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Entrepreneurial Orientation Factors of University Graduates in the Cameroonian Context : The Case of the Far North.

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Abstract

Purpose : The objective of this study is to determine the entrepreneurial orientation factors of young university graduates in Cameroon, in a context where businesses evolve in an unstable, unpredictable environment.

Methodology : To achieve this objective, an analysis was carried out on exploratory survey data collected from 198 university-educated entrepreneurs in the Far North region of Cameroon, using chi-square independence tests between variables such as gender, education and age to confirm their impact on the orientation of entrepreneurial specialization.

Findings : The results of this study showed that only gender and entrepreneurial education appear as factors in entrepreneurial orientation in the present study. While for men, there seems to be no limit to engaging in a particular activity, women do not have this flexibility, as they find it easier to orientate themselves in activities such as trade, hairdressing and catering, but not in activities such as butchery and banking.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy : Given that the study also shows that, thanks to training, young entrepreneurs have the flexibility to operate in all sectors of activity, particularly those requiring specific knowledge such as health services, it is therefore recommended that Cameroonian public authorities step up the promotion of entrepreneurship training to encourage young people to become self-employed.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial Orientation Factor, Far North Of Cameroon, University Graduates*

1. Background

In a changing world, where all African countries are permanently involved in development policy programs through strategies planned for fairly long horizons, the national development strategies for 2030 (SND-30) implemented since 2020 in Cameroon are a reference document in which the elements of economic structuring remain a key element. Among the factors structuring the Cameroonian economy is the promotion of youth entrepreneurship, a fundamental element in reducing unemployment (SND-30, 2020). The main aim of promoting entrepreneurship is to boost the creation of businesses by young Cameroonians, whose entrepreneurial orientation remains a key factor. The concept of entrepreneurial orientation is seen as a strategic posture characterized by a strong commitment to risk-taking, innovation and proactivity (Cherchem and Fayolle, 2010). However, it should not be forgotten that from the moment a company is created (from the point of view of its orientation), its performance should not be related solely to the implementation of a particular organizational attribute, but should also be considered as the result of the intercorrelation of various dimensions within an environment that is always specific and characterized by a certain degree of hostility and uncertainty (Bosso et al, 2009). Bakengela (2017), for his part, points out: "For several decades now, Africa as a whole has been identified as the locus of economies of uncertainty. Businesses evolve in an unstable environment, without predictability...". In recent years, Cameroon's economic environment has found itself permanently enveloped in enduring crises, such as the security crisis caused by the Boko Haram terrorist sect, the Anglophone crisis and the Covid-19 health crisis (INS, 2020).

In order to cope with these uncertainties and instabilities, potential entrepreneurs are obliged to develop skills that will enable them to deal with the various constraints imposed by the management of their entrepreneurial activities (Ngouyamsa, 2021). Although a number of studies have focused on the orientation factors involved in setting up a business, to date, these have not been carried out among young entrepreneurial graduates in Cameroon, in a context of perpetual crises.

2. Problem statement

The observations and remarks made above lead us to question the real factors behind the entrepreneurial orientation of university graduates in Cameroon. In line with Cherchem and Fayolle's (2010) definition of entrepreneurial orientation, which notes its three main components (risk-taking, innovation and proactivity), the main question we are asking is what factors are likely to influence the entrepreneurial orientation of university graduates in Cameroon? In an attempt to answer this question, we conducted a quantitative study of 198 young entrepreneurial university graduates in the Far North region of Cameroon, and particularly in four of its six Departments, with the main objective of determining the factors that influence their actions in specializing in a particular sector of activity. We formulate our basic hypothesis in these terms: in the Cameroonian

context, the entrepreneurial orientation of university graduates is dependent on factors linked to their profile and their entrepreneurial culture.

The rest of our analysis is divided into four parts, dealing successively with: Literature review, outlining the main current features of the Cameroonian context; Analysis framework and research methodology; Presentation and discussion of survey results.

3. Literature review : Current features of the Cameroonian context

Generally speaking, the current global context is marked by exacerbated environmental turbulence in the economic, technological and health fields (Hourenatou, 2023). For this reason, Lagadec (1991) points out that nowadays, there is no week that is not marked by the sudden eruption of such situations, often explosive, always delicate and requiring precise responses, but at the same time situated in a context of complexity. To this end, the author raises the notion of a major event, described as the universe of disruption. For, in his view, we're dealing on a day-to-day basis with things that no longer resemble mere incidents. He outlines a number of characteristics of certain events in the Cameroonian context, which he describes as major crises. These are crisis events with the following characteristics: large-scale failure, with quantitative difficulties far beyond anything imagined; qualitatively destabilizing failure; urgency in the face of highly serious and exponentially worsening situations; emergency procedures described as "out-of-sorts"; more than uncertainty : the unknown; beyond urgency, the more global question of time; the multiplication of stakeholders; critical communication problems; colossal stakes: calling on a mass of individuals, a large number of organizations and even the economy of the entire country; an event that can largely depend on the perception we have of it, as it can touch a sensitive area of representation, and the boundaries between the fact and its perception will be quickly erased. Considering these characteristics, Cameroon, like all other African countries south of the Sahara, is going through major crisis situations.

Indeed, since 2013, security tensions have arisen, which were amplified from 2016 by socio-political unrest (INS and ICF, 2020). These are : the so-called Anglophone crisis, the Boko Haram crisis, and the crisis following the October 2018 presidential election (Mbarga, 2019). Thus, four of Cameroon's ten regions are particularly concerned, namely : the Far North, with attacks by the terrorist sect Boko Haram; the East, affected by the aftershocks of political and social tensions in the Central African Republic, with ramifications in the Adamaoua region; and the North-West and South-West, which since 2016 have been plagued by insurrection by armed groups following socio-political demands. These demands, described as corporatist and sectoral by the country's English-speaking populations, are said to have arisen following government hesitation in dealing with them, and have degenerated into armed conflict. The escalation of tensions and the multiplication of hotbeds of hostility between armed groups and defense and security forces have severely affected the civilian population, causing numerous casualties, massive displacements, the destruction and/or closure of schools and health centers, and the stoppage of economic activities. (INS and ICF, 2020).

In addition, the Covid-19 health crisis has not gone unnoticed in Cameroon, and the whole country has been affected since its advent in 2020. Ehode Elah (2022) notes several consequences that have since changed his daily life. These include a sharp increase in public health spending; major disruption in all sectors of economic and social life (lower customs revenues, loss of household and business income, disruption of the school calendar, increased family burdens, reduced production in most companies, additional burdens for some companies in relation to teleworking, job losses for some employees, breakdown in conviviality between people (no greetings, hugs, for example), amplification of the current account and budget deficit. In addition to Covid-19, WHO (2022) points out that Cameroon has been hit by a cholera epidemic since 2021. In fact, six of its ten regions have been affected since April 30, 2022, and the epidemic continues to spread throughout the country, causing numerous deaths and thousands of cases of contamination right up to the present day, i.e. September 2023.

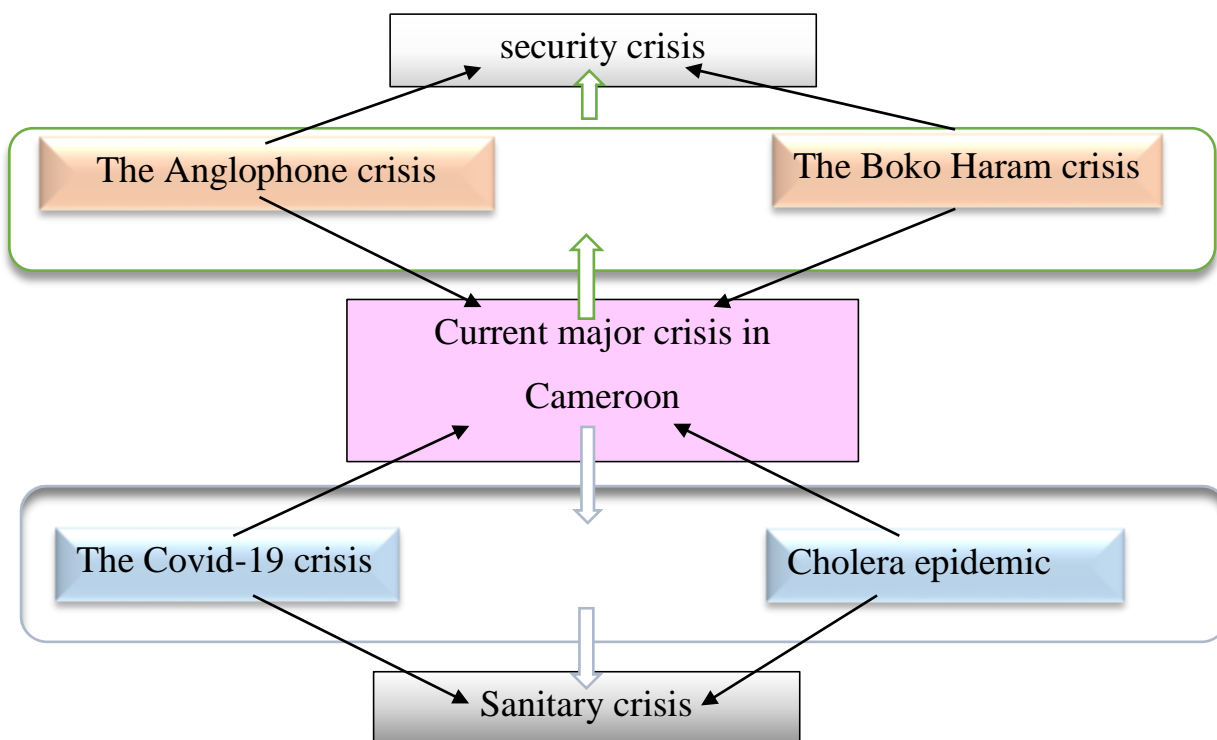


Figure 1: Cameroon's current major crisis

Source: Author, based on documentation.

3. Analysis framework and methodology

3.1 Analysis framework

In this research, we use the contextual analysis framework inspired by the work of Cherchem and Fayolle (2010). Indeed, their work, which focuses on entrepreneurial orientation - in our case,

that of university graduates - enables us to focus on two groups of variables, namely: the profile of the manager or entrepreneur and the corporate culture, in order to perceive those that act on the said orientation.

Our research is quantitative in nature: it consists of data from primary surveys we carried out among one hundred and ninety-eight (198) university-educated entrepreneurs in Cameroon's Far North region, chosen because it is experiencing two major crises in the country: the Boko Haram security crisis and the Covid-19 and cholera health crises. The survey took place over three months, from June to August 2023. It took place in: four (04) departments including twelve (12) arrondissements and 78 different localities.

To collect the data, we carried out surveys in the field, using a questionnaire. This gathered information on: the entrepreneur's profile (sex, age, marital status, education, training, experience); their activities; entrepreneurial culture (commitment, risk-taking, ambition, resilience). These sets of information were used to construct 3 groups of variables (Cf. Table 1).

3.2 Methodology: Variables and data

Two methods of data analysis are necessary. The first is the univariate analysis of each variable studied, by presenting the percentages of observations. The second is a bivariate analysis, enabling us to identify the factors associated with the respondents' entrepreneurial orientation. To process these data, we used SPSS version 26 statistical software, as it allows both coding and processing of data through its various windows.

Table 1: Construction of study variables

| Variables | Details | Items | Scores |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Profil | Gender | Female; male | 1 ; 2 |
| | Age | Less than 25 ; 25 at 34 ; 35 at 44 ; 45 and more | 1 ; 2 ; 3 ; 4 |
| | Marital status | Single ; Married(e) ; Divorced; widower | 1 ; 2 ; 3 ; 4 |
| | | Licence ; Master ; Doctorate | |
| | Level of university education | | 1 ; 2 ; 3 |
| | Education | In entrepreneurship; oder formation ; none | 0 ; 1 ; 2 ; 3 |
| | Experience | 0 ; 1at 3 years ; 4 at 5 years ; 6 years and more | |
| Culture (Qualities) | The commitment | yes ; non | 1 ; 2 |
| | Taking risks | yes ; non | 1 ; 2 |
| | Ambition | yes ; non | 1 ; 2 |
| | Resilience | yes ; non | 1 ; 2 |
| Activities | | Commerce; elevage; transport; | 1 ; 2 ; 3 ; 4 ; |
| | Done activities | Coiffure; Boucherie; Restauration; Banque; Etablissement scolaire; Santé; Secrétariat; autres | 5 ; 6 ; 7 ; 8 ; 9 ; 10 ; 11 |

Source : *Autor, based on the information collected*

4. Presentation and discussion of study results

4.1. Presentation of results

As mentioned above, the data collected from 198 entrepreneurs graduating from universities in Cameroon's Far North region were obtained in 4 departments and 78 different localities. We present the results of this survey in two stages. Firstly, we present the results for each variable in terms of percentages of obseravtions, and secondly, we carry out a bivariate analysis based on chi-square tests obtained by crossing the variables of entrepreneurial profile and culture with the activities undertaken.

Of all those surveyed, 38.7% were women and 61.3 were men. Their ages are as follows: 11.1% under 25; 53.5% between 25 and 34; 28.3% between 35 and 44; and 7.1% over 45. As for the marital status of the respondents, we have: 50.5% single; 47.5% married; 0.5% divorced; and 1.5% widowed. Many of them have no children (45.5%), and those with between 1 and 3 children represent 29.3%. For those with between 4 and 5 children and those with more than 5 children, the respective percentages are 14.6 and 10.6. Speaking of university education: 56% have a Bachelor's degree; 30.8% a Master's degree; and 12.6 a Doctorate. The percentages of frequencies specific to their training show that: 31% have been trained in entrepreneurship; 30.3% have had other specific

training; and 38.4% have had no training at all. In terms of experience, we have: only 2% with no experience at all; 28.8% with 1 to 3 years' experience; 29.3% with 4 to 5 years' experience; and 39.9% with over 5 years' experience.

As far as entrepreneurial culture is concerned, we measure it through the qualities of a good entrepreneur outlined by Gomes (2022). In our case, we investigated commitment, risk-taking, ambition and resilience. Our data reveals that: only 34.8% are committed versus 65.2%; 68.7% are risk-takers versus 31.3%; 84.8% are ambitious versus 15.2%; and 88.4% are resilient versus only 11.6%. In addition, for the 11 different activities surveyed, and after grouping them into three sectors of activity, the statistics given in table 2 reveal that : 17.1% of respondents work in the primary sector (12.6% in livestock farming; and 4.5% in butchery); 15.2% work in the secondary sector (8.1% in restaurants; and 7.1% in hairdressing salons); and 40.9% work in the tertiary sector (19.7% in commerce; 5.6% in transport; 1% in banking; 2.5% in hospitals/clinics; 4.5% in schools; and 7.6 in secretarial work). In addition, the remaining 26.8% represent the percentage of those who do not have a single orientation; they exercise several activities at the same time, and we have chosen to include them in the "other" section. After this univariate presentation of the results of this study in terms of observation percentages, let's now turn to the bivariate observation.

To this end, when the variables relating to the entrepreneur's profile are crossed with the activities surveyed, the results of the chi-square tests give the following significances: 0.02; 0.672; 0.944; 0.265; 0.003; 0.897 respectively for: gender, age, marital status, level of education, training and experience. The latter reveal that gender and education have significant chi-squares, as they are well below the 5% threshold. On the other hand, age, marital status, education and experience have chi-squares above the 5% threshold, and are therefore insignificant. They reveal their independence from the respondents' activities.

Table 2: Summary of respondents by sector of activity*Source: Author, conception based on collected data*

| Activities sector | Activities | Frequency | Percentage | Total percentages by sector |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------------------------|
| Primary sector | Breeding | 25 | 12.6 | 17.1 |
| | Butcher's shop/ slaughterhouse | 9 | 4.5 | |
| Secondary sector | Restaurant | 16 | 8.1 | 15.2 |
| | Hair salon | 14 | 7.1 | |
| Service sector | Commerce | 39 | 19.7 | 40.9 |
| | Transport | 11 | 5.6 | |
| | Bank | 2 | 1.0 | |
| | Hospital/clinic | 5 | 2.5 | |
| | School establishment | 9 | 4.5 | |
| | Secretariat | 15 | 7.6 | |
| Oder | Combining various sectors | 53 | 26.8 | 26.8 |
| Total | | 198 | 100 | 100 |

The results of chi-square tests obtained by crossing the variables relating to the culture of the respondents with their activities give the following significances: 0.606; 0.248; 0.233 and 0.495 respectively for: commitment, risk-taking, ambition and resilience. As these significances are all greater than 0.05, we can say that these factors are not dependent on the activities undertaken by university graduates in the Far North of Cameroon.

Table 3: Chi-square significance of variables in relation to activities

| Variables | Significance of Person's chi-square ¹ |
|----------------|--|
| Gender | 0.020* |
| Age | 0.672 |
| Study level | 0.944 |
| Marital status | 0.265 |
| Education | 0.003** |
| Experience | 0.897 |
| Commitment | 0.606 |
| Taking risks | 0.248 |
| Ambition | 0.233 |
| Resilience | 0.495 |

*Source : Author, estimates made using the SPSS software based on collected data (** and * represent significance at 1% and 5% respectively)*

4.2. Discussion of results

¹ These values are significant when they are less than 0.05, otherwise they are not significant

Contrary to the work of Cherchem and Fayolle (2010), who highlight three main factors in the definition of entrepreneurial orientation, namely: commitment to risk-taking, innovation and proactivity, the results of the present study based on the case of university graduates in the Far North of Cameroon in the context of crisis seem to consider only two variables relevant to the profile of the entrepreneur. These are essentially gender and education.

In addition to the fact that women entrepreneurs are still in the minority and do not enjoy the same status as their male counterparts in the business world (Chergui, 2022), we note that in the Far North of Cameroon, women entrepreneurs seem to focus their entrepreneurial choices on certain activities rather than others. In contrast to their male counterparts, they tend to focus on activities such as commerce, hairdressing and catering. They are less and less found in activities such as butchery, banking and even health services. Men, on the other hand, don't seem to have any particular interest in specific activities. Apart from their interest in trade and livestock breeding, they are involved in all other activities. What's more, many of these men and women are not just interested in one particular activity, but in several at the same time.

It's worth noting that, as far as training is concerned, these results reveal its non-negligible importance in the various entrepreneurial orientations. It's clear that most entrepreneurs have undergone some form of training. These results support the position of Schmitt and Monsalvo (2008), who argue that entrepreneurial actions need to be sustained within universities in order to properly orient entrepreneurial motivations among academics. In the same vein, Fayolle and Gailly (2009) demonstrate the positive effects of various entrepreneurship teaching programs on the activities of entrepreneurs.

The other variables considered in the survey - age, marital status, level of education, experience, commitment, risk-taking, ambition and resilience - seem to have no connection with entrepreneurial orientation. In this case, it must be said that just because an entrepreneur is of a certain age, it doesn't mean that he or she is engaged in a particular activity. Nor is it because an entrepreneur is single, married or even widowed that he or she has a preference for a particular activity. It's also not because an entrepreneur has a high level of education or a high number of years' experience that he or she is oriented towards a specific field. Whether he's ambitious, resilient, a risk-taker or committed, or whatever cultural entrepreneurial qualities he may possess, his choice of activity would be unrelated to these characteristics.

Conclusion

The main aim of this article was to determine the factors influencing the entrepreneurial orientation of university graduates in Cameroon, focusing on those in the Far North region. To achieve this, it was first necessary to outline the main current characteristics of the Cameroonian context as a whole, all of which are found in the chosen study region. These are mainly the two major crises facing the country, namely: the so-called Anglophone and Boko-Haram security crises (Mbarga, 2019 INS and ICF, 2020); and the health crises of Covid-19 and the cholera epidemic (

Ehode Elah, 2022; WHO, 2022). Next, we presented the analytical framework inspired by the work of Cherchem and Fayolle (2010), in which two groups of variables were selected to explain entrepreneurial orientation, namely entrepreneurial profile and culture variables. The analysis is based on primary data collected from 198 university graduates in the Far North region of Cameroon. The results of this study show that only gender and entrepreneurial education appear as factors in entrepreneurial orientation in the present study. While for men, there seems to be no limit to engaging in a particular activity, for women, however, there is no such latitude. These results indicate that they find it easier to orientate themselves in activities such as commerce, hairdressing and catering. In activities such as butchery and banking, however, they are less and less so. In addition, the present study gives us the opportunity to note that not only have more and more entrepreneurs been trained prior to exercising a particular activity, but also to perceive that thanks to this training, they have the flexibility to exercise in all sectors, particularly those requiring very specific knowledge, such as health services.

limits and recommendation : Although these results seem to provide some answers to our question, the study does have a few limitations that are worth mentioning. Indeed, the sample size of our study is not representative enough, and it is based in only one of Cameroon's ten regions. However, each region has its own specificities that could influence the results of the analysis. It should also be noted that the study was limited to bivariate observations, and that a multivariate analysis should be carried out to determine the relationship or otherwise of each of the variables taken simultaneously in the analyses. Furthermore, environmental variables, which are important in explaining a phenomenon in context, were not included. despite these limitations, young academics should at least be advised to opt for vocational training to facilitate their entrepreneurial orientation.

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