Pascual-Ezama, D., 2019) has made it possible to distinguish the factors of entrepreneurial failure between a multitude of factors linked to the entrepreneur, or the company, or even the development context.

The 83 articles that form the basis of our systematic review were subjected to bibliometric analysis to define the articles that fall within the same family of analysis. This resulted in two thematic groups, the first (G1) studying microeconomic causes of failure, the second (G2) studying macroeconomic causes.

4.2. Business failure: thematic groups

Group 1- Microeconomic causes of entrepreneurial failure

Entrepreneurial failure is influenced by managerial skills (Sidek and Mohamad, 2014), entrepreneurial skills (Bin Mohamad and Sidek, 2013), the adoption of e-marketing, and the development of competitive advantage (Sidek 2020).

Difficulties in forecasting and management affect net cash flow and, consequently, the success of the company (Blazy, 2000). It is therefore the responsibility of companies to seek out their key success factors in strategic, technological, commercial or financial terms, in order to be competitive and able to survive. Indeed, a panoply of factors affect a company's success: the experience of its staff, the ability of the manager to anticipate, plan, react and delegate tasks (Baldwin and Gray, 1997; Ooghe and WAEYAERT, 2004).

4.2.1. Presentation of the results of the systematic review.

A. Entrepreneurial failure factors linked to the entrepreneur.

Causes that may be inherent to the entrepreneur such as mistakes (Cardon, Stevens & Potier, 2011), overconfidence (Hogarth & Carélaïa, 2012), personality and personal values (Klimas 2020), lack of skills and tools, or lack of liquidity (Guerrero & Espinoza- Benavides, 2020).Table 2 details these factors:

Table.2: Table of entrepreneur-related variables identified by the literature review and their impact on business survival

Category	Explanation	Failure factors	Authors	Positive impact on company survival	Negative impact on business survival	Insignificant impact
Internal	factors related to the entrepreneur	Gender	Yang & del Carmen Triana, 2017	P	-	-
			Lamontagne, Thirion 2000	-	-	I
			Perry, 2002 ; Persson 2004.	-	N	-
		Level of education	Marvel and at al.2016, Valentina A. Assenova (2020) Almekhlafi, 2022	P	-	-
			Lasch 2005	-	-	I
			Persson, 2002.	-	N	-
		The entrepreneur's origins	Kristiansen 2004	P	-	-
			Persson 2004	-	N	-
		Entrepreneurial orientation	Sasha Boucher and at al.,(2023)	P	-	-
		Risk-taking	Torrès, 2010, Sasha Boucher and at al.,(2023)	P	-	-
		Professional experience	Aspelund and al. 2005 ; Lasch and al. 2005 Yaghtin and al. (2022).	P	-	-
		Managerial experience	Zhang, Amankwah-Amoah, Beaverstock, 2018 Nhamo Mashavira and at al.,(2022)	P	-	-
		Specific experience in business sector	Hashim, Raza & Minai 2018	P	-	-
		Experience in research and development	Syed Asad Abbas Bokhari (2022),	P	-	-
		Motivation	Aleksandrova 2019; Giacomin, Guyot, Janssen Lohest, 2006, Ma & Yang, 2020, Bowmaker-Falconer Meyer, 2022	P	-	-
		Personality	Ng & Kee 2018 McCrae and Löckenhoff 2019	P	-	-
		Emotions	Shepherd, Cardon, 2008, Catherine Bassal (2013) Ucbasaran and al., 2013). Lechat And Torres, 2016	P	-	-

		Fear of failure	Morgan & Sisak, 2016). Spoelder and van Gelderen, 2019). Holienka, M. and at al, (2022)	P	-	-
		Learning	Nielsen, Sarasvathy, 2011, Fimayer, 2011 Polo García-Ochoa, C., De-Pablos-Heredero, C., & Blanco Jiménez, F.J. (2020) Lattacher and Wdowiak (2020)	P	-	-

B- Factors in entrepreneurial failure linked to the management process

These factors are related to the management process, which includes preparation for business start-up, and corporate strategy.

Table 3: Table of variables related to the management process identified by the literature review and their impact on company survival.

Category	Explanation	Failure factors	Authors	Positive impact on company survival.	Negative impact on business survival.	Insignificant impact
Internal	Preparation for business start-up	Market research before starting up a business	Perry 2002	P	-	-
			Gelderen and al. 2005 ; Lasch 2005.	-	N	-
		Consulting	Lasch and al. 2005 ; Perry, 2002	P	-	-
			Lussier, Pfeifer 2000	-	N	-
		Business Plan	Wu, Young 2002 ; Delmar, Shane 2004 ; Duchesneau, Gartner 2002 ; Gelderen and al. 2005	P	-	-
		Setting up a start-up team	Schutjens & Wever, 2000	P	-	-
			Aspelund and al. 2005	-	-	I
		Commercial viability	Crutzen and Van Caillie (2007, 2010	P	-	-
	Strategy	Marketing activities	Myung-Soo and al. 2004 Crutzen and Van Caillie (2007, 2010	P	-	-
		Planning activities	Sheppard, Chowdury, 2005 Crutzen and Van Caillie 2007, 2010	P	-	-
			Frese and al. 2002 ; Duchesneau, Gartner 2002	-	N	-
		Innovation activities	Weliswa Matekenya and Clement Moyo (2022), Kő, A., Mitev, A., Kovács, T., Fehér, P. & Szabó, Z. (2022).	P	-	-
		Technology and digital	Orlandi, Zardini, Rossignoli, 2021, Obinna Alo and al (2023)	P	-	-
		Financial strategy	Gepp, Kumar, 2015 ; Feng and al. 2020	P	-	-
		Internationalization strategy	Lussier, Pfeifer 2000	P	-	-
		Innovation strategy	Nhamo Mashavira and at al (2022)	P	-	-

C- Organization-related factors of entrepreneurial failure.

Table.4: Table of organization-related variables identified by the literature review and their impact on business survival.

Category	Explanation	Failure factors	Authors	Positive impact on company survival.	Negative impact on business survival.	Insignificant impact
Internal	Organizational structure	Age	Bosma 2000 ; Persson, 2002, 2004 ; Praag, 2003 ; Honjo 2004; Persson 2002 ; Lamontagne, Thirion 2000 ; Béthune 2005	P	-	-
			Teurlai 2004, Gelderen. 2005 Headd 2003	-	N	-
		Location	Fotopoulos, Spence (2001)	P	-	-
		Company size	Zhang, 2018	P	-	-
		Business sector	Zorelli, 2006	P	-	-
		Number of employees	Kanenburg 2002 ; Béthune 2005	P	-	-
	Financial structure	Invested capital	Headd 2003 ; Teurlai 2004 ;	P	-	-
			Béthune 2005	-	N	-
		Liquidity	Tiziana La Rocca, (2023)	P	-	-
		Profitability	Fotopoulos 2000.	P	-	-
	Sales structure	Quality approach	Jenkins & McKelvie,2016; Wagner, 2013	P	-	-
		Pricing strategy	Gerben 2003 ; Wijbenga 2003	P	-	-
		Customers	lasch 2005 ; Teurlai 2004	P	-	-

Group 2 - Macroeconomic causes of failure.

Macroeconomic factors are external factors that can cause companies to fail, including the political environment, institutions, regulations, the socio-economic environment, financing, and market opportunities.

A- Macroeconomic factors in business failure.

Table.5: Table of macroeconomic variables identified by the literature review and their impact on business survival.

Category	Explanation	Failure factors	Authors	Positive impact on company survival.	Negative impact on business survival.	Insignificant impact
External	General Environmental variables	Political Environment	Katrodia, Sibanda, 2018 Gruszczynski, 2020	P	-	-
		Institutional and regulatory environment (justice, land and housing, governance, taxation)	Wang, 2016, Bosmaet 2018; Fritsch, Wyrwich, 2018; Fuentelsazet.,2019.	P	-	-
		Socio-economic environment	Amankwah-Amoah & Zhang, 2015	P	-	-
		Government support, incentives and subsidies.	Xiang, Worthington 2017 ; Nurunnabi, 2020, Pu, 2021, Wang 2021 Gunartin 2021	P	-	-

		Access to financing opportunities (bank loans, self-financing, banking systems, equity contributions)	Wang, 2016, Olomi (2018) Alo & Arslan, 2021, Obinna Alo (2023), Tiziana La Rocca, , (2023)			
		Market conditions (domestic market, global markets, public procurement, trade and investment)	Artinger & Powell,2016, Walsh & Cunningham,2016, Wright & Drori, 2018 Thabiso Msomi, Odunayo Olarewaju (2021)	P	-	-
			Débrouiller,2011	-	N	-
		Access to skills (culture, education, training, labor market)	Nhamo Mashavira,(2022)	P	-	-
		Infrastructure (logistics, energy, technology, internet, scientific and R&D networks).	Kshetri, 2011, Elena, 2015, Wang, 2016	P	-	-
		Access to innovation assets (technologies, data, collaboration networks, research and development, organization and processes).	Saunila & Ukko, 2014, Lose, Tengah, 2015, Lippmann, Aldrich, 2016, Bouncken & Kraus, 2021,	P	-	-
	Specific environmental variables	Environmental hostility	Haman 2015; Ogujiuba 2021b	P	-	-
			Wu et Young 2002	-	N	-
		Informality	Cuervo-Cazurra, 2016), Barnard & Mamabolo, 2022).	-	N	-
		Competitive intensity	Irjayanti et Mulyono Azis, 2012 ; Uchegbulam 2015 ; Wang, 2016			
		Customer negotiation capacity	Fotopoulos, Louri (2000),	P	-	-
		Supplier negotiation capacity	Fotopoulos, Louri (2000),	P	-	-
		Labor costs	Mishchuk , 2022	P	-	-
	Resource variables (human and non-human)	Demographic and behavioral characteristics of human resources	Kusi , 2015, Ngo, Le, Doan,2022	P	-	-
		Raw materials, facilities, equipment.	Juntunen, 2017, Rosavina et al., 2019 Ngo, Le,Doan,2022	P	-	-
	Networking	Networking and communication activities	Yipeng Liu (2020) Marijin, Frank, Menno, Moors, 2020, Scott 2022	P	-	-
		Access to resources and information through the network	Wright et Drori, 2018, Clough.2019, Deyanova, Brehmer, Lapidus, 2022	P	-	-

B- Access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Access to finance is among the crucial obstacles to SME growth, hence the need to develop a prosperous climate for the success of this category (Kimanzi & Gamede, 2020).

Sustainability, viability, and the ability to stimulate the start-up phase require recourse to external financing, De la Torre. (2017). Typically, SMEs do not qualify for the borrowing necessary for growth (Yeboah, 2020). Difficulties in accessing finance concern the lack of collateral, the size of the credit requested and its unsuitability with the company's structure (Connolly & Bank, 2020). As a result, credit financing becomes accessible after the passage of time and the establishment of a company history (Yeboah, 2020).

Financial access is of major importance (Bruhn & Love, 2014). It enables entrepreneurs to innovate, increase productivity, enter new markets and create jobs (Kim., 2018). To alleviate the credit gap, governments, financial institutions and donors need to invest in lending products and policies that are appropriate to the development and innovation needs of SMEs (Rosavina 2019). Studies along these lines have focused on analyzing differences in collateral requirements, knowledge asymmetries, high risk, small loans, and the gap between lenders and borrowers (Jaabei, 2018; Mbowe 2020).

Olomi. (2018) presented the causes of difficulties in access to finance by SMEs by three groups; the first includes capacity (skill and knowledge level), market culture, business division, credit history, and lack of knowledge of available financial services. Secondly, the level of staff qualification, and lack of expertise. The third group of factors concerns environmental regulations, lack of system recognition and credit institutions.

SME financing policy should be based on reducing the need for risk capital, in the case of SMEs using private equity, diversifying the range of financing available and matching it to the development phase, and reducing disproportionate tax burdens and developing incentives in favor of SMEs.

Differences in access to financing depend on interest rates and access conditions. Financial institutions regard SMEs as riskier, and large companies as more stringent. The highest interest rates are charged to SMEs to absorb the high level of risk presented by this category. As a result, access to financing is conditional on the presentation of guarantees. In some situations, the assessment of access to credit is based more on guarantees than on expected return. In fact, the existence of guarantees reduces moral hazards in favor of the SME.

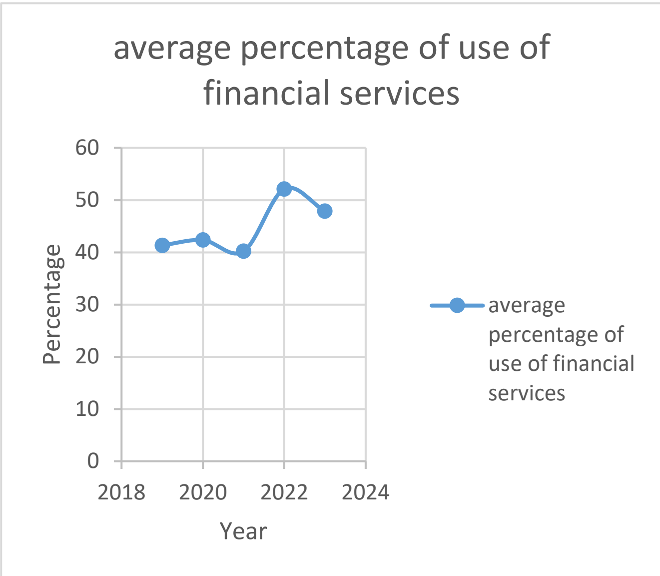


Fig.6: Average percentage of use of financial services.

Table. 6: Average percentage of use of financial services.

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
2019	2019	2019	2019	0,000
percentage of use of financial services	20%	80%	41,34	17,380
2020	2020	2020	2020	0,000
percentage of use of financial services	10%	90%	42,308	26,907
2021	2021	2021	2021	0,000
percentage of use of financial services	10%	70%	40,192	21,737
2022	2022	2022	2022	0,000
percentage of use of financial services	20%	90%	52,115	25,540
2023	2023	2023	2023	0,000
percentage of use of financial services	10%	90%	47,885	27,104

The graph and table present the percentages of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises' recourse to external Financial services for 5 consecutive years 2019-2023. The aim is to understand the sources of financing for companies' investment or fixed assets, so financing choices are made internally, through equity, supplier credit, or other sources of financing (non-financial institutions or personal networks). It should be noted that the average use of external financial services over the 5-year period varied between 40.192% and 52.115%, reflecting the importance of internal financing, which calls into question the efficiency of financial intermediation in Africa. It is clear that the use of credit is attributed exclusively to financing growth.

C- Developing the business environment.

According to Joseph Amankwah-Amoah (2023), developing countries are defined by institutional delays and dysfunctions (Khanna and Palepu, 2005). The various characteristics that define the business environment in developing countries are corruption, political instability and non-compliance with agreements (Cuervo-Cazurra, 2016).

Indeed, when the formal structures of the business environment are dysfunctional, informal structures govern business activities (Barnard & Mamabolo, 2022). The creation of a favorable business climate is linked to the simplification of procedures for setting up a business, obtaining contracts and licenses. Also, the development and understanding of taxation policies, the modernization of relations, the development of access to financing, the improvement of working conditions, access to land, the simplification of legal recourse, the promotion of social dialogue and access to information.

According to Joseph Amankwah-Amoah (2023) , a lack of institutional knowledge of laws, regulations and governance leads to a lack of understanding of customer needs, and frustration with standards. In other words, business failure is the result not only of the degradation of resources and lack of expertise, but also of fluctuating business conditions.

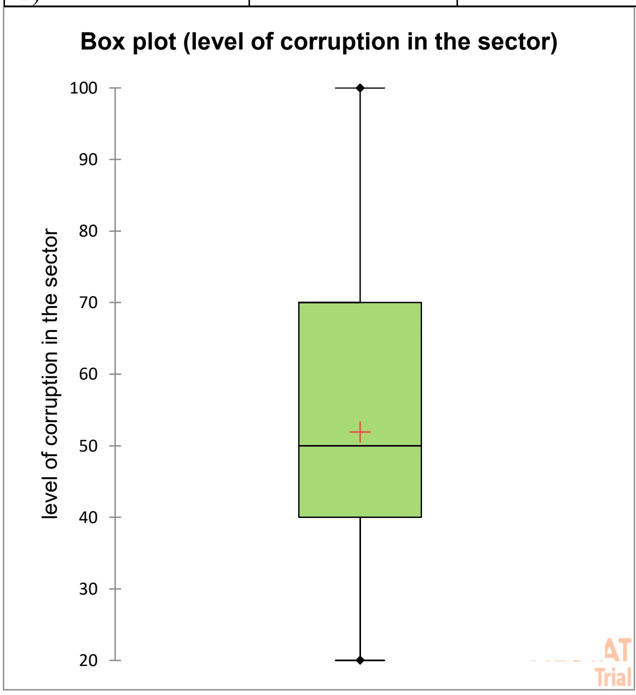
Faced with compliance obligations and the complexity of regulatory procedures, SMEs have to face the costs of external expertise and investment in training to guarantee compliance. Larger companies have a greater advantage in terms of cost support, but small businesses are penalized by resource and cash flow constraints, particularly in the early stages. In some situations, compliance costs can exceed the tax burden of small and medium-sized businesses (OECD 2015c; Eichfelder and Vaillancourt, 2014).

This policy requires in-depth analysis of regulations, and monitoring of their impact on SMEs. For the effect of regulations that exclude small businesses is detrimental, and can endanger their development due to the limited resources available to manage the complexity of regulatory and bureaucratic networks.

As tax burdens are heavy for small and medium-sized businesses, the tax system is also a tool for reducing the obstacles to SME growth. The tax system can intervene to reduce financial difficulties and ensure compliance with tax legislation.

Table.7: Presentation of difficulties in the business environment.

Statistics	**level of corruption in the sector**	**Level of informality in the sector**	**difficulties in supplying water and electricity**	**difficulties with Internet connection and access to technologies**
Nb. d'observations	52	52	52	52
Minimum	20,000	20,000	10,000	20,000
Maximum	100,000	70,000	20,000	100,000
1st Quartile	40,000	35,000	10,000	40,000
Median	50,000	60,000	10,000	50,000
3rd Quartile	70,000	70,000	10,000	80,000
Average	51,923	49,038	12,115	56,731
Variance (n-1)	502,112	404,940	17,006	712,632
Standard deviation (n-1)	22,408	20,123	4,124	26,695



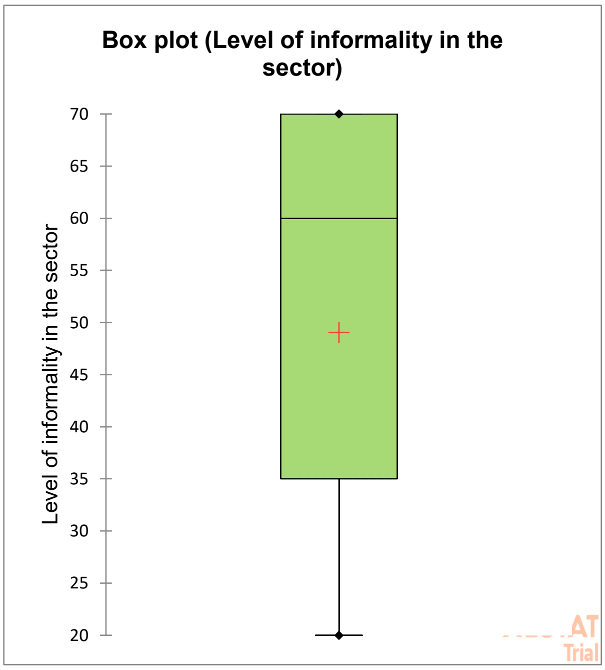


Fig. 7 and 8 : Levels of corruption and informality in the sector.

Table. 8: Frequency of corruption, informality, water and electricity, internet connection and access to technologies by sector of activity.

	Corruption			**Informality**			**Difficulties in supplying water and electricity**			**Difficulties with internet connection and access to technologies**		
Percentage of experiencing difficulties	**Agricultural al sector**	**Commercial and Services Sector**	**Industrial Sector**	**Agricultural sector**	**Commercial and Services Sector**	**Industrial Sector**	**Agricultural sector**	**Commercial and Services Sector**	**Industrial Sector**	**Agricultural sector**	**Commercial and Services Sector**	**Industrial Sector**
10%	-	-	-	-	-	-	24	2	15	-	-	-
20%	4	-	-	13	-	-	-	11	-	8	-	-
30%	8	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
40%	12	-	1	11	-	-	-	-	-	10	6	-
50%	-	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
60%	-	-	4	-	-	11	-	-	-	6	4	-
70%	-	3	1	-	13	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
80%	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	5
90%	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
100%	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7

A company's survival and success are influenced by the supply of water and electricity. Inadequate supply procedures lead to higher costs, disrupted productivity and lower returns. Tables and figures 07 and 08 show the level of informality, corruption, water and electricity supply difficulties, as well as internet and technology access difficulties. With respective averages of 51.923%, 49.038%, 12.115% and 56.731%.

These infrastructure factors influence entrepreneurial success to the extent that these difficulties hinder productivity and investment. Companies operating in the agricultural, industrial, trade and service sectors cite the considerable effect of internet access and technology.

Difficulties in acquiring water and electricity in the sectors studied do not exceed 20%.

The level of informality in trade, services and industry is 70%. Businesses that are subject to crime and informality therefore incur losses due to theft, burglary or arson, as well as security costs. These resources are opportunity costs, which could be mobilized in business development activities.

The commercial and services sector is characterized by the presence of more corruption. Corruption is a pecuniary burden that creates an unfavorable context for development, and increases costs and risks to a company's operational efficiency.

D- The importance of innovation, and research and development for Small and Medium Enterprise.

For Weliswa Matekenya (2022), Kő, A (2022), the adoption of innovation and digital enhance the competitiveness of SMEs (Dabicet 2019). Delays in innovation, research and development have detrimental effects on the success of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Parrilliet al.,2020). Innovation requires the integration of new business models, and the problem for SMEs in this context lies in scarce resources, limited expertise and low risk aversion (Bouwman 2019). The fourth industrial revolution, as well as the Covid-19 health pandemic, have accelerated SMEs' needs for innovation and digitization. The company must therefore go beyond its traditional functions by adopting new functions of innovation, research and development, as well as the modernization of the informational aspect (Davila ,2012).

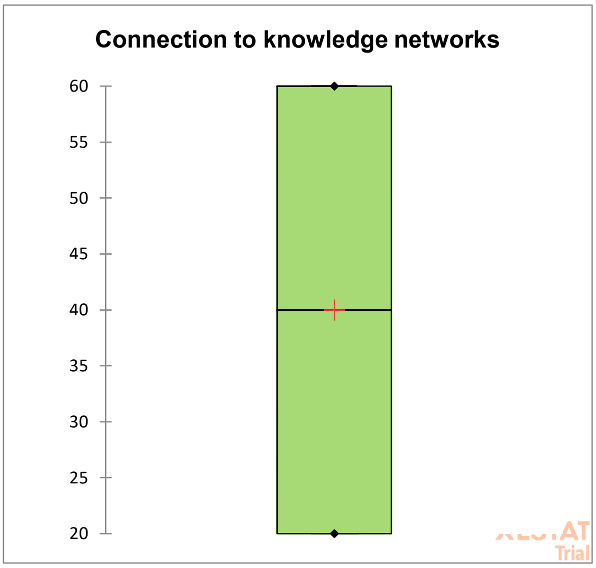
Research has demonstrated the impact of technological innovation on SME performance (Esone and Tsambou, 2017, Chegéet al.,2020, Chege and Wang, 2020). The conclusion concerns the positive correlation between the two variables. Effective technological development enables competitiveness and access to international markets.

Research has introduced a panoply of factors that explain the effect of innovation on performance including strategy, access to capital and product differentiation (Abdilahi .,2017;Kijkasiwat and Phuensane, 2020;Guo ,2018). Abdilahiet al. (2017) in his research in Hargeisa, Somaliland, enabled the mobilization of four innovation categories: product, process, marketing and organizational innovation the organization. The results confirmed the impact of innovation on sales promotion and consequently company growth. For Nyoike (2019),Afriyie (2019)andTébourbi . (2020) the impact of innovation on performance depends on leadership and management factors. Thus, in the current context, digital transformation could be the key to survival (Tarutė 2018).

Small and medium-sized enterprises are catalysts for innovation, able to go beyond the dominant paradigms, by exploiting knowledge not commercialized by research institutions, or detecting technological and commercial opportunities neglected by developed companies (OECD, 2010). For example, biotechnology patents as a criterion for evaluating innovation developed by SMEs in OECD countries have reached a rate of 20% (Eurostat, 2014). SMEs contribute to value creation and change, as well as meeting customer needs. The adoption of innovation requires the integration of partnership networks. The globalization movement has fostered collaboration, to access inputs including procedures, knowledge, technologies and financial resources. And also develop outputs products, services, licenses and patents. However, the major challenge for SMEs is to connect to national and international collaboration networks, as well as to acquire management capabilities and innovation processes (OECD, 2013).

Table.9: Levels of connection to knowledge networks and R&D investment.

Statistics	**Connection to knowledge networks**	**Investment in research and development**
Nb. d'observations	**52**	**52**
Minimum	**10,000**	**20,000**
Maximum	**80,000**	**60,000**
1st Quartile	**20,000**	**20,000**
Median	**30,000**	**40,000**
3rd Quartile	**50,000**	**60,000**
Average	**36,923**	**40,000**
Variance (n-1)	**366,817**	**298,039**
Standard deviation (n-1)	**19,152**	**17,264**



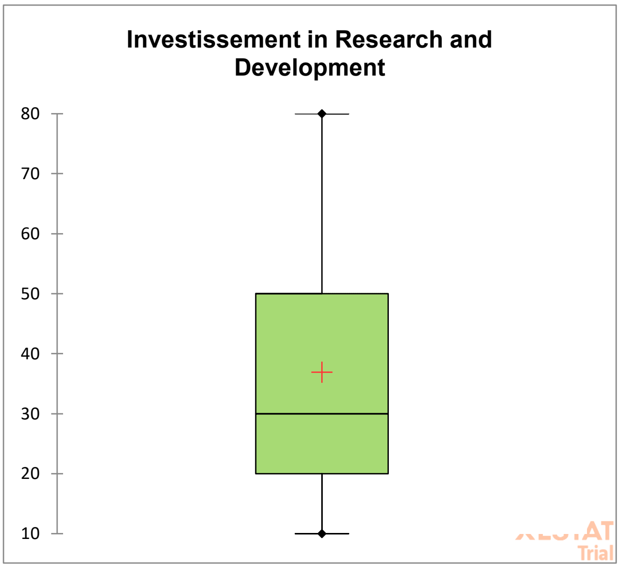


Fig. 9 and 10: Percentages of R&D investment and network connection.

Africa's small and medium-sized enterprises are poorly connected to international knowledge networks, and have a low commitment to investment in research and development, with averages as low as 36, 923% and 40% respectively. SMEs must rely on learning and seizing technological and commercial opportunities to improve production. Investment in innovation requires the mobilization of significant potential resources and skills. Lack of investment in innovation limits the company's ability to take advantage of new technologies, access networks and coordinate with partners to integrate external knowledge into internal processes (OECD, 2010a, 2015b).

In the case of Morocco, according to a business survey carried out by the World Bank between May 2019 and January 2020, on the effects of the business environment on the performance of 1,096 companies, the level of investment by Moroccan companies in formal training does not exceed 36%.

The OECD's (2017) guidelines for developing technology support programs recommend that companies be provided with the know-how to overcome market failures, including investment requirements.

The objectives of the support programs to be developed by governments in favor of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises are the economic ones of maximizing yield, competitiveness and growth.
Due to the high cost of adopting, generating and complying with R&D standards, small and medium-sized enterprises find themselves excluded from the field because of the length and complexity of procedures and the lack of sufficient resources for investment.

E- Developing the management capabilities of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Lack of strategic resources, financing, management skills and knowledge hamper business development. The integration of the company into knowledge networks, and the development of knowledge in management and staff training, enable the firm to grow (OECD, 2013b). However, in the majority of cases, SMEs encounter difficulties in acquiring training and qualifications. SMEs appear to be lagging behind in terms of partnerships with training institutions and the adoption of learning processes (OECD, 2015b). The challenge is for support structures to put in place the support, advice and subsidies needed to ensure the acquisition of new skills by this category. One example is Japan, which has adopted SME schools. Company performance is presented by the quality of management and staff skills. These criteria are influenced by education, training, experience and learning.

Governments need to ensure the quality of management training, through access to training and consultancy services. The UK, for example, has launched a consultancy system for SMEs, mobilizing consultants in a variety of fields, including sales, marketing, quality and design. The aim is to support the development of the SME.

In Italy, Law 44 was passed to provide managerial expertise, technical and financial support, training and job quality improvement for companies up to the age of 30. The aim is to develop the company's capabilities, and the survival rate in southern Italy is consequently high for companies that have benefited from the program.

Table.10: Frequency of company management difficulties by sector of activity.

		Activity area			
		Agricultural Sector	**Commercial and Services Sector**	**Industrial Sector**	**Total**
10%	Number	0	3	0	3
	% in management difficulties	0,0%	100,0%	0,0%	100,0%
	% in activity area	0,0%	23,1%	0,0%	5,8%
	% of total	0,0%	5,8%	0,0%	5,8%
20%	Number	19	3	0	22
	% in management difficulties	86,4%	13,6%	0,0%	100,0%
	% in activity area	79,2%	23,1%	0,0%	42,3%
	% of total	36,5%	5,8%	0,0%	42,3%
30%	Number	0	3	0	3
	% in management difficulties	0,0%	100,0%	0,0%	100,0%
	% in activity area	0,0%	23,1%	0,0%	5,8%
	% of total	0,0%	5,8%	0,0%	5,8%
40%	Number	5	4	0	9
	% in management difficulties	55,6%	44,4%	0,0%	100,0%
	% in activity area	20,8%	30,8%	0,0%	17,3%
	% of total	9,6%	7,7%	0,0%	17,3%
60%	Number	0	0	3	3
	% in management difficulties	0,0%	0,0%	100,0%	100,0%
	% in activity area	0,0%	0,0%	20,0%	5,8%
	% of total	0,0%	0,0%	5,8%	5,8%
70%	Number	0	0	6	6
	% in management difficulties	0,0%	0,0%	100,0%	100,0%
	% in activity area	0,0%	0,0%	40,0%	11,5%
	% of total	0,0%	0,0%	11,5%	11,5%
80%	Number	0	0	6	6
	% in management difficulties	0,0%	0,0%	100,0%	100,0%
	% in activity area	0,0%	0,0%	40,0%	11,5%
	% of total	0,0%	0,0%	11,5%	11,5%

Management difficulties in the agricultural sector do not exceed 20% for 79.2% of African SMEs, and are at 30% for 20.8%.

Management difficulties in the commercial and services sector are at four levels: 10%, 20% and 30% for 23.1% of African SMEs per level, and 40% for 30.8%.

Management difficulties are greater in the industrial sector, with higher percentages than in the other sectors: 60% for 20% of African small and medium-sized businesses, and 70% and 80 for 40% of businesses by level.

F- The development of small and medium-sized enterprises' access to local, national and international markets.

For Thabiso Msomi (2021), access to finance and access to markets are variables with a significant impact on SME viability. Access to finance and markets for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is a topic that has captured the interest of economists and policymakers around the world (Connolly and Bank, 2020). The survival and development of SMEs depends on the development of a prosperous environment (Kimanzi & Gamede, 2020).

Integrating small and medium-sized businesses into markets accelerates their technological development and innovation, and the acquisition of knowledge by improving management and productivity. Faced with the ability of large companies to react to environmental change, businesses need to develop their ability to personalize and differentiate in order to secure a competitive edge. Market integration is uneven across the board, with some companies being born global players, with considerable capacity for innovation and export. However, for the majority export relationships are short-term, and market integration only concerns low-value value chains (OECD, 2017). Opening up companies to international trade requires trade, intellectual property development, institutional quality and infrastructure. Large companies, due to the availability of resources are better able to bear the costs of engaging in international trade. These include the costs of customs procedures, logistics services, compliance with standards, technical regulations and adherence to compliance procedures (OECD, 2015).

Effective information and communication strategies are also a pillar of market access, as they enable information transfer, communication and exchange in e-commerce platforms (BIAC et al., 2016). The digital transition is also a tool for process, product and service innovation, access to finance and to skills and knowledge through outsourcing, recruitment and connection with knowledge partners (OECD, 2017). Access to these resources is a means of competitiveness on international markets. Market integration is hampered by the scarcity of information on supply opportunities, demands, contracts, bidding times and costs.

Governments need to adopt policy and institutional approaches to ease access to local, as well as international, markets for SMEs, the aim being to remedy shortages of personnel, experience and technology. In Japan, efforts in this area are focused on combating discriminatory tools in favor of SMEs. In the same perspective, Japan has created the Local Industry Promotion Center, a collaboration center for SMEs operating in the same industry, which is also in charge of long-term financing at low interest rates.

According to the World Bank's survey on the effects of the business environment on company performance in the manufacturing sector, international trade enables development, the import of materials and the acquisition of technologies. However, it requires compliance with regulations, international trade licenses and customs.

Table.11: Market access percentages by sector of activity.

	Activity area		
	Agricultural Sector	**Commercial and Services Sector**	**Industrial Sector**
10%	46,15%	13,46%	0
30%	-	-	17,30%
40%	-	11,53%	11,53%

The percentage of market access for small and medium-sized enterprises in the agricultural sector does not exceed 10% for 46.15% of companies. However, for the commercial and services sector, the percentage of market access is 10% for 13.46%, compared with 40% for 11.53% of companies. Small and medium-sized enterprises in the industrial sector access markets with a percentage of 30% for 17.30% of companies and 40% for 11.53%. Small and medium-sized enterprises in the agricultural sector are the category that has the most difficulty accessing markets.

The majority of research articles on business failure take into account criteria such as variations in supply and demand, investment levels and entrepreneurial behavior. The accounting and financial aspects of the failure phenomenon, the entrepreneur and the study of his environment, as well as the discrepancy between the organizational mode of the company and its environment, are some of the ways in which the subject is analyzed. The particularity of our research concerns a complex interaction of factors linked to the entrepreneur, the management process, organizational characteristics and environmental variables.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of the homogeneous factors driving SME failure in Africa, highlighting the importance of considering sector-specific challenges and the broader business environment. The systematic review and descriptive analysis reveal that SME failure is influenced by a complex interplay of factors related to the entrepreneur, management process, organizational characteristics, and environmental variables. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms that address the identified failure factors, such as improving access to technology and the internet, reducing informality and corruption, enhancing management capabilities, and facilitating market integration. Policymakers and SME support organizations should consider these insights when designing programs and policies to promote SME growth and resilience in Africa. However, the study has some limitations, such as the lack of primary data collection and the focus on only three sectors. Future research could expand the analysis to other sectors and employ mixed-methods approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of SME failure in Africa. Despite these limitations, this study provides a valuable foundation for further research and policy discussions on fostering SME development in the African context.

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