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Perception about entrepreneurship among students at Alassane Ouattara University (Bouake, Cote D'ivoire)

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Abstract

Work, while freeing man from needs, is a powerful factor for social integration. However, with the mismatch between demographic growth and job availability, we have observed an increase of unemployment rate since the 1980s. In response to this unemployment, specifically among young people, aggravated by socio-political crises and the mismatch between training received in universities and the job market, the entrepreneurial solution seems to be the best option proposed by international organizations and African leaders. Côte d'Ivoire is not exempted from this logic. The aim of this study is then to analyze the perception about entrepreneurship among young people, particularly 3rd year sociology students at Alassane Ouattara University of Bouaké (Côte d'Ivoire). The study, both qualitative and quantitative, is based on focus group and questionnaire, concerns 156 students. For analysis, the study mobilized the model of formation of entrepreneurial event by Shapero and Sokol (1982) and the theory of reasoned action by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). The research results show that overall, students do not perceive entrepreneurship as an opportunity. Yet, those who operate in an entrepreneurial environment have different vision.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, perception, students, young people, unemployment, Bouaké

Introduction

Africa's rapid growth among youth constitutes a promising asset for the development of the continent. Indeed, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Africa has more than 200 million young people aged 15 to 24, and this figure is expected to increase significantly in the coming decades due to the continent's high fertility rates. This precious resource should allow the continent to reach its full production potential and take charge of its development. However, it requires the creation of decent and productive jobs. Nevertheless, the deficit of decent jobs is prevalent across the entire African continent (ILO, 2019). Indeed, between 2007 and 2017 for example, Africa has created only 3 million decent jobs per year for the 11 to 12 million new comers to the labor market. In 2018, only 14% of African workers were salaried (ILO, 2019). There is therefore a huge gap between the aspirations of young people and the reality of the job market. According to a recent survey conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in around ten African countries, the majority of students, or 74%, want to work in the public sector (OECD, 2021).

In other words, young Africans aspire to productive formal jobs, which offer income security and stability that the labor market is incapable to provide. As a result, many young Africans find themselves with unfulfilled job aspirations. For many of them, being unemployed or holding a poor-quality job remains a reality (World Bank, 2022). The African Union recognizes that entrepreneurship, without being able to solve all the problems of young people, appears to be a lasting solution to the employment crisis in Africa (AU, 2020). It adds that entrepreneurship constitutes a promising avenue to take full advantage of the demographic dividend, promote a change of mentality so that young people become themselves job creators to address the problem of youth employment in Africa.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the national survey on the employment situation and the informal sector by the Youth Employment Agency noted that 63% of the Ivorian population is on working age and many of them are unemployed. According to Theodore (2017) ^[13], to deal with the growing unemployment rate of young people under 35, estimated at more than 25% of the active population, the Ivorian government is promoting youth entrepreneurship.

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Côte d'Ivoire does not publish statistics regarding the number or percentage of higher education graduates who find job in the public and private sectors. However, in the field, it is easy to see the large number of graduate students in social sciences, particularly in sociology, looking for a job. We are then tempted to ask ourselves the following question: How do students perceive entrepreneurship?

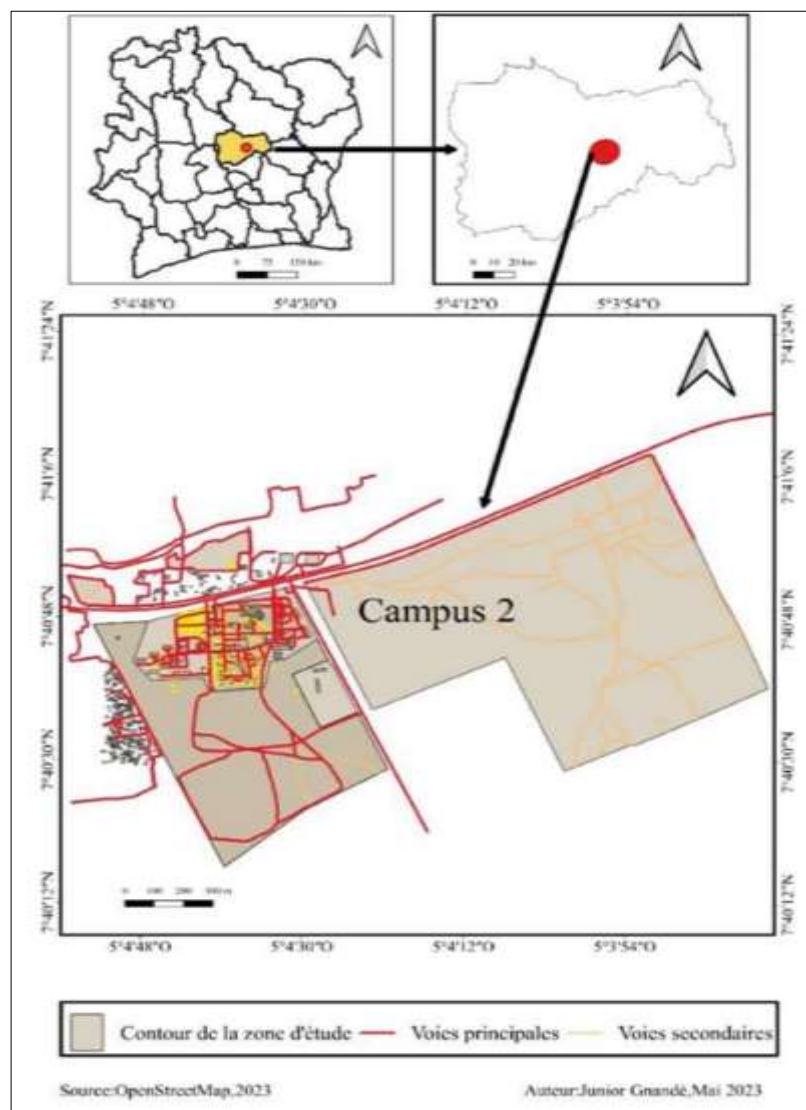
The objective of this study is to analyze and understand the perception about entrepreneurship among students. This objective is broken down into specific ones, namely: (i) examining the positive and negative opinions that students have towards entrepreneurship by identifying the factors which contribute to the formation of these attitudes; (ii) identify variations in perceptions between different groups of students and the factors that justify them; (iii) examine specific social factors that could influence students' perceptions about entrepreneurship. This article is divided into two parts: (i) methodology; (ii) results and discussion.

Methodology

Study site

The city of Bouaké is located at latitude 7°69 N and longitude 5°030. It extends over an area of approximately 71.79 Km². The city is located on a plateau which altitude varies, between 320 to 400 meters above sea level, and favors human settlement and the practice of economic activities. Indeed, the city of Bouaké is one of the largest in Côte d'Ivoire due to its surface area, economic weight and demography. The 2014 census estimates its population at 542,000 inhabitants. With an annual growth rate of 3%, it is estimated in 2022 at around 800,000 inhabitants.

Alassane Ouattara University (Formerly named University of Bouaké) is a public university. It is built on two sites in the western part of the city. These sites are located on the Béoumi-Sakassou axis. The university has two campuses. The first, called campus 1, houses the following departments: Legal Sciences, Economics and Management Sciences, and Medicine. The second (Campus 2) consists of: Geography, History, German, English, Communication and Language Sciences, Modern Literature, Spanish, Anthropology and Sociology, belongs to the Communication, Environment and Society faculty. The following map shows the survey location.



Map 1: Study site: Alassane Ouattara University

Sampling

The population consists of students from campus 2 of Alassane Ouattara University in Bouaké. It particularly

concerns bachelor students, officially registered and actually attending classes in the Sociology department. The latter, numbering 258, are aged 18 to 25. For purposes of

anonymity, the first names included in the verbatim are borrowed first names. The Probabilistic method was used in the constitution of the sample. The total population of undergraduate sociology students is 258 students, including 121 boys and 137 girls. The number of boys and girls represents 46.90% and 53.10% of the total number, respectively. Based on the total population which is 258, we relied on the method of Kryce and Morgan (1970) to determine the sample size. Thus, we obtained 156 students, including 83 girls and 73 boys who were surveyed.

Data collection techniques and tools

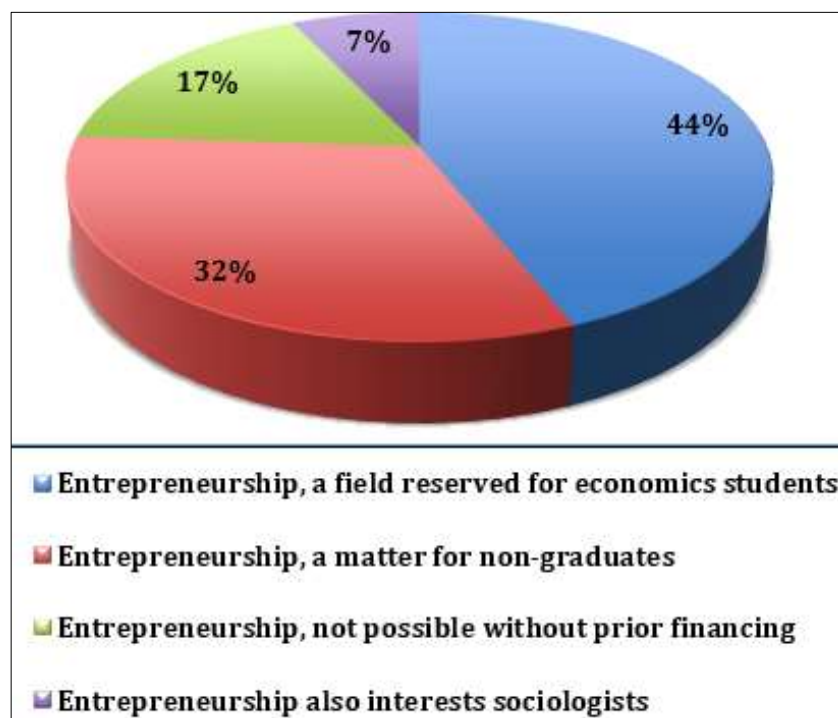
The questionnaire and the focus group were the two instruments that enabled the collection of field data. After the pre-survey, a questionnaire on the perception about entrepreneurship was administered to 156 respondents. Three focus groups of eight, ten and twelve students respectively were also constituted. Each focus group lasted approximately 40 minutes.

Data processing and analysis: Sphinx plus 2 software allowed us to process the questionnaire. It has the advantage of analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data. To deepen the data, we used some theories. Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) ^[1] theory of reasoned action is a model developed in social psychology to study the entrepreneurial field. This model explains how the decision to engage in entrepreneurial action is based on the outcomes the individual hopes to achieve as a result of performing the behavior. It allowed us to understand how the assimilation of entrepreneurship to crafts and the informal sector

influences the orientation of students towards salaried work. In addition, the entrepreneurial event formation model by Shapero and Sokol (1982) ^[11] is generally used to analyze entrepreneurial intention. This model explains entrepreneurial intention by the perceived desirability and feasibility of people. Desirability is defined as the individual's attractiveness or attitude towards entrepreneurship. It depends on the individual's value system formed under the influence of his cultural and social environment (Family, entrepreneurial models, peer groups, school environment). Feasibility is related to the belief in the existence and access to the necessary skills, resources (financial, human and technical), facilitating conditions, etc. essential for starting a business. The individual's cultural capital as well as the social capital are mobilized at this stage to control variables linked to the environment (Resources, facilitating conditions, drafting a project). The model allows us to understand how a group of students choose entrepreneurship and opt for an entrepreneurial career despite uncertainties.

Results and Discussions

The results of the survey show that for the majority of bachelor students, entrepreneurship is not part of their professional prospects. They believe that entrepreneurship is either the exclusive domain of economics students, or determined by significant external financing, or reserved for less educated people, namely artisans. Only 7% of the students surveyed think that entrepreneurship is also open to sociology students against 93% of the above mentioned opinions.



Source: Cyrille Aka Aoutou, May 2022.

Graph 1: Perception about entrepreneurship among bachelor students

2.1. Entrepreneurship, an opportunity reserved only for economics and management students.

In total, 93% of students think that entrepreneurship is not made for sociologists, 44% believe that entrepreneurship is dedicated to students in economics and management sciences. Indeed, entrepreneurship is considered by third-

year sociology students to be a field exclusively reserved for economists, anyone with a degree in commercial or business management.

In this regard, Arsène states: "We didn't study economics. It is economic science students, trained in management, who

can become entrepreneurs. I don't know how to do marketing for example, as we are not taught that in sociology. How can we get started? How to manage a business, it's not our job, it's social facts we learn here, we will be lecturer, researcher or something like that.

We wanted to know if they could start and or manage a very small business with one or two employees. To this end, Koné states:

"I've never done this so I don't know what to do. What we've been doing since then is studying, going from class to class all the way to university. I've never worked so I can't handle something like that". Koffi adds; "You have to get clients, do expenses and calculations, etc. It's complicated "often you have to pay taxes, bills and things that I don't know". You also need to know accounting to master purchases, sales, etc. » Finally, Aicha believes: "We need marketing studies before approaching customers and a little taxation for taxes and duties".

Paying taxes or looking for clients are activities that bachelor students can do and should not constitute an obstacle to entrepreneurial opportunity. In other words, are fundamental skills necessary for entrepreneurship? The results show that students are affirmative and give an idea of it. Indeed, according to them, as the verbatim shows, to be an entrepreneur you must master accounting, human resources management, financial management, marketing, etc.

However, Bagchi-Sen (2009) ^[3] argue that the best marketers have never studied marketing and give the example of thousands of entrepreneurs around the world who have not studied economy and yet are models of success. They then highlight the importance of perseverance and rapid learning in the entrepreneurial process. They encourage entrepreneurs to test quickly their ideas on the market, to learn from failures and to adapt accordingly. In the same vein, Howard developed the notion of entrepreneurship "being" versus "doing". According to him, the entrepreneurial attitude and mentality are crucial, and he highlights personal qualities like passion and determination. Finally, in his theory of disruptive innovation explains how entrepreneurs succeed by introducing innovations that disrupt existing markets. It requires, he says, a combination of creativity, perseverance and adaptability. A diploma in economics is therefore not required to start a business. Furthermore, sociology students also think that they are too qualified to start a business.

Entrepreneurship, an option for the least educated

32% of students think that entrepreneurship is a field that is reserved for less educated people, those who do small jobs. Thus, Koffi says:

"I have a friend who I consider an entrepreneur. She buys clothes in Abidjan and resells them in her shop in Bouaké." Jean adds: "I know a bricklayer who builds houses, he is a contractor and we are from the same parish." Jeannette adds: "Hairdressers can be considered entrepreneurs in that they offer hairdressing and beauty services in their salons and are paid for accordingly."

The crafts and the informal sector are singled out. Indeed, throughout towns of Côte d'Ivoire and particularly in Bouaké, we observe that in all the artisans, from carpenters to tailors. They are self-employed and work mostly in the informal sector. These are the types of activities that respondents perceive as entrepreneurship. It is also in

relation to these artisans that they react when we ask them if they want to start a business. The following verbatim is an illustration of this:

Yao claims: "Ah! if it's to become an entrepreneur, we didn't need to have all these diplomas up to bachelor degree. We wasted all the time for nothing; and now you are asking us to set up on our own. For that, just primary school would have been enough." Mamadou persists by saying: "My cousins have set up on their own. They didn't go to school. They are both mechanics. I can understand that but with a diploma, I cannot be an entrepreneur! ".

For those surveyed, being an entrepreneur does not require extensive studies. According to them, the entrepreneur is a person motivated by the need to create an income-generating activity because there are no other viable paid employment opportunities due to their low level of education. To this end, Ulyssea (2018) ^[12] distinguish two groups of entrepreneurs: "subsistence entrepreneurs" and "transformational entrepreneurs". The first represent the majority of those who created SMEs as a means of subsistence, almost and exclusively in the informal system. The second, minority group, to which students should refer, includes promoters of small and medium-sized businesses that have the potential to grow, join the formal sector and contribute to the economy by creating decent jobs. However, subsistence entrepreneurs are therefore those that sociology students perceive as entrepreneurs. In fact, this perception of academic success induces social expectations among the respondent. Indeed, in the collective imagination, a student is close to success, the diploma he holds should guarantee him a position in the public service or in the private sector. So, once you graduate, there is no question of starting from scratch by looking to start a business or live like an artisan. However, these informal artisans do not reflect the vision of social success of the sociology student in particular and of the community in general. Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) ^[1] theory of reasoned action explain that the decision to engage in entrepreneurial action is based on the outcomes the individual hopes to achieve as a result of performing the behavior. Therefore, students do not want to live as artisans. In the absence of real knowledge about entrepreneurship, sociology students confuse entrepreneurship and the informal sector. They also believe that one must benefit from financing before embarking on entrepreneurship.

Need for financing before entrepreneurship

17% of students believe that you cannot start an economic activity without financial contribution from a structure or a third party. Indeed, according to approximately one out of five students, the sine qua none condition for launching into entrepreneurship is obtaining funds, a donation or a loan. Thus, says Koffi:

"Some friends and I set up an 80 million project for the transformation of attiéké, we looked for funds at all the organizations, but we did not find any funding. You see, in this case, how do you expect us to do business if people are not ready to finance." Ahmed also says: "I have a breeding project and my expenses to carry it out are around 8 million CFA francs. But I don't have the means and no one wants to help me."

Respondents were asked about likely sources of funding since Koffi, like Ahmed and others who express the same

concern, seem to believe in the availability of fund. To this end, Koffi specifies:

“The World Bank, African Development Bank or the Government should finance our projects” and Julien adds: “No one in my family gave me money that is why I could not carry out my project”. Is money alone enough to complete a project? The survey then focused on the profile of project leaders. Ahmed says: “I have never done breeding, but if I am given the money, I am sure to succeed.” When asked how much money he needs to get started and to whom he plans to sell the chickens from the farm, he has this abstract answer: “I don't know exactly. Maybe between three and four million, and I can sell easily because everyone eats chicken, it won't be difficult to sell.” He has never raised chickens, he does not know whom he is going to sell to if he succeeds in raising them, and he wants to start with millions after observing a group of entrepreneurs, concluded that to be a good entrepreneur, you must have a good product, know who you are going to sell it to, and how much you are going to make from it. All this information can be recorded in a document called "the business plan", which defines as follows: "The business plan is above all a feasibility study of the planned project, where all the technical, commercial, financial, human implications of the project adds that information and planning are essential and that the business plan is the first step towards strategic thinking for the creation of the small business. Consequently, to benefit from financing from a credit facility structure, you must prepare a business plan, which the respondents seem to ignore. In this regard, the World Bank (2022) states that one of the reasons why banks remain risk averse is that the quality of small business financing files makes projects not to be bankable. In addition, in the absence of funding, very few sociology students believe in entrepreneurship.

Little interest in entrepreneurship among students

Only 7% of respondents believe that sociology students can also become entrepreneurs. Unlike the majority of their classmates, these students, made up of girls and boys, opted for entrepreneurship upon leaving university. These choices and the reasons supporting them appear in the verbatim. Yao says:

“My father did not study, yet he is one of the most successful transporters in the city of Bouaké and he has nothing to envy of a civil servant or an employee. On the contrary, he hires dozens of people alone.” Aicha adds: “My mother has a loincloth store at the big market and she always says that you have to believe in what you do and be serious, the rest comes with time.”

In fact, sociological and cultural motivations are elements directly linked to the different environments known and frequented by individuals, and which can play a primordial role in the emergence of entrepreneurial behavior. Coulibaly confirms by adding:

“We all grew up alongside my father who is an entrepreneur, most of my brothers are entrepreneurs and I am going to work on my own. We can start with a little money. You do not need a lot of money when you really want to do something. Even for breeding, you can start with two roosters and five hens for example. Little by little, the business we do will grow. There will be difficult moments and mistakes but we learn from it all. Nothing is easy in life,

even less undertaking. I work with my father when I'm not in class and that's what I noticed.”

As shown by the Shapero and Sokol model (1982) ^[11], entrepreneurial intention is a function of the individual's value system formed under the influence of their cultural and social environment (Family, entrepreneurial models, groups of peers, school environment). Feasibility is related to the belief in the existence and access to the necessary skills, resources (Financial, human and technical), facilitating conditions, essential for starting a business project. The individual's cultural as well as the social capital are mobilized at this stage to control variables linked to the environment (Resources, facilitating conditions, drafting a project).

Conclusion

The study focused on undergraduate students who are preparing to begin a professional career. The results showed that almost all of them think that entrepreneurship is not for them. In fact, 44% believe that entrepreneurship is an opportunity only for economics students. 32% confuse entrepreneurship and artisanship. 17% with unrealistic projects think that only financing can help them get started. Only 7% believe in entrepreneurship. The latter, unlike others, come from entrepreneurial backgrounds. As mentioned by Shapero and Sokol (1982) ^[11], desirability is the individual's attractiveness towards entrepreneurship. It depends on the individual's value system formed under the influence of his cultural and social environment. Consequently, the orientations and practices of the school environment relating to professional integration influence the way in which graduates approach professional integration at the end of their training (Alves, 2005) ^[2]. The purpose of entrepreneurship education would be to deconstruct the model of salaried work by legitimizing the professional integration of graduates through entrepreneurship (Benié, 2012) ^[5]. To this end, ideological, social and symbolic resources that function as ideological references favorable to integration and maintenance in entrepreneurship are mobilized (Gnabéli and Lognon, 2010) ^[6]. The Ivorian government must further promote awareness of entrepreneurship to increase the desirability of entrepreneurship in the professional choices of students, particularly those in the Sociology department. Young people being energetic, innovative, and dynamic constitute the most expensive human resource to promote the social, economic and political development of any nation. Properly directed, their energy and fervor are likely to bring enormous positive change to society and the nation.

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