

An Investigation into the Individual Barriers to Youth Entrepreneurship: The Case of Young Congolese Graduates

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Abstract: Objective: The main objective of this article is to study the individual obstacles to entrepreneurship of young Congolese graduates and to present some possible solutions to overcome them. **Methodology:** This study was conducted in the city of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The sample was made up of 588 young Congolese graduates of higher education and university, aged 15 to 35. The data collected in the research was analyzed using descriptive statistics. **Results:** The results reveal the individual barriers to entrepreneurship among young Congolese graduates, the main ones being: lack of entrepreneurial skills, lack of entrepreneurial experience, self-financing difficulties, lack of professional experience and lack of relationships business. **Practical Implications:** Knowledge of individual barriers and the means to overcome them can have important implications for the creation, development and growth of small, micro and medium enterprises for young entrepreneurs in general and for young graduates in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The fight against these obstacles can help encourage the realization of entrepreneurial projects through the creation of businesses by young Congolese graduates. **Originality/Value:** Youth entrepreneurship in the Democratic Republic of Congo is little studied. This research is an independent and comprehensive analysis of individual barriers among young graduates in one of the understudied entrepreneurial developing countries.

Keywords: youth entrepreneurship, individual barriers, personal obstacles, young Congolese graduates, business creation, DRC.

INTRODUCTION

At the base of entrepreneurship, there is always an entrepreneur, considered as a project developer and in a stricter sense, as a person capable of transforming a dream, an idea, a problem, or an opportunity into a business. The entrepreneur is the subject and the main actor of the entrepreneurial phenomenon and business creation.

During the business creation process or the realization of the entrepreneurial project, the entrepreneur can come up against many obstacles: family, psychological, social, cultural, institutional, economic, political, financial, regulatory and individual (personal). This last category is the subject of this study.

Schumpeter considers that the characteristics of the individual who creates his business are decisive in understanding his success or failure. This opinion is widely shared, since all the authors agree that the individual is a key factor in the success of a business in creation, and this, all the more so in the start-up phase. Individual characteristics facilitate or hinder creation (Slitine and Barthelemy, 2010).

This study seeks to investigate individual barriers to youth entrepreneurship. She wants to answer the question: What are the individual obstacles that hinder the entrepreneurship of young people, mainly young Congolese graduates?

The objective of this investigation is to examine the various individual factors of young graduates likely to constitute obstacles to entrepreneurship and to suggest actions that can help overcome these obstacles.

This research is part of the desire to improve the business creation process and further promote the entrepreneurial culture among young graduates in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Indeed, the promotion of youth entrepreneurship is one of the possible tools for poverty reduction and economic development through the creation of jobs for young people. However, the body of existing knowledge is not sufficient to explain the individual barriers to entrepreneurship of young project leaders and entrepreneurs in the DRC. The results of this research will: i) contribute to increasing knowledge in the field of youth entrepreneurship, ii) highlight the main obstacles and individual challenges affecting young graduates in the DRC, iii) propose actions on how to reduce the problems identified in order to help more young people to become entrepreneurs.

This article is structured as follows. The first section presents a review of the literature on individual barriers. The second section describes the methodology used. The third section presents and discusses the results. The fourth section gives the conclusions and recommendations. The last

section presents the limitations of this research, suggesting avenues for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on entrepreneurship focuses on individual factors that constitute barriers to youth entrepreneurship, such as: socio-demographic factors, psychological factors, factors related to skills, experience, relationships, self-financing, etc.

Socio-Demographic Barriers

Discrimination Based on the Age of the Promoter of the Business Creation Project

The age of the project leader can constitute a major obstacle to their entrepreneurial approach (Laghzaoui. *et al.*, 2020). Young age (under 30) can be a source of obstacles and challenges if we consider the lack of experience, the lack of knowledge, the discredit (with banks, employees, customers) and the lack of capital.

The young age of the entrepreneur makes it difficult for the latter to obtain certain recognition from the established economic communities (Krauss, 2016).

The study carried out by Schoof, (2006) shows that young people can be discriminated against because of their age by institutions or public authorities and by their suppliers or customers and, being taken seriously by colleagues or business contacts, and having difficulty attracting financing to the company. Similarly, Verheul. *et al.*, (2010) point out that young entrepreneurs are similarly exposed to discrimination in the product market, as buyers may question the reliability of their products/services.

Young people are discriminated against solely because of their age. This is legitimized by beliefs such that wisdom only comes with age, and that youth is only a time of transition. Society also perceives young people as irresponsible and troublemakers. This perception may contribute to difficulty obtaining credit (Kaburi. *et al.*, 2012).

Discrimination Based on Gender

The existing literature on entrepreneurship has assessed barriers to starting a new business and found that gender-based constraints are brought together in developing countries due to scarcity of resources and limited opportunities (Tunio. *et al.*, 2021). Gupta and Bhawe, (2007) conclude that the threat of gender stereotype significantly decreases the entrepreneurial intention of the most proactive women.

In Least Developed Countries (LDCs), gender-specific constraints to women's participation in economic activities stem largely from gender-based discrimination in laws, customs and practices (UNCTAD, 2015). These constraints impede women's access to inputs and resources, which can reduce both their willingness to engage in entrepreneurial activities and their chances of entrepreneurial success (UNCTAD, 2018).

Psychological Barriers

The personality of the project leader and his behavior when faced with the act of entrepreneurship are determining factors. In many cases, perceived obstacles may depend on the personality of the potential entrepreneur (Kovářová and Šimsová, 2018).

Fear of Failure

Fear can be defined as a feeling of discouragement developed by a person who believes that he will not succeed even before attempting any action (Ekore and Okekeocha, 2012).

The concept of fear of entrepreneurship is operationalized by fear of failure, fear of success, fear of criticism, and fear of change. In other research, fear of entrepreneurship has been defined either as an attitude towards risk (Minniti and Nardone, 2007; Morales-Gualdrón and Roig, 2005) or as a sociocultural trait that stems from the social stigmatization of entrepreneurial failure (Vaillant and Lafuente, 2007).

Fear is a real obstacle to starting a business because it holds back many people who want to start their own business. It deters many young people from trying to start and run their own business. Entrepreneurship becomes a phobia or downright an alternative automatically doomed to failure for those who witness the failure of a close entrepreneur. The bad experience of his entourage blurs his possible desire to undertake and take risks.

The fear of failure is one of the factors that can affect the transition from intention to entrepreneurial action in individuals, particularly young people, and can prove to be a major obstacle to the development of an entrepreneurial culture (Laghzaoui. *et al.*, 2020). Many entrepreneurial projects would be abandoned even before their launch due to psychological factors such as risk aversion, fear of failure, stress aversion, etc. Wagner, (2005) and Morales-Gualdrón and Roig, (2005) find that fear of failure

hinders incipient entrepreneurial activity for both opportunity and necessity entrepreneurs.

Potential entrepreneurs, that is, individuals who perceive opportunity and have the belief that they have the skills to start a business, may be prevented from acting on these beliefs due to fear of failure (Kew. *et al.*, 2013). Another study was done by Muruganantham and Natarajan, (2015) on obstacles to entrepreneurship in India, identified fear of failure among the main constraints. Similarly, Staniewski and Awruk, (2015) also identified the fear of failure among the most important entrepreneurial obstacles facing students.

Lack of Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is an entrepreneurial characteristic that makes the individual feel capable of doing something, undertaking and completing a project, thanks to their knowledge and skills. Individuals who have high self-confidence are more likely to persevere when problems arise and to act to resolve the problems. They are more intuitive, have a greater hope of success and can engage in long-term perspectives. On the other hand, an individual who has low self-confidence has doubts about his entrepreneurial abilities (Kovářová and Šimsová, 2018).

Lack of self-confidence is an obstacle to starting a business. According to Campy, (2014), the very first barrier that opposes the desire to undertake for the Groups of creators born within the local missions, is self-censorship, essentially linked to a lack of self-confidence. The young people do not have enough confidence in themselves or in their project to dare to broach the subject with their adviser.

Individual Skills Barriers

The authors endeavor to show the considerable influence of skills on the success of the start-up phase of a project. This is why the creator's learning capacities are essential, especially in the start-up phase (Slitine and Barthelemy, 2010). On the other hand, the lack of skills is an obstacle to the success of business creation.

The feeling of incapacity and incompetence is the main fear that holds back potential creators, who feel incapable.

Lack of Entrepreneurial Skills

Many researchers point out that young people often lack the knowledge and skills to be more

motivated and successful in starting a new business (Giacomin. *et al.*, 2011).

Young entrepreneurs lack adequate technical management skills in Africa. This is mainly due to the low level of education and lack of skills of the majority of idle youth (Sulo. *et al.*, 2012).

Findings from research conducted by Jongh and Meyer, (2017) on young people aged 18-35 in South Africa confirms the lack of necessary entrepreneurial skills as one of the most critical aspects hindering their entrepreneurial activity.

Lack of Creativity and Project Ideas

Creativity is the generation of new and usable ideas to find a solution to any problem or use any opportunity (Strydom, 2012). Creativity is an essential element in the emergence of new ideas or business opportunities (Hills. *et al.*, 1999). Kao (1995) insists on the importance of creativity, as an indispensable resource for the invention of new creative ideas.

The idea of the project to be created, largely determines the chances of success of this project. On the other hand, the lack of project ideas and creativity is an obstacle to the entrepreneurial project.

Entrepreneurship involves the development of business ideas and skills to start and grow a business. The lack of business ideas and the ability to put them into action is identified in the literature as an obstacle to business creation (Botha and Ras, 2016; Robertson. *et al.*, 2003).

Experience Barriers

Studies show the importance of the entrepreneur's previous experiences on the progress of the entrepreneurial process (Kidane and Harvey, 2009). Professional experiences affect career intentions (Kolvereid, 1997; Tkachev and Kolvereid, 1999). Giacomin. *et al.*, (2007) find that previous work experience (in the private or public sector) has a positive impact on business creation.

Lack of Work Experience

As the experience makes it possible to embark on the project with fewer risks and uncertainties, its failure generates quite a few problems which would threaten the advancement of the process of creation of new companies. Lack of experience is an obstacle to the business creation process (Halabisky, 2012).

Lack of experience in an industry can prevent business owners from providing focused and specific support in areas such as product development and marketing, which can lead to an inability to understand and solve practical problems (Martin, 2005).

Young people very often lack professional (Chigunta, 2002; Greene, 2013; OECD, 2012) and entrepreneurial experience. Under these conditions, they do not have the technical and managerial skills necessary to successfully set up a business and manage it.

A study by Potabatti and Boob, (2015) in India on barriers to entrepreneurship faced by young people identified the lack of previous work experience among the main challenges hindering youth entrepreneurship opportunities. Similarly, Staniewski and Awruk, (2015) identified lack of work experience among the most significant entrepreneurial barriers facing students.

Lack of Entrepreneurial Experience

The lack of previous entrepreneurial experience among young graduates is an obstacle to starting a business (Brahmi Halima and Jellali Majida, 2016).

Relationship Barriers

Starting a business is a fundamentally relational activity (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994). Indeed, relationships occupy an important place in the decision to undertake. Personal or professional contacts already established by the creator make things easier for him. The creator's membership of a network will be of great use to him in the exercise of his functions as an entrepreneur.

Lack of Business Connections: Appropriate Business Contacts, Suppliers, Partners and Networks

The professional relational network is frequently studied as a leverage effect for entrepreneurial intention (Maalej, 2013). Networks play an important role in business creation. Networking benefits young entrepreneurs inspires those working alone, and helps facilitate their business growth (Kew. *et al.*, 2013).

A lack of relationships can complicate the creation and management of a business and prevent entrepreneurs from establishing their "legitimacy" with the main stakeholders (financial organizations, customers, suppliers) (Brahmi Halima and Jellali Majida, 2016; OECD/European Union, 2012). The lack of relevant networks in

entrepreneurship is a barrier to youth entrepreneurship (Rahmawati. *et al.*, 2012).

Low Social Capital

Social capital designates all the current or potential resources that are linked to the possession of a lasting network of more or less institutionalized relations of mutual knowledge and mutual recognition (Bourdieu, 1980; Leger-Jarniou, 2013). This capital is variable in volume and potential depending on the relationships involved.

In both poor and rich countries, social capital is a key factor in the success of self-employment and youth entrepreneurship (De Gobbi, 2014).

The social capital of the entrepreneur has a positive impact on entrepreneurial success (Baron and Markman, 2003). According to Schmitt and Janssen, (2012), social capital does not explain everything, but it plays a role in the entrepreneurial process.

Lack or low social capital is a barrier to business creation. According to Dzaka. *et al.*, (2020), young people have little social capital, which makes relations with other actors difficult and does not favor their entrepreneurial activities. Similarly, Brahmi Halima and Jellali Majida, (2016) also note insufficient social capital among the barriers that prevent young Tunisians from becoming entrepreneurs.

Obstacles Related to Self-Financing Self-Financing Difficulties

The difficulties of self-financing entrepreneurial activities among young people stem from the lack of financial resources.

An entrepreneur who does not have the necessary financial means will encounter several difficulties in self-financing his business creation project. A lack of capital can be a real obstacle to business creation. Indeed, project leaders without capital are not able to promote it. Evans and Jovanic (1989) argue that liquidity constraints can exclude potential creators, because they do not have sufficient funds, they will not complete the entrepreneurial process.

Young people generally do not have the necessary financial capital to create and develop a new business. The lack of funds for starting a business is a barrier to entrepreneurship in the literature (Jongh and Meyer, 2017; Kovářová and Šimsová, 2018; Staniewski and Awruk, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design is a framework for data collection and analysis. The choice of a research design reflects decisions about prioritizing a range of dimensions of the research process (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This study used a quantitative methodological approach, based on a field survey.

Population and Sample

The target population of this study is made up of young active Congolese aged 15 to 35, with at least a higher education diploma.

The study sample focused on young graduates of higher education and university found in the city of Kinshasa, of all options, from public and private institutions, men and women, having studied in the capital Kinshasa as in the provinces of the DRC. This sample is made up of 588 young graduates, all aged between 15 and 35. The people to be interviewed during the surveys were chosen by the technique of accidental sampling.

According to several international bodies, such as the United Nations, the OECD, the International Labor Organization and the World Bank, young people are considered to be people between the ages of 16 and 24. However, this definition adopted by other organizations and national governments differs widely from one country to another. In Africa, the word young refers to people between 15 or 18 to 35 years old (Chigunta. *et al.*, 2005; Gough. *et al.*, 2013). According to the African Union's African Youth Charter of 2006 ratified by the DRC, youth is in the age group between 15 and 35 years. It is this slice that is taken into account in this research.

Data and Data Sources

The study only used primary data collected in the field from young Congolese graduates of higher and university education. The collection was carried out using a survey questionnaire addressing the main points on the subject of the study.

The administration of the questionnaire was carried out in direct mode, in other words face to face between the researcher and the respondent. The research was anonymous to ensure the sincerity of the answers.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study is carried out using descriptive statistics. This method was used to find the frequency and percentage of data for all variables in the study. It allowed us to present the results obtained by means of tables and to interpret them using the calculated frequencies.

Response Rate

Of the 630 questionnaires administered, we received 588 properly completed and therefore a response rate of 93%. The rest (42 questionnaires) were not answered or filled out incorrectly, which forced us to eliminate them from our studies, given their lack of credibility (not usable).

Study Area

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a central African state with access to the Atlantic Ocean. It is bordered by the Enclave of Cabinda and the Republic of Congo to the West; Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania in the East; the Central African Republic and Sudan in the North; Zambia and Angola to the south. With an estimated population of 91.994 million and an area of 2 345,000 km², the Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of the most populous and vast countries in sub-Saharan Africa. It is the fourth largest country in Africa and the eleventh in the world. The country comprises 26 provinces. Its capital is Kinshasa.

The surveys were conducted in Kinshasa, in all 24 municipalities, with young Congolese graduates. It's about capturing the voices of young people firsthand. Basically, Kinshasa was chosen as the study area because most young graduates of different courses of study are based in the region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the data collected and the results of the study. This study aims to examine the personal barriers faced by recent graduates in the DRC.

Personal Characteristics of the Young Graduates Surveyed

Table 1 gives the personal characteristics of the individuals surveyed, which include sex, age, marital status and level of education.

Table 1: Personal characteristics of young graduates surveyed (N=588)

Variable	Values	Number of respondents (N=588)	Percent
Gender	Male	311	52.89
	Female	277	47.11
Age groups	15 -19	12	2.04
	20 -24	108	18.37
	25 -29	188	31.97
	30 -35	280	47.62
Marital status	Married	166	28.23
	Single	380	64.63
	Divorced/separated	26	4.42
	Widower (widow)	10	1.70
	Others	6	1.02
Educational level	Graduat diploma*	215	36.6
	Bachelor's degree	308	52.4
	Master's degree	12	2.0
	Other university degrees	53	9.0

Note. The "graduat" is an undergraduate university degree in the DRC, which is worth 3 years of study.

Source: Field survey, 2021.

The age of the participants varies between 15 and 35 years, and 47% of them are women and 53% men. Regarding the age groups, there is a high concentration of young people aged 30-35 (48%), which is followed by young people aged 25-29 with 32%, and then young people aged 20-24 with 18.37%. Young people aged 15-19 are rare (2%). The majority of young graduates are single with a rate of 64.63% of respondents, followed by married people with 28% of respondents, after come divorced or separated with 4.42%, and finally, widowers and other statuses respectively with 1.7% and 1%.

It appears from the results of the level of education of the respondents that almost half of them have at least a bachelor's degree with 52.4%, while 36.6% have a "graduat" degree (a first university cycle in the DRC). Other types of university degrees represent 9%. Holders of master's degrees are poorly represented, with 2% respectively.

Individual Barriers or Obstacles to the Entrepreneurship of Young Congolese Graduates

Young Congolese graduates recognized many individual barriers that make starting a business difficult (Table 2).

Table 2: Individual barriers to youth entrepreneurship in the DRC (N=588)

Individual Barriers	Number of respondents	Percentage
<i>Socio-demographic barriers</i>		
Discrimination because of the young age of young people	180	30.61
Discrimination based on gender	12	2.04
<i>Psychological barriers</i>		
fear of failure	45	7.65
Lack of self-confidence	50	8.50
<i>Experience Barriers</i>		
Lack of work experience	511	86.90
Lack of previous entrepreneurial experience	528	89.80
<i>Relationship barriers</i>		
Lack of business connections	365	62.07
Low social capital	98	16.67
<i>Skills barriers</i>		
Lack of entrepreneurial skills	529	89.97
Lack of creativity and project ideas	272	46.26
<i>Obstacles related to self-financing</i>		
Self-financing difficulties	527	89.63

Source: Field survey, 2021

The analysis of Table 2 allows us to make the following observations according to the groups of obstacles.

Socio-Demographic Obstacles

Young Congolese graduates are discriminated against because of their age by institutions, their suppliers and their customers (30.61%). They are sometimes not taken seriously by colleagues and their business contacts. On the other hand, discrimination based on gender does not exist in the field of business or youth entrepreneurship in the DRC (2.04%). This result confirms the point of view of Dzaka. *et al.*, (2020) who showed that there is no gender-based discrimination in business creation in the DRC.

Psychological Obstacles

8.5% of respondents highlighted the lack of self-confidence and 7.65% the fear of failure. It is quite natural when we look at the situation of individuals, the Congolese economic context and the current Covid-19 pandemic, these young graduates carrying out the projects were afraid to take the risk of investing, whether it was their savings or their credit well.

Obstacles Related to Previous Professional and Entrepreneurial Experience

Almost all of the young graduates surveyed lack previous professional experience (86.9%). The lack of experience is due to the fact that young graduates do not find it easy to find a job. Moreover, the majority of the young graduates surveyed had been unemployed (73.5%) since the end of their studies. This is why they have no previous work experience. 89.8% of young graduates say they have not started a business before. This result reflects that most young graduates are not aware of entrepreneurship during their studies as a career. Also, it reflects the difficulty of creating a business experienced by young Congolese. This observation goes in the

same direction as that of Saleh, (2011) who observes that 91.7% of all students in Lebanon declare that they have not started a business before.

Relationship Barriers

62.07% of respondents lack business relationships, and 16.67% have low social capital. These young people do not belong to any professional or business network. Also, there is no system for creating a network of former students of school or university X or Y in the DRC. Furthermore, with the arrival of social networks, young people favor friendly and local networks rather than more effective networks in terms of economic benefits, such as national and international professional networks, which men join more easily.

Obstacles Related to Skills

89.97% of young Congolese graduates do not have the skills necessary for entrepreneurship. This clearly indicates that not enough is being invested in quality entrepreneurship education and that despite current efforts, more needs to be done. 46.26% of young Congolese graduates lack creativity and project ideas. This may be due to the lack of training and awareness in entrepreneurship.

Obstacles Related to Self-Financing

Young Congolese graduates have serious self-financing difficulties (89.63%). These difficulties stem from the lack of personal financial resources among young graduates. These results agree with those developed by Boateng. *et al.*, (2014) in Ghana and by Bilewicz and Tsimayeu, (2021) in Belarus and Kovářová and Šimsová, (2018) in Ústínad Labem (Czech Republic) who demonstrate that the lack of financial resources as the main obstacle to business creation among youth.

All the results on the obstacles linked to the personal characteristics of the young creator in the DRC are represented in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Individual barriers to youth entrepreneurship in the DRC

It emerges from the analysis of Figure 1 that the lack of skills and knowledge in entrepreneurship (89.97%), the lack of entrepreneurial experience (89.8%), the difficulties of self-financing (89.63%), the lack of professional experience (86.9%), and the lack of business relations (62.07%), constitute important obstacles among the individual barriers among young Congolese graduates. Then come other obstacles such as: lack of creativity and project ideas (46.26%), discrimination due to the young age of the project leader (30.61%), low social capital (16.67%), lack of self-confidence (8.5%) and finally, discrimination based on gender (2.04%).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of the study was to examine the various individual factors of young graduates likely to constitute obstacles to entrepreneurship and to present some measures to overcome them.

The results of the survey reveal that lack of entrepreneurial skills, lack of entrepreneurial experience, lack of remunerative work for self-financing, insufficient or lack of savings, lack of professionalism, the poverty of young people and their parents and the lack of business relations, constitute major obstacles among the individual barriers among young Congolese graduates.

The contribution of the study is to provide a comprehensive recognition of individual barriers to youth entrepreneurship in the DRC. So far, research in this area is scarce.

Based on our results, we have deduced the recommendations below, aimed at different interest groups. Their implementation would contribute to eliminating or overcoming the individual obstacles encountered by young people in the DRC in general and young graduates in particular.

To policy makers and educators, we call for entrepreneurship education to be taught across all educational pathways from an early age, to foster the development in young people of the skills, competencies, understandings and attributes that equip them to be innovative, to successfully identify, create, initiate and manage personal, community, business and professional opportunities, including working for themselves.

Educational institutions should (i) focus on the professional internship of students in companies, (ii) establish partnerships with professional and community organizations, (iii) develop strategies for transferring experience and knowledge, (iv) increase and stimulate training offers in entrepreneurship through seminars, courses, conferences, forums, etc.

Support and support structures should (i) promote support for project leaders from upstream to downstream of the entrepreneurial act, (ii) offer information on the various successes of other young graduates, on the various sources of financing available in the country, the services of support and accompaniment, etc. (iii) create networks of young entrepreneurs, etc.

Young graduates should (i) see young age as an opportunity, building on the strengths of youth, (ii) build self-confidence (have greater self-confidence and capacity for action) , (iii) have a propensity for risk, (iv) use personal savings, loans from family or friends. The use of personal savings or their own network of relations, with their relatives (family and friends) appears to be the majority mode of financing for young people in Africa.

Limitations of the Study and Further Research

This research, like so many others, has its limits and opens up new perspectives. Young people face many barriers to entrepreneurship.

This study focuses only on the personal difficulties of young graduates in entrepreneurship. Subsequent studies may focus on understanding and explaining other difficulties or obstacles experienced by young graduates when setting up their businesses or even once they have created their businesses.

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