

## **Representation of Educational Elitism and Entrepreneurship Merit in Contemporary Africa: A Cultural Shift to Self- Fulfilment**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper explores and acknowledges the recurring theme of education in African literature, which is often depicted as both a means to reclaim African identity and culture and a tool for social mobility and economic empowerment. Using the Interpretive Interactionism methodology, the study identifies a growing emphasis on the representation of entrepreneurship as a form of vocational training, experiential and work-based learning that can supplement or even replace traditional educational qualifications. This evolving perspective reflects cultural shifts to self-fulfilment, where entrepreneurship is seen as a viable path to success. This study contributes to our understanding of the multifaceted role of education in postcolonial francophone African literature. The findings highlight the complex nature of education in many African societies and its potential for positive transformation as well as challenges to traditional notions of elitism, empowerment, and self-fulfilment.*

**KEYWORDS:** cultural shifts, educational elitism, entrepreneurship, Interpretive Interactionism, postcolonial francophone African literature, self-fulfilment.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The representation of education in African literature is undoubtedly a recurring theme that reflects the changing nature of postcolonial African societies. On one hand, education in literature has often been portrayed as consciousness catalyst to challenge the colonial multifaceted dominance and reclaim African identity and culture. On the other hand, it has been represented as a means of empowerment, a tool for social and economic mobility. Furthermore, there are also writers from both the Anglophone and Francophone linguistic spaces, who have focused their literary representation of education on its role as a determining factor in perpetuating colonialist attitudes, behaviours and practices.

Nevertheless, postcolonial African literature has undergone significant cultural shifts in its perceptions of education. While education was initially portrayed as a tool of westernisation and cultural alienation, some writers began to challenge this perception and portray education

as a means of empowering and reclaiming African identity. Contrary to the perspectives of rejection of the education-induced westernisation of Africa, some novelists endeavour to present it as an instrument of societal modernisation, and political and professional emancipation. In *Nervous Conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga, education is portrayed as a means of challenging patriarchal structures and promoting gender equality. The protagonist, Tambudzai, fights against the cultural norms that limit her educational opportunities and ultimately achieves academic success. This portrayal of education reflects the cultural shifts that occurred in postcolonial Africa, as women began to challenge traditional gender roles and demand access to education.

This perception of education continued to dominate future novels for a long time. However, in recent years, postcolonial African literature has undergone significant cultural shifts in its perceptions of education. But due to the significant demographic changes, political and undemocratic factors, the urbanisation of African countries and collusive practices in socio-professional contexts, only to name a few examples, the novelists of this decade have begun to see the hidden side of a westernised education philosophy. Schooling is no longer the vector of the expected universal values, given the elites have corrupt minds. The western school is no longer driving social and economic mobility since it does not prevent unemployment but rather contributes to it. In this regard, westernised education in grappling with the new trends of entrepreneurship that is likely to guarantee the self-fulfilment, which was expected from educational qualifications.

Such a portrayal of education reflects the cultural shifts in postcolonial African society and literature. With writers beginning to challenge the notion that westernised education is the economic mobility guarantor, their reflection seeks to create educational systems that reflect African cultural and historic needs by promoting and marketising the entrepreneurship merit.

The postcolonial African literature offers a powerful critique of educational elitism and its role in perpetuating social inequality. By portraying education as a means of upward social mobility that is only accessible to a select few, writers challenge the notion that education is a tool of empowerment for all. Through critical reading and analysis of the novels of the corpus drawn from the francophone African literature of this decade, this paper aims to examine these changes in perspectives regarding the role of education in the Western model. It seeks to identify the characteristics and effects of the cultural changes that present entrepreneurship as the best form of vocational training, as well as a supplement or substitute for educational qualifications.

### **Insights into educational elitism in Africa**

Educational elitism in Africa varies across countries and regions due to differences in socio-economic and cultural conditions, historical factors, and educational policies. It is important to note that Africa is a diverse continent with 54 countries, each with its own unique education system and challenges. Therefore, any generalisation should be taken with caution.

Nevertheless, access to education has overall been seen as access to opportunities, and hence earning elitist labels that are underpinning social classes.

There is often a significant disparity in access to quality education between urban and rural areas. Urban centres tend to have better-funded schools with more resources, qualified teachers, and access to technology. Rural areas, on the other hand, frequently face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited educational facilities, and a shortage of trained teachers. In many cases, access to education has created some entrepreneurial schemes through the prism of private education, which has significantly increased elitism.

In many countries, private schooling can be associated with elite institutions, often providing a higher quality of education compared to public schools. These private schools are typically expensive and cater to privileged sections of society. Elsewhere, the governance of private schools is in the hands of either business associations whose main objective is to generate income, or associations of parents without educational and pedagogical expertise. Furthermore, the cost of education, including tuition fees, textbooks, uniforms, and other related expenses, can be a significant barrier for many families. This prevents children from lower-income backgrounds from accessing quality education, leading to an elitist system that primarily benefits those with financial means. In any case, private education creates divides between those who can access and afford education and those who cannot, which exacerbate education elitism.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE REPRESENTATION OF EDUCATION AND ELITISM IN AFRICA**

The representation of education and training environment in Africa reflects the ideal of knowledge, hopes and dreams, as well as feelings of confrontation and disconnection. On one hand, the concept of school inherited from the colonial enterprise is presented as a threat to the traditional power of customary chiefs and principality rules in place. It also represents feelings of cultural and spiritual displacement, as it is perceived as a mirror of imported values through the prism of Western civilisation. Furthermore, schooling reflects geographical, psychological, social, cultural, epistemological, and symbolic distance vis-à-vis the African identities and values. On the other hand, the school is a source of knowledge and know-how. In his novel *L'Aventure ambiguë* (1961) [Ambiguous adventure], Cheikh Hamidou Kane entrusts the protagonist with the idea that to better combat the power of colonisers, "One must go and learn from them the art of winning without being right" (p.46). It is these cognitive perspectives of discovery and skills acquired through education that have always fuelled dreams of social and economic success through the alignment of personal, educational and professional fulfilment. Nevertheless, several voices, whose echoes resonate around the mismatch between education and the job market, are being heard. From school to work, unemployment is increasingly becoming either an intermediate stage or a fatalistic outcome within an elitist context.

At the dawn of the independence of many African countries, the colonial literature mainly portrays education as a tool for westernisation and cultural alienation against African nations. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1958) depicts the impact of colonialism on African societies and the struggle to reclaim African identity and culture. Even through its narratological structure one can notice that overall, the protagonist, Okonkwo, values education and sends his son to school to give him the opportunities he never had, the novel nevertheless widely presents education as a colonial tool used to subjugate and control Africans. With Okonkwo resenting the colonial education system because it has made his son Nwoye turn his back on his traditional culture, Achebe's novel underscores the role of education in the indoctrination of African minds and societies. Through a critical reading of the novel, the education system appears to have been designed in the first place to produce a compliant and subservient labour force that would serve the interests of the colonisers. It is an education system that emphasises a European culture and values at the expense of African history, traditions and beliefs.

Similarly, *Une Vie de Boy* [A Houseboy] by Ferdinand Oyono (1956), portrays the experience of a young African boy who is taken from his village to work as a domestic servant in the house of a French colonial family. In this novel, education is depicted as a means of social and economic mobility, which is unfortunately only accessible to the French colonial elite. One can notice that *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* [The Poor Christ of Bomba] by Mongo Beti (1956) takes a slightly different scope. Education is portrayed as a means of resisting colonial domination and reclaiming African identity. The protagonist, Ndougou uses knowledge and skills to resist the cultural alienation that results from colonial education and to learn about the significance of his own culture and history.

Many African writers of the early postcolonial period started to put education to the test by exploring and exposing its positives and negatives in an independent Africa in a contrastive manner. While on one hand, education contributes to empowerment for social mobility, on the other hand, it is still seen as a tool of sustaining the colonial legacy by perpetuating the western cultural and economic domination on Africa. Education is seen a system serving the West by producing an African elite with diverging interest vis-à-vis the African dreams, expectations and ideals. In *Les Soleils des Indépendances* [The Suns of Independence] by Ahmadou Kourouma (1968), education is portrayed as a means of promoting Western values and beliefs at the expense of African identity and culture. The protagonist, Fama, an authentic Malinké prince, in the times of independence and the political system of single party, reflects a context where traditions and modernity clash in a tragic and derisory way. He castigates Africans who internalised Western values through education to the point where they despise their own culture. Similarly, in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that colonial education was designed to alienate Africans from their own cultures and histories, and that a decolonised education system is necessary to empower African societies. As African writers gained more autonomy and vividly started to challenge the cultural dominance of the West, education was portrayed as a means of empowering and reclaiming African renaissance.

In Ousmane Sembene's *Xala* (1974), education is also perceived as a means of achieving economic success and political power. Although the novel criticises the narrowminded mentality of the African newly formed petty bourgeoisie, the protagonist, El Hadji, is a wealthy businessman who seeks political power but is unable to achieve it because of his lack of education. Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) narrates the challenges that poor African families face in accessing education, highlighting the importance of education in breaking the cycle of poverty. The protagonist, Nnu Ego, values education as a means of securing a better life for her children.

However, there are writers whose perception of education is the reinforcement of social hierarchies and colonial domination. *Une si longue lettre* [So Long a Letter] by Mariama Ba (1979) portrays gender inequality and elitism through the experience of educated African women in a patriarchal society. It highlights the importance of education in challenging traditional gender roles and promoting gender equality. The novel highlights the transformative power of education in challenging social hierarchies and promoting social mobility. The protagonist, Ramatoulaye, is a strong-willed woman who is determined to achieve financial independence through her education. The novel underscores the challenges that African women face in accessing elitist education and its impact on their lives. In *Changes: A Love Story* (1991), Ama Ata Aidoo presents the challenges that African girls face in accessing education. The protagonist, Esi, is denied an education because she is a girl, and the novel highlights the impact of gender inequality on access to education.

In summing up, one can argue that if African literature has highlighted the challenges that Africans face in accessing education, the latter has equally been historically related to a systemic failure of developmental initiatives. Educational opportunities have been limited to a privileged few in African society, and this has perpetuated social inequalities.

It can hence be arguable that African literature has portrayed education as a double-edged sword that can both empower and oppress Africans. On one hand, education has been used as a tool to subjugate and control Africans, while on the other hand, it is a means of achieving social and economic mobility. Furthermore, whilst literature highlights the challenges that Africans face in accessing quality education, particularly marginalised groups such as girls and those from multiple marginalised characteristics, it equally emphasises the need for education to be inclusive, equitable, and reflective of African culture and history. It is from this perspective that some novelists have also represented education, not through the western education lenses, but by the portrayal and the critical analysis of entrepreneurship in postcolonial African francophone literature. Whatever scope the writers take, the bottom line is that from colonial to postcolonial African literature, the paradigm of representation of education offers a diverse and complex portrayal of its role and effects in shaping African societies.

### **Insights into entrepreneurship in Africa**

Entrepreneurship has long been ingrained in Africa's socio-economic fabric, rooted in traditional trading practices and artisanal skills. Throughout history, Africa has faced various challenges in the education sector, including limited access to formal education, inadequate training opportunities, and a growing demand for skills in a rapidly changing world.

Since 1960s, entrepreneurial initiatives and perceptions have mainly focussed on formal education as the key synergy that drives development in its multifaceted dimensions. Against this backdrop, entrepreneurship has gained prominence as a viable solution to address development challenges. In recent years, it has gained significant attention as an alternative pathway to formal education and training in Africa (Mbeteh and Pellegrini, 2022). By exploring the current situation of entrepreneurship as an alternative to formal education in Africa, one can get insights into the motivations, challenges, and potential benefits associated with entrepreneurial endeavours and their impact on individuals and communities. A study by Fatoki and Chindoga (2011) explored the impact of education programmes on entrepreneurial intentions and behaviour among African youths. They found that such programmes enhance innovation, attitudes, and skills, leading to increased entrepreneurial initiatives.

Entrepreneurship has in fact shown a remarkable ability to stimulate economic growth and job creation in Africa. Studies by Kiggundu (2002) and Ochonu (2018) highlighted the increasing recognition of entrepreneurship as a driver of economic growth and job creation. As governments and international organisations began recognising the potential of entrepreneurship, policies and programs were implemented to support enterprising skills and activities. These initiatives have resulted in the creation of new businesses, fostering an environment conducive to entrepreneurship. Scholars like Blackburn and Schaper (2016), and Hörisch (2015) and Hockerts (2017) have highlighted the importance of entrepreneurship in addressing sustainable development goals.

There are many factors that contribute to the growing interest in entrepreneurship as an alternative education and training systems. Economic factors such as high unemployment rates, limited job opportunities, and the need for self-reliance push individuals to explore entrepreneurial ventures.

One of the key factors behind the rise of entrepreneurship in Africa is the urgent need to provide youths with meaningful opportunities. Formal education systems often struggle to accommodate the growing number of youths, leading to high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Entrepreneurship provides an avenue for young people to develop essential skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, enabling them to create their own ventures and contribute to economic development (Sriram et al., 2021). The proliferation of mobile phones and internet connectivity has also provided new opportunities for digital entrepreneurship. Scholars like Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2018) and Dlodlo et al. (2020) have examined the role of technology and digital platforms in fostering entrepreneurship, enabling

entrepreneurs to access markets, finance, and information more effectively. Moreover, the desire for financial independence, empowerment, and the ability to create social impact serve as intrinsic motivations for many aspiring entrepreneurs.

However, while entrepreneurship offers potential benefits, it is not without challenges. Access to capital and financial resources is one of the significant barriers faced by aspiring entrepreneurs in Africa. Limited access to funding, high interest rates, and a lack of collateral hinder the establishment and growth of entrepreneurial ventures. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure, bureaucratic red tape, and corruption pose significant obstacles to aspiring entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the gender dimension of entrepreneurship in Africa has gained significant attention. Dabiçi and co-researchers (2022) have explored the challenges and opportunities faced by female entrepreneurs, emphasising the need for gender-responsive policies and programs. The inclusion of women in entrepreneurship has the potential to drive economic growth and reduce gender disparities.

Although formal education may not be the primary pathway, it nevertheless equips individuals with essential skills, knowledge, and a mindset that contribute to entrepreneurial success.

Recognising the potential of entrepreneurship, African writers, including novelists, acknowledge the key role of entrepreneurship in contributing to the development of individuals and local communities by addressing social challenges, promoting sustainable practices, and empowering marginalised groups. They encourage individuals to identify and leverage opportunities, leading to wealth creation and economic empowerment beyond education and qualification markets.

### **Representation of entrepreneurship in postcolonial African francophone literature**

In postcolonial African francophone literature, educational entrepreneurship has started to be represented as a crucial means of addressing the challenges facing the educational system. Through the creation and development of entrepreneurial educational initiatives, individuals and organisations are portrayed with the ability to both generate economic opportunities and promote innovative social change.

One prominent example of educational entrepreneurship in postcolonial African francophone literature can be found in the novel *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages* [Waiting for the vote of the wild beasts] (2000) by Ahmadou Kourouma. The protagonist, Koyaga, establishes a modern school in his village that combines traditional African education with modern pedagogical methods. Through his entrepreneurial efforts, Koyaga is able to promote educational opportunities for his community, as well as to challenge the colonial legacy of the educational system in Africa. This portrayal of educational entrepreneurship emphasises the importance of innovation and creativity in addressing the challenges facing education in many African countries.

Another example of educational entrepreneurship can be found in *Littoral: Le Sang des promesses* [Coastline: the blood of promises] (2010) by Wajdi Mouawad. The protagonist, Nawal, travels to Africa to establish a school for young girls in a remote village. Despite facing numerous challenges, including cultural barriers and political instability, Nawal's school becomes a success and transforms the lives of many young girls in the region. This portrayal of educational entrepreneurship emphasizes the importance of persistence and determination in achieving social change through educational entrepreneurship.

Even though postcolonial African francophone literature offers a nuanced and complex representation of educational entrepreneurship using characters as agents of change who are motivated by both economic and social goals, many writers challenge the traditional binary between commercial and social entrepreneurship. The authors of the three novels that constitute the corpus for this study depict the factors that highlight shortcomings of education in its traditional perceptions. Whilst they emphasise the importance of formal education, they equally advocate for the promotion of innovative and creative initiatives for positive change. By challenging the dominant paradigm of education as a static and fixed entity that warrants all forms of development, they portray a cultural shift from perceiving education as a catalyst for values and empowerment to new perspectives that facilitates social and self-fulfilment through entrepreneurship.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on the literary texts of two novels serving as a corpus, using Denzin's Interpretive Interactionism (Denzin, 1989). The thematic perspective will be used as a qualitative research approach that aims to identify, analyse, and interpret discursive meaning within textual and paratextual data.

Thematic Analysis in studying novels enables researchers to delve into the author's intentions, examining the ideas and messages they seek to convey through their writing. By identifying recurring themes and motifs, researchers can gain insight into the author's worldview, literary techniques employed, and the broader social and cultural contexts that inform their work. This analysis allows for a deeper understanding of the novel's purpose and its significance within the literary canon.

As novels often revolve around the experiences, emotions, and personal growth of the characters, thematic analysis allows researchers to explore the nuances of character development, identifying the underlying themes that shape their journeys. By examining the characters' interactions, dialogues, and conflicts, researchers can gain a richer understanding of the social, psychological, and emotional dimensions depicted in the novel. Furthermore, novels often serve as reflections of society, addressing relevant issues, and provoking critical thought. Hence, thematic analysis offers a robust and insightful methodological framework for analysing novels.



Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis provides a valuable tool for researchers seeking to understand the underlying themes, motifs, and ideas presented in literary works. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach introduces a six-phase approach, which has become one of the prominent theoretical frameworks in the field. Their methodology involves familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and defining themes, naming themes, and producing a coherent analysis. Even though this systematic and iterative process allows researchers to uncover both explicit and implicit themes, providing a robust foundation for novel analysis, it does not unveil the pragmatic features of the construction of the narrative. In the context of analysing novels, thematic analysis should enable a comprehensive exploration of the author's intentions, characters' experiences, and societal issues.

In her Narrative Analysis, Riessman (1993, 2008) advocates rather for a narrative approach to thematic analysis, emphasising the significance of storytelling in understanding human experiences. This perspective recognises that novels are inherently narrative-driven, focusing on the relationships between characters, their interactions, and the development of plot. Given the African novelist generally use storytelling perspectives, the Narrative Analysis can help with examining the narrative elements to uncover underlying motifs and themes embedded within the storyline. However, confining the narratological construction into the storytelling intentions may not allow for a holistic understanding of the novel by ignoring some factors that influence the thematic interpretation.

Denzin's Interpretive Interactionism (Denzin, 1989) proposes instead an interpretive interactionist perspective that emphasises the social construction of reality through interactions between individuals. This theoretical framework recognises the complex interplay between the author, characters, and readers, emphasising the role of societal context in shaping themes within novels. Thematic analysis, within this perspective, enables researchers to identify and analyse the social, cultural, and historical factors that influence the themes depicted in the novels.

### **The corpus**

The two novels of the corpus were published from 2000. On the thematic level, this novelistic temporality takes on interpretative clues from a sociological reading of social and historical contexts of the two Congo, namely Congo-Kinshasa and Congo-Brazzaville.

### ***Le Destin de Laurent Tshiosha* (2020) by François Mbiyangandu Tshibila**

This novel *Le Destin de Laurent Tshiosha* [The Destiny of Laurent Tshiosha] (2020) by François Mbiyangandu Tshibila presents the protagonist Laurent Tshiosha as a prototype of any diligent student who, despite the learner engagement efforts made, does not unfortunately achieve the expected grades. Instead of clinging to fruitless school adventures, he returns to the village and settles there. He is dedicated to community development through entrepreneurial initiatives. Contrary to his academic failure, these entrepreneurial adventures lead to

spectacular results. Thanks to his commitment and to the support of young people who adhere to his ideal, he succeeds in making his village a model of its kind through its cleanliness, its health centre and equitable access to healthcare services, and its primary and secondary school. Clean water flows from the taps everywhere and electricity illuminates the entire village. Far from leading to and perpetuating fatalistic and lethargic defeatism, school failure opens new horizons. It becomes a source of motivation, a chance for new impactful experiences and unsuspected successes that the school system has not been able to guarantee. For in-text citations, the title of the novel will be referred to as *Destin*.

***Le pousse-pousse de Makélékélé : Une jeunesse au Congo (2021) by Bernard N'Kaloulou***

The narratological structure of this novel *Le pousse-pousse de Makélékélé : Une jeunesse au Congo* [The Makélékélé hand-pulled rickshaw: Being young in Congo] (2021) by Bernard N'Kaloulou revolves around the adventures and misadventures of six students forced to abandon their postgraduate studies due to the university closure following strikes, Célio (chemistry), Côme (physics), Jean-Serge (law), Nino (sociology), Pandy and Sukisa (economics). These six young Congolese attended Marien Ngouabi University in Brazzaville but, in the absence of equitable and inclusive practices, they find themselves victims of institutional elitism and forced to leave higher education. Multiple entrepreneurial endeavours force them to live in different places in the country. From adventures to misadventures, their journey is made of a complex combination of successes and crises. The author explores the bitterness of educational exclusion of Congolese youths and their positive engagement with the entrepreneurial opportunities that the society offers to its youths. The political and socio-economic reality facing young people in Congo-Brazzaville is meticulously connected to current challenges and opportunities that characterise the multifaceted evolution of this country. The in-text referencing will use *Pousse-pousse* as a title.

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

A critical reading of these two novels allows to perceive school as one of the most determining factors of social and political mobility. However, for this positive impact to materialise, the management of education must take place in a democratic society where inclusive and equitable principles are effectively aligned with learning outcomes and degree awards that would facilitate effective professional integration into the labour market. While insisting on the fact that education remains the main catalyst for removing social inequalities barriers by supporting ambitions of equal chances to all, the novelists present entrepreneurship and self-directed learning as an alternative to formal training capable of facilitating social mobility and individual self-fulfilment.

### **Association of access to university with the realisation of childhood dreams in adulthood**

During their boat trip from the village to the capital city, Laurent and his companion Marco feel amazed at the advantage they enjoy preferential treatment for the simple reason of being admitted to university. The sole title of future university students earns them the honour of

traveling in a comfortable first-class cabin, sheltered from the bad weather, while their compatriot travellers are exposed to all possible risks under an open sky (Destin, p.73). For Marco, university studies are indeed associated with promises of a glorious future, because « l'université, la réussite! Oui, Laurent, la vie devant nous, m'entends-tu? Au lieu de croupir dans les coins perdus qui nous ont vus naître, nous voici lancés à la conquête du savoir et du bonheur » (Destin, p. 72) [university means success! Yes, Laurent, a good life is ahead of us, do you hear me? Instead of languishing in the lost corners of villages where we were born, here we are now embarking on the conquest of both knowledge and happiness]. They hope to find one day jobs matching their level of studies, and their degrees are keys assets that many other young people in the country cannot even dream of (*Destiny*, p.123).

### **Professional, personal and family aspirations**

If the high school student Zuana has always expressed the desire to study law to become a lawyer and therefore help disadvantaged people in her community (*Pousse-pousse*, p. 87), Marco's dream was of being a medical doctor, and hence feeling filled with all the forms of joys academic success provides. He dreamed of being director of a large hospital in the capital, driving a big American car, living in a sumptuous villa, surrounded by his happy family. He dreamed of marrying a beautiful mix-race girl who would give him two charming boys, and a girl who would be a true likeness of her beautiful mother. The two boys would become doctors like him, or otherwise would choose would become either engineers or university professors. His daughter would push her studies as far as possible to be very influential in the country and fight for gender equality (*Destin*, p.77). It should be noted that Marco's large part of his dreams will be realised, since at the end of his studies, he will be appointed Health Minister in the central government.

### **Educational elitism as a major hindrance to the aspirations of youths, inclusive policies and practices in Africa**

When education is based on unequitable and exclusive criteria for access, it creates barriers and inequalities among learners. This type of education arrangements limits access for those who do not fit into pre-established standards as they come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Beyond questioning traditional criteria of excellence that can also be associated with elitism, the novels in the corpus call for the promotion of an education that values diversity, equity, and inclusion. This would provide all students with the opportunity and support to develop their talents and contribute fully to society, regardless of their social backgrounds or presumed abilities.

In his novel, N'Kaloulou discusses how many schools in the country at all levels and cycles are attended by ambitious young people. However, their studies take place in overcrowded classrooms, with an average of one hundred and twenty students per class, which should be unacceptable from a pedagogical standpoint. Due to poor or lack of adequate investment in education, wealthy families do not want to entrust their children to teachers who no longer

receive continuous training. According to a headteacher, «je n'ai plus aucune place de disponible vu la qualité de l'enseignement dispensé. La majorité de mes enseignants sont formés en France » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.240) [I no longer have any places available given the quality of education we provide. The majority of our teachers are trained in France]. It is this professional development that would guarantee and adapt teaching and training to the requirements of the profession demands in line with aspirations and ambitions of the future. Consequently, «L'engouement du privé est réel » (*Pousse-pousse*, p. 240) [The enthusiasm for private schools is real]. « Les enfants lambda sont accueillis principalement par l'Université locale dont les conditions, les moyens se dégradent de jour en jour » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.88) [Ordinary children mainly enrol in the local University, whose conditions and resources deteriorate day by day], while rich families send their children abroad for quality education.

« Les lieux traditionnels de formation supérieure en France, Canada, Cuba reçoivent régulièrement nombre d'étudiants congolais dans leurs universités. A ceux-ci sont venus s'ajouter, récemment, certains pays africains en raison de l'excellence de leur formation universitaire (Dakar et Saint-Louis au Sénégal, Abidjan en Côte d'Ivoire, Libreville au Gabon...). Problème : les critères d'obtention de bourse de l'État pour s'y rendre et s'y épanouir brillent par leur flou artistique, donnant le sentiment que seuls les enfants de la bonne société accèdent au Graal. Aussi, pour l'immense majorité des étudiants congolais, l'université locale demeure la seule planche de salut » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.22)

[Traditional higher education destinations in France, Canada, Cuba regularly receive a significant number of Congolese students in their universities. Recently, some African countries have been added to this list due to educational excellence of their universities (Dakar and Saint-Louis in Senegal, Abidjan in Ivory Coast, Libreville in Gabon...). The problem lies in the vagueness of criteria for obtaining state scholarships to go there and flourish, which gives the impression that only children from the privileged few in the society have access to the Holy Grail. Therefore, for most Congolese students, the local university remains their only educational lifeline].

It is in this context that three weeks after starting to deploy his efforts to obtain scholarships for his daughter and son-in-law through network favours, Zuana's father is pleased with his success when he heard that these young people are already expected in France at the beginning of the next academic year at the University of Le Mans, in Sarthe (*Pousse-pousse*, p.88). Faced with these inequalities, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds constantly ask themselves this relevant question: « Mais que faire pour mettre en musique cette aspiration, cette nécessité dans leur propre pays, lequel leur refuse à présent de se former et de se construire ? » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.22) [But what can be done to ensure this aspiration, this need resonate in the ambitions of their own country, which is now denying them the opportunity to train and build a better future?].

### **Factors contributing to education failure and its impact in Africa**

Among the factors contributing to education failure and its impact in Africa are lack of or poor investments which lead to financial precarity, illicit networks of influence, nepotism, failure to match curricula and learning outcomes with the demands of the markets, as well as lack of opportunities for continuous staff development. This situation of resentments inevitably translates into educational stakeholder grievances that often turn into strikes, leading to the closure of academic establishments.

### **Financial precarity and peaceful demands versus repressive measures and closures of educational institutions**

N'Kaloulou's novel depicts the precariousness of financial challenges endured by students and university. The protagonist of *Destin* (p.121) saw his learning failure coming as the hard blows of fate. «Les sessions d'examens se succédaient et se ressemblaient. Le résultat attendu ne venait pas au rendez-vous. Plus que la honte, le sentiment d'échec le minait du dedans.»

[The examinations results came one after another with the same patterns. The expected grades did not materialise. More than shame, the feeling of failure was destroying him internally].

Faced with the lack of investments in education, students taste the bitterness of failure pills, whilst teachers feel socially devalued by a society that no longer allows them to embody the future and the hope of the country. Across the country, academic status is no longer associated with prestigious social roles. The national university no longer symbolises the pride of the nation, a beacon for a sustainable development. With the traditional image of university as the guarantor of a destiny of success being completely demystified and degraded (*Pousse-pousse*, p.24), the students and the unions bring their grievances to the streets through peaceful strikes.

« L'Université Marien Nguabi en grève illimitée. Vive l'Intersyndicale ! »  
C'est inédit. Pour autant que nous soyons bien informés, c'est la première fois dans l'histoire de cette institution qu'une grève est déclenchée conjointement par le Collège intersyndical de l'Université Marien Nguabi et le Mouvement des Étudiants du Congo (MEC), paralysant les onze établissements de l'université » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.17)

[Marien Nguabi University is on indefinite strike. Long live the unions!'. It is unprecedented. As far as we are aware, this is the first time in the history of this institution that a strike has been launched jointly by the Inter-union Movement of Marien Nguabi University and the Congolese Student Union (CSU), paralysing the eleven campuses of the university].

With education being a fundamental and universal right, every individual should have the opportunity to access quality education, regardless of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity or geographic location. However, due to lack of resources and investments, many young Africans are excluded from access to higher education. This creates inequalities and excludes

students from disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds, which hinders diversity and inclusion in higher education.

When the official and immediate closure of Marien Ngouabi University until further notice is announced, it is a hard blow to students. The news spark furious discussions and feelings of disbelief as all strikers do not appreciate this indirect way of paralysing their studies and without any consultation. They feel helpless since the closure translates into questioning the relevance of peaceful strike (*Pousse-pousse*, p19). For students,

« la grève est une liberté et un droit universels. Quant à percevoir l'aide de l'État, sous la forme d'une bourse, c'est un dû et non une faveur pour tout État qui place sa jeunesse comme la première des promesses » (*Pousse-pousse*, P.18)

[the strike is a universal freedom and right. As for receiving state aid, in the form of a scholarship, it is a due and not a favor for any state that places its youth as the first of the promises]. Nevertheless,

«Marien Ngouabi » a été évacuée manu militari, puis fermée. Pourtant ces temps-ci circule une rumeur insistante : l'État serait tenté de décréter l'année 2013-2014, « année blanche », c'est-à-dire : une année sacrifiée pour des milliers d'étudiants, sans examen ni diplôme » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.29)

["Marien Ngouabi" was evacuated manu militari, and then closed. Yet these days there is a rumour going around that the State is tempted to declare 2013-2014 academic year, a disrupted or "blank year", that is to say: an entire year wasted for thousands of students, without exams or qualifications].

In circumstances where students do not feel fully engaged in education, either due to financial insecurity or policies and decisions that have a negative impact on their learning,

« Rester à l'université, ce serait perdre son temps, pendant qu'ailleurs en Afrique, les uns les autres s'activent dans la construction du monde de demain. L'idée de penser qu'en Afrique même on peut se former et se construire leur provoque un certain énervement pareil à celui que peut éprouver tout batteur de djembé sans djembé ou tout fumeur de pipe sans tabac » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.24)

[Staying at university would be wasting your time, while elsewhere in Africa, others are busy building their future. The idea of thinking that within Africa one can train and build their future even cause a certain nervousness similar to what any djembe drummer without a djembe or any pipe smoker without tobacco can feel].

### **Lack of or insufficient investments in education**

Poor investments in education in Africa represent a major obstacle to access and participation, teaching and learning. In higher education sector, this situation compromises the synchronisation of educational synergies in the country.

The two novels analysed in this study present universities and regional educational institutions in a critical situation of needing adequate financial resources to operate effectively. “L’école de notre village tombe en ruine » (*Destin*, p.139) [Our local school is falling apart].

When a single university must serve the whole country, access to higher education reflects and feeds on elitism. Therefore,

« c’est une excellente chose que cette université en construction au nord de Brazzaville ouvre un jour ses portes pour ainsi soulager « Marien Ngouabi », unique université pour un pays de cinq millions d’habitants » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.123)

[building and opening a new university in the north of Brazzaville is an excellent idea to relieve one day “Marien Ngouabi”, the only university for an entire country of five million people].

The challenges of not having enough institutions undoubtedly have a direct negative impact on access to education and compromise the country’s ability to provide equitable and inclusive services. When a single university cannot serve an entire country, some candidates for higher education are forced to leave their homeland, if they can, for other horizons.

« Pensons que des villes comme Pointe-Noire ou encore Dolisie n’abritent pas la moindre faculté. En conséquence, il ne faut pas s’étonner que faute d’alternative les jeunes soient de plus en plus tentés d’aller voir ailleurs » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.23)

[Let us remember that cities like Pointe-Noire or Dolisie do not have any single. Consequently, it is not surprising that, for lack of alternative, young people are more and more tempted to look elsewhere].

Due to lack of funding, educational institutions face operational difficulties related to lack of infrastructures, lack of qualified personnel, lack of equipment and lack of student grants.

« Prenons, par exemple, la petite université du Mans dans la Sarthe : 12 500 étudiants, et comparons-là à la nôtre, l’UNIKIN : 29 554 étudiants. Voyons maintenant les rapports de force en matière de bibliothèque centrale pour s’apercevoir que la première dispose d’une bibliothèque de 5 000 mètres carrés contre 1 000 mètres carrés pour la seconde ; de 500 places assises contre 150 ; de plusieurs dizaines de milliers d’ouvrages contre 6 700, et je ne comptabilise pas les ouvrages détenus par les bibliothèques de nos disciplines, lesquelles d’ailleurs ne sont accessibles qu’aux professeurs » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.211)

[As an example, let us take the small university of Le Mans in Sarthe: 12,500 students, and compare it to ours, UNIKIN: 29,554 students. Let us now look at the operational capacity in terms of the central library to appreciate that the first one has a library of 5,000 square meters against 1,000 square meters for the second; 500 seats against 150; with several tens of thousands of books against 6,700; and I am not mentioning books held on library shelves within our disciplines, which are in fact accessible to teachers only].

With education being a fundamental and universal right, every individual should have the opportunity to access quality education, regardless of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity or geographic location. However, due to lack of resources and investments, many young Africans are excluded from access to higher education. This creates inequalities and excludes students from disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds, which hinders diversity and inclusion in higher education.

To overcome these challenges, the novels in the corpus conclude that increased investments in education is crucial. African governments should give priority to education and allocate adequate financial resources for the development of educational infrastructures, the recruitment and training of teachers and the creation of scholarships awarded fairly in compliance with clear criteria.

### **Discrepancies between education programmes and employability needs**

The mismatch between curricula and labour market needs is one of the major challenges facing education in Africa. Indeed, education and training that are not relevant to labour markets can have several negative consequences, both for individuals and for the economy as a whole, including high unemployment, underemployment, skills mismatch, low productivity and loss of human capital.

The novels argue that educational elitism does not prioritise vocational training. Training focuses on working in administration and management. Areas such as masonry, carpentry, building, painting, or ironwork, which are generally strategic for basic infrastructures, are struggling to find qualified people.

« Le pays s'est affaibli parce qu'il ne forme plus ses enfants. [Il y a] le manque de perspectives comme si le cerveau s'était endormi à jamais, pour ne pas dire éteint » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.11)

[The country's development is stalling because it no longer trains its children. [There is] lack of development strategies as if the brain has been completely turned off, if not dead].

When education does not link programmes with the labour market demands employers can struggle to find candidates with the skills needed to fill specific positions, which limits their ability to grow and innovate.



According to the novels, education in some African countries does not take into account the diversity and diversification of economic sectors. « Les seules exportations du pétrole représentent plus de 70 % des recettes de l'État congolais » (Pousse-pousse, p.18) [Oil exports alone account for more than 70% of Congolese state revenue].

Even when graduates manage to find a job, they risk being confronted with occupying positions that do not require the level of attained qualifications. This leads to underuse of skills and talents and can have a negative impact on motivation and job satisfaction. « Des jeunes diplômés qui recherchent un emploi dans les secteurs de la manutention, du ménage, de la surveillance nocturne » (*Pousse-pousse*, p. 273) [Many young graduates are looking for jobs in manual handling, cleaning, nightwatch].

When graduates do not have the right skills, the overall productivity of the economy can suffer. Employees struggle to adapt to the workplace, which limits their efficiency and performance.

« Mais c'est ton cas qui m'a le plus bouleversé, je ne sais pourquoi. Voici un jeune, de surcroît une femme, qui a cravaché dur pour parvenir à ce niveau, mais qui se heurte à un marché de l'emploi quasi inexistant pour ses compétences acquises » (*Pousse-pousse*, p. 273)

[But it was your case that upset me the most, I don't know why. Here is a young person, moreover a woman, who has worked hard to reach this level, but who comes up against an almost non-existent job market for his acquired skills].

It is obvious that inadequate training can lead to a high unemployment rate, since the acquired skills do not match the labour market needs. Graduates from fields where there are few job opportunities often struggle with finding a job matching their qualifications. This situation leads to a loss of human capital, since the resources invested in education and training are not fully used.

It is therefore imperative to ensure that there is close collaboration between educational institutions, employers and governments to identify skills in demand, adapt curricula accordingly and put in place training mechanisms to enable workers to adapt to changes in the employment markets.

### **Entrepreneurship as alternative to educational elitism and failure**

Entrepreneurship can be an important alternative to educational elitism and failures in Africa. It offers the possibility of creating own economic, social and professional opportunities. Rather than looking for a traditional job in a saturated employment market where working skills do not match employability needs, people can develop their own businesses and initiatives. Such initiatives can bypass various barriers of educational elitism and failure, giving entrepreneurs the opportunity to create their own success regardless of their level of formal education.

In this regard, a successful entrepreneurship is the one that fosters the development of tailored solutions to specific problems. It must therefore allow to adapt creativity and innovation to local realities and needs. It must consider the cultural, social and economic aspects specific to each community to allow and promote the autonomy and self-determination of individuals in the creation of their own businesses. Hence, the narrative representation of the novels in the corpus reflects some of the entrepreneurial qualities expected for entrepreneurship to be complementary to formal education, providing additional opportunities for those who fail in the traditional education system.

### **Reflective practice as an entrepreneurial quality**

Reflection is an essential entrepreneurial power, as it allows to generate innovative ideas and critical thinking for problem solving processes that lead to concrete solutions. In *Destin*, reflection is seen as a catalyst in exploring new possibilities, questioning existing norms, seeking opportunities and discovering unique and innovative ideas.

« La réflexion n'est pas l'apanage des seuls intellectuels bardés de diplômes. Il en avait la preuve là, en face de lui. Les deux interlocuteurs qui discutaient devant lui à coups d'arguments avaient à peine franchi le cap du diplôme d'études secondaires. Ce qu'ils disaient avait pourtant du sens et valait à ses yeux les thèses insipides qu'il lui avait fallu péniblement mémoriser à l'université » (*Destin*, p.128)

[Reflection is not the prerogative of intellectuals with degrees only. He witnessed it. The two interlocutors who were arguing in front of him with strong and convincing arguments had barely completed their high school studies. And yet in his opinion what they were saying was making sense and worth theories that he had to painstakingly memorise at university].

This means that reflection allows entrepreneurs to detect problems and gaps in the market. By stepping back and carefully analysing consumer needs, market trends, and unmet demands, entrepreneurs can identify opportunities to deliver solutions.

### **Accountability and leadership skills as entrepreneurship key success factors**

On one hand, accountability allows the entrepreneur to make informed decisions, to demonstrate integrity and take responsibility for actions. On the other hand, leadership warrants a clear vision, ambitious goals and an environment that is conducive to business growth and success. Good leadership inspires trust, fosters collaboration and helps achieve expected outcomes.

In *Pousse-pousse*, Pandy realises that he has become, in a way, the banker of the family, meeting big and small expenses of the community. For all financial needs, it is on him that all eyes and hopes turn (*Pousse-pousse*, p. 236). Nevertheless, he knows very well that friendships and business cannot be intertwined. « En effet, ne dit-on pas que les rapports d'argent agissent

comme un poison mortel au sein des familles ? » (*Pousse-pousse*, p. 63) [Indeed, don't we say that mixing money and relations acts like a deadly poison within families?].

In addition, entrepreneurship emphasises the use of practical skills and concrete experience acquired to solve real problems. Thus, individuals who have not succeeded in the formal education system can develop and use their practical skills to succeed in the world of manual labour. It is for this purpose that Pandy confirms his determination to work in farming.

« Je ne crains pas d'avoir la main calleuse de jardinier. Bien entendu, je m'appuierai aussi sur votre longue expérience de jardinier, vous qui savez tout l'art d'exploiter une terre pour en tirer le meilleur rendement. J'aime la terre, j'aime son odeur, j'aime la terre car elle seule féconde les graines et plantes de toutes sortes, attire et abrite plein d'oiseaux afin de la saluer et la louer chaque fois que le soleil se lève et se couche » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.94)

[I am not afraid of having a gardener's calloused hand. Of course, I will also rely on your long experience as a gardener, you who know all the art of working the land to get the best yield. I love the earth, I love its smell, I love the earth because it alone fertilizes seeds and plants of all kinds, attracts and shelters many birds to greet and praise it every time the sun rises and goes to bed].

Entrepreneurial skills undoubtedly allow to adapt effectively to changes in the business environment. Strategic entrepreneurs can spot changing customer needs and offer products or services that meet market demands.

### **Synergies and strategies as essential factors for entrepreneurship**

Synergies and strategies play an essential role in the success of any entrepreneurial initiative. They are essential to the success of any entrepreneurial initiative because of their ability to maximize resources and minimize risk. By combining synergies and strategies, entrepreneurs can maximize their chances of success by creating sustainable competitive advantages.

### **Identification of needs and exploitation of opportunities**

In entrepreneurship, strategies for identifying needs and opportunities go hand in hand with anticipating challenges, which makes it possible to put in place measures to mitigate risks. Impactful strategic planning helps to develop action plans to overcome them and to evaluate available alternatives, because «A celui qui sait puiser dans ses ressources, rien n'est impossible » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.116) [To those who know how to tap into their resources, nothing is impossible]. Of all the services provided by the rickshaw puller Nino, that of providing water is undoubtedly the most appreciated by customers in his district where he has earned confidence and esteem. « Économiquement parlant, c'est aussi l'opération la plus rentable pour notre pousse-pousseur » (*Pousse-pousse*, p. 38) [Economically speaking, it is also the most profitable business for the rickshaw puller]. The hand-pulled rickshaw has

become indispensable in water supply, playing the interface between customers and water supply companies (*Pousse-pousse*, p.39).

Even though the country is full of multiple hydrocarbons, especially oil and natural gas (*Pousse-pousse*, p. 113), Jean-Serge discovers that wood charcoal remains by far the most used energy in the country and engages in this type of business. This means that exploring and exploiting opportunities remain key skills for an entrepreneurship. It is about paying attention to market trends, social changes and customer behaviour, in order to spot profitable opportunities. Entrepreneurs must be able to turn these opportunities into viable business ideas, which can lead to significant competitive advantages.

For Jean Serge, the little wood charcoal is sold to Brazzaville by bush taxis which are already very crowded. The charcoal supply to the capital could be done by small vehicles designed for this type of transport, with a "gain de temps, mais aussi gain quantitatif et qualitatif du combustible" (*Pousse-pousse*, p. 114) [saving time, but also fuel quantitatively and qualitatively]. And then,

« Le bourg de Mayama, 2 à 3 000 habitants, le chef-lieu, n'est qu'à une soixantaine de kilomètres de Brazzaville la Capitale : 3 millions d'âmes = 3 millions de consommateurs. Ce district est le domaine, par excellence, de la savane arborée et de la forêt galerie, ce qui signifie qu'il y a beaucoup de bois. À ce jour, l'exploitation de cette matière première par les paysans demeure à l'état d'ébauche » (*Pousse-pousse*, p. 113-114)

[The district of Mayama has 2 to 3,000 inhabitants, and the town is only about sixty kilometers from the Capital Brazzaville: 3 million of people means 3 million consumers. This district has huge, wooded savannah and the vast forest, which means that there is a lot of wood. To date, the exploitation of this raw material by peasants remains at the sketchy state].

This seems to say that the identification of needs and the exploitation of opportunities are essential for entrepreneurship. They contribute to targeting specific market and customer segments, creating relevant value propositions and capitalising on market trends. By developing these skills, entrepreneurs can increase their chances of success and become key players in their area of business.

All things considered, strategic entrepreneurship leads to the creation of a unique and differentiated value proposition. Standing out in the market, attracting customers and generating revenue can be better achieved through a proactive approach that promotes innovation.

### **Associative solidarity involving interpersonal, family, societal and professional relations**

Associative solidarity plays a crucial role in facilitating entrepreneurship by providing support, resources and an impactful network for mutual benefits. Beyond solidarity based on interpersonal and family relationships, associations also allow entrepreneurs to benefit from

shared business resources, both financially and in terms of human capital. Since associations often bring together members who share common interests or values, associative solidarity creates opportunities for collaboration and sharing specialised knowledge and contacts.

A critical reading of the novels in the corpus allows to understand that associative solidarity and entrepreneurial initiatives enable committed communities to face challenges, seize opportunities and succeed in their businesses. To rally the members of his community to entrepreneurial plans, Laurent, the protagonist of *Destin*, wants to explain the village sanitation project, not to the clan chiefs first, but rather to the heads of families of the different clans as grassroots (*Destin*, p. 145). For Laurent, « Notre solidarité est notre force » (*Destin*, p. 147) [Our solidarity is our strength].

Laurent and his small group of young people plan to create an association for those who want to sell the farming products, especially corns, at the best possible prices. Their community used to sell their maize to the Balanda tribes of Katanga who made large profits at the expense of the farmers. The members of this new association could hence earn the Balanda profits, on the sole condition of agreeing to contribute ten percent of the gain to the association responsible for sales. Laurent

« propose que nous mettions à part les montants qui reviennent aux membres qui ont contribué et les dix pour cent qui reviennent à l'Association, ensuite que nous déposions le reste à la banque, qui prendra là-dessus le montant du crédit que nous avons emprunté. Nous devons aussi nous payer nous-mêmes pour le travail que nous faisons » (*Destin*, p.169)

[proposes that we set aside the amounts of money which go to shareholders and the ten percent which goes to the Association. Then we deposit the rest in the bank, which will take the relevant amount of loan we borrowed. We must also pay ourselves for the work we do]

Associative solidarity provides the opportunity to take advantage of the available skills, knowledge and resources. By creating partnerships and collaborations, people can use solidarity strengths of different stakeholders to achieve greater results. Associative solidarity is clearly presented in the novel as an entrepreneurial force that becomes a mode of learning in business management.

« Shito et Terkas, formaient le premier noyau d'adhérents. Tous avaient dépassé la vingtaine, avaient terminé les études secondaires sans possibilité d'aller plus loin et s'adonnaient à la petite agriculture au village. Tous étaient mariés et pères d'un ou de deux enfants. À ce noyau s'ajoutèrent bientôt d'autres jeunes garçons de la même tranche d'âge et partageant le même sort. Laurent pouvait s'appuyer sur ce groupe homogène, motivé et déterminé. Il n'avait pas à courir après le destin, car son destin était entre ses mains, se disait-il. Il devait le réaliser, non pas seul, mais en y faisant participer ces jeunes gens et faire d'eux le moteur du changement de leur village » (*Destin*, p. 142)

[Shito and Terkas became the first core members to join. All of them were in their twenties, had finished secondary school without the possibility of going any further, and were involved in small-scale agriculture in the village. All were married and fathers of one or two children. To this nucleus founding members were soon added other young men of the same age group and sharing the same fate. Laurent could rely on this homogeneous, motivated and determined group. He did not have to chase up fate, because he believed it was in fact in his reach. He just had to grab it, not by acting alone, but by involving these young people and making them the engine of change in their village].

The same associative strategy is used by Jean-Serge who, despite the small means at his disposal in Mayama was helped by young people of his family and village who fully devoted themselves to « la coupe du bois et la fabrication du charbon et peut ainsi constituer au bout d'un mois un bon stock de combustible et le vendre sur le marché prometteur brazzavillois » (*Pousse-pousse*, p. 116) [cutting wood and making charcoal which can thus constitute a good stock of fuel after a month, and sell it on the promising Brazzaville market].

On the governance side, Malumalu Farmers Association has three bodies which are specific to any association created in compliance with the County Law of 1901, namely general assembly, board of directors and executive bureau (*Pousse-pousse*, p.98).

The success of this associative movement is measured against increase of income generation, development of community infrastructures, easy products supply and development of educational initiatives that allow fair and inclusive access and participation to all children in the region.

« L'Association des agriculteurs de Malumalu devint riche et pouvait initier de nombreux projets de développement auparavant impensables. Le premier était celui d'une motopompe installée à la source pour propulser l'eau potable au village. Puis, ce fut un groupe électrogène capable d'éclairer toutes les cases. Le Père curé, lui-même engagé dans le milieu des pétroliers, assurait l'approvisionnement régulier en carburant moyennant paiement par la caisse de l'Association. Enfin, celle-ci s'était penchée sur la situation de l'école primaire, jusque-là limitée aux trois premières années d'enseignement, obligeant les jeunes élèves des classes supérieures de parcourir sept kilomètres à pied pour suivre les leçons à la cité » (*Destin*, p.172)

[The Malumalu Farmers Association became rich and could develop many new projects previously unthinkable. The first was that of a motor pump installed at the source to propel drinking water to the village. Then, it was a generator with the capability of lighting all the village houses. The parish priest, himself involved in the oil industry, ensured the regular supply of fuel against payment from the Association's fund. Finally, the Association had assessed the situation of primary school, hitherto limited to the first three years of education,

forcing pupils in the upper classes to travel seven kilometres on foot to attend lessons in the city]

By working with partners and relevant organisations, the grassroots movement has put in place initiatives to provide regular access to clean water, electricity and other basic resources. The establishment of supply channels and facilities has improved products mobility and access to services, which contributed to reducing inequalities and strengthening the resilience of communities in the face of environmental challenges.

By encouraging local entrepreneurship and setting up education programmes offering all cycles of primary school, this associative movement has enabled children to access a complete basic education locally. Schools were built, teachers training was supported, and educational resources were provided. These measures have enabled children, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds or personal circumstances, to receive an equitable education and develop their full potential.

Ultimately, the success of the association movement has had a significant impact in several key areas. The increase in incomes, the development of community infrastructure, the easy supply of essential goods and the development of education for all have improved the quality of life of the residents of the region. This movement has demonstrated the power of collective action to bring about lasting positive change, fostering economic, social and educational development, while promoting inclusion and equality.

### **Strategic networking and sponsorship**

Networking and sponsorship are among the best strategies to create, implement and succeed in entrepreneurial projects. Researchers and practitioners argue that entrepreneurs with extensive and strategic networks are more likely to find business opportunities and succeed in their ventures (Granovetter, 2010, Johnson, 2013, Robinett, 2014, Wickre , 2018, Burkus , 2018, Band, 2019). By expanding their network, entrepreneurs increase their chances of receiving recommendations and referrals, which can boost business growth. Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) suggest that entrepreneurs with strategic contacts and sponsors have easier access to key information and can therefore make better decisions. In the novels that are being analysed, networking approaches are based on creating and maintaining reliable professional relationships at the national level, which offers multitude advantages to Laurent and his Malumalu Farmers Association which he co-founded with his close friends. Faced with the difficulties related to lack of sufficient investment funds to build a health centre, Laurent turns to his former classmate who has become minister to access the necessary resources.

« Laurent fit entrer en jeu ses relations avec son ami le ministre de la Santé qui, non seulement dota Malumalu d'un centre de santé, mais obtint de son collègue de l'Éducation nationale, l'autorisation de mettre sur pied une école primaire complète et, dans la foulée une section secondaire qui s'étofferait au fur et à mesure. Le ministère se chargea de la construction des bâtiments

appropriés en matériaux durables et de la fourniture des équipements et matériels pédagogiques » (*Destin*, p. 172)

[Laurent brought into play his relations with his friend Minister of Health, who not only endowed Malumalu with a health centre, but also obtained from his colleague at the National Education, the authorisation to set up a primary school with complete education cycles and, in the process, a secondary school section which would expand as the project progresses. The education ministry funded the construction of appropriate buildings in strong materials and the supply of teaching equipment and materials].

Apart from networks of contacts that were established at the national level and led to financial support, Laurent does not leave aside the relevance of local synergies to obtain advice, sectoral information and varied skills allowing him to learn from the experiences of others.

«Mais le Père Marcel, notre bon ami, qui est au courant de tout, m'a conseillé, pour nous aider, dix jeunes gens venus du Katanga [...]. Ensuite, et toujours avec l'aide du Père Marcel, des maçons viendront, feront des plans, décideront des prix et bâtiront des maisons pour nous » (*Destin*, p. 173)

[But Father Marcel, our good friend, who is very knowledgeable, helped us by suggesting ten young people from Katanga to be brought onboard [...]. Then, and as always with Father Marcel's help, builders joined us, made plans with all costings and built houses for us]

On the university side, Côme stands out for his exceptional commitment to academic work. His diligence did not go unnoticed, and he was offered the position of deputy librarian whilst continuing his studies. In addition, during his time at the University of Kinshasa to deliver his professorial lecture, Professor Larivière of the University of Quebec and Montreal noticed the excellence of this gifted and talented student's work. He managed to intervene and secure two scholarships for Côme and his wife to embark on postgraduate studies in Canada.

« Le garçon leur parle de son inscription en lettres à l'UNIKIN [Université de Kinshasa], de félicitations et d'encouragements reçus de la part de son professeur pour son travail, de l'arrivée du Professeur québécois, l'éminent spécialiste de la littérature francophone, le Professeur Larivière à Kinshasa pour honorer sa chaire à l'UNIKIN. C'est ce dernier qui a, avec insistance, demandé au jeune couple de poursuivre ses études au Québec, avec la promesse d'intervenir auprès de son pays, pour obtenir les papiers nécessaires, pour ce faire » (*Pousse-pousse*, p.220)

[The young man tells them about his enrolment in languages at UNIKIN, the commendations and encouragements received from his lecturer for his work, the arrival in Kinshasa of Professor Larivière from Quebec, an eminent specialist in francophone literature coming to deliver his chair lecture at UNIKIN. It was him who insistently asked the young couple to



continue their studies in Quebec, promising to make contacts in his country to obtain the required and necessary documents].

This intervention by Professor Larivière for scholarships confirms the interdependent relationships between the strategic networking and visibility. This relational dynamic shows that increased visibility can improve credibility, reputation, and positively influence potential partners (Coleman, Katz and Menzel, 2012). In addition, networking and sponsorship allow building impactful circles of influence (Misner and Hilliard, 2017).

In conclusion, establishing networks of contacts and sponsorship relations is a key strategy for successful entrepreneurial initiatives. Entrepreneurs can benefit from business opportunities, access to valuable resources and information, and increased visibility and credibility. By taking a proactive approach and developing effective communication skills, entrepreneurs can maximise the benefits of networking. It is therefore important to emphasise that building networks of contacts and sponsorships takes time and effort, but the long-term benefits are well worth it.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the past two decades, entrepreneurship has gained substantial attention as a means of tackling unemployment and subsequently socio-economic inequality, particularly in the context of social injustice and limited access to formal education and training opportunities.

This study conducted on the representation of educational elitism in the face of entrepreneurial initiatives in francophone African narratives has highlighted the challenges faced by many young people in terms of access to education. Various reasons, such as absence of educational infrastructure, nepotism and lack of implementation of equity and equality principles, were identified as major obstacles to educational success. However, culturally, the study also revealed a shift in perspectives on failure in education, showing that lack of academic achievement is no longer perceived as irreversible sentence determined by fate.

African francophone novels have played a crucial role in highlighting the educational difficulties faced by disadvantaged people. These fictional narratives vividly and poignantly presented the social realities and injustices faced by many African youths in their quest for education. The authors addressed current themes such as inequality of opportunity, marginalisation of people from modest backgrounds, and systemic barriers that limit access to opportunities provided by and through education.

In these novels, the lack of adequate educational infrastructures has been identified as a recurring problem. In many parts of Francophone Africa, schools are often under-equipped, overcrowded or even non-existent. This creates an environment that is not conducive to learning and limits opportunities for young Africans to access quality education. The novels highlighted the disastrous consequences of this situation on the protagonists, but they also underlined the resilience and determination of those who face these difficulties.

Furthermore, nepotism has also been identified as a detrimental factor to equal educational opportunities. In many cases, access to education is conditioned by kinship or political connections, which marginalises those who do not have these advantages of networks and sponsorships. Yet this study also revealed a promising shift in how educational failure is currently perceived in African societies. While in the past, failure in education was often seen as a dead end, a fatality, African Francophone novels now tend to highlight entrepreneurship as a viable alternative to failures and academic elitism. The characters in the novels showed that those who fail in the traditional educational system can still find avenues of success and fulfilment through entrepreneurship.

Ultimately, this study has demonstrated that entrepreneurship offers a possibility of autonomy and freedom of creation for those who have not succeeded in flourishing in the educational systems. The novels illustrated how the characters, faced with educational difficulties, were able to turn obstacles into opportunities by starting their own and associative businesses and forging independent futures. This portrayal of entrepreneurship as a credible and empowering alternative provided positive insights into inspiring cultural shifts on how individuals can overcome educational challenges in Africa.

### **Contribution**

Firstly, the contribution of this study lies in the way it examines critically and thoroughly the representation of educational elitism and entrepreneurship in Francophone African novels. By examining the fictional narratives, the study sheds new light on the problems of access to education in Francophone Africa and offers a literary perspective that complements more traditional research focusing on quantitative and qualitative data in pedagogy and in the entrepreneurship.

Secondly, this study underlines the relevance and timeliness of its themes. Access to education is a critical issue in many African countries, and it is important to understand the barriers faced by many Africans who aspire to obtain a quality education. By focusing on francophone african narratives, the study gives voice to stories that are often marginalised or silenced, thus allowing a better understanding of the social realities and experiences of the protagonists.

Thirdly, by focusing on the representation of educational elitism and entrepreneurship, the textual analysis used in this study examines sociological themes, motifs, and characteristics that emerge from literary texts. This makes it possible to identify the different means by which the authors approach these questions, thus offering an in-depth analysis of the way in which literature reflects and critiques social reality.

Finally, this study is relevant in the field of literary criticism, as it offers a broader perspective on the correlations between education, entrepreneurship and social mobility. By highlighting the fact that failure in education should not be perceived fatalistically, the study encourages reflection on alternatives to traditional education, including entrepreneurship. It raises

important questions about societal values and priorities, while offering new avenues for personal and professional success.

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