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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION OF STUDENT ENTREPRENEURS AT JOSEPH KI-ZERBO UNIVERSITY: OBSTACLES AND SUCCESS FACTORS

Lompo Miyemba, Ouedraogo W. Anne, Ouedraogo Payaïssédé Salfo, Soré Zakaria and Maiga Alkassoum

1. Joseph KI-ZERBO University, Department of Sociology (Burkina Faso).

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Abstract

In Burkina Faso, unemployment among young graduates remains a major challenge. Given the saturated job market, student entrepreneurship is emerging as an alternative pathway to socio-professional integration. This mixed-methods study was conducted at Joseph Ki-Zerbo University with 285 student entrepreneurs and supplemented by interviews with key informants. This article aims to analyze three dimensions of the professional integration of student entrepreneurs: institutional support, personal traits, and the socio-economic environment. The results show that entrepreneurship training programs and incubators promote project development, but their accessibility and effectiveness remain limited. Personal traits, particularly self-confidence and proactivity, emerge as key drivers of success. Conversely, the socio-economic environment, characterized by limited access to financing and restricted support, hinders initiatives. The main hypothesis is partially confirmed: integration depends on a combination of institutional, individual, and contextual factors. The study recommends strengthening incubation, facilitating financing, and promoting transferable skills.

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Introduction:-

In developing countries, unemployment and underemployment among young graduates represent major obstacles to economic and social development. The professional integration of young graduates remains a major challenge in many economies, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Although entrepreneurship is increasingly presented as a relevant alternative to salaried employment, this pathway remains fraught with structural, institutional and individual obstacles (Adekomaya et al., 2023; Ndayizigamiye and Mhlongo, 2022). Indeed, many young people, despite their willingness to start businesses, encounter constraints such as a lack of financing, insufficient entrepreneurial skills, a mismatch between university training and labour-market needs, and the absence of a stimulating entrepreneurial environment (Boso et al., 2021). Burkina Faso is no exception to this dynamic. Burkinabè youth face a saturated labour market, with few prospects of formal salaried employment. Unemployment particularly affects young graduates, placing considerable pressure on entrepreneurship support schemes. Yet the outcomes of the initiatives implemented remain mixed, notably because of the persistent gap between public policy and the concrete realities faced by young project holders (Kra et al., 2021). Universities, aware of their role in entrepreneurship education,

have multiplied the support schemes available to students: incubators, specialised training, mentoring programmes, and even the granting of student-entrepreneur status (Ndofirepi, 2020; Nabi et al., 2018). However, studies show that these initiatives, while they improve entrepreneurial motivation, do not systematically lead to durable professional integration. Indeed, the transition from entrepreneurial intention to the actual creation of a business often remains fragile, and depends on multiple factors such as the institutional environment, social support, and the individual's locus of control (Marques et al., 2018; Abaho et al., 2019).

In this context, Joseph KI-ZERBO University, through programmes such as the 'student-entrepreneur status', seeks to strengthen the integration of young graduates through the entrepreneurial pathway. However, few studies have examined the real impact of these initiatives on the professional integration of student entrepreneurs. This is what motivated our choice of theme, namely analysing the durable professional integration of student entrepreneurs. We therefore ask the following research question: how does the initiative of the authorities/government contribute to the professional integration of student entrepreneurs at Joseph KI-ZERBO University? The present study therefore aims to analyse the determinants of the professional integration of student entrepreneurs at Joseph KI-ZERBO University, examining the effectiveness of existing schemes and the levers to be strengthened in order to optimise their contribution to tackling graduate youth unemployment.

Study Methodology:-

The study area is the geographical space within which the study takes place. For the purposes of this study, our choice fell on Joseph Ki-Zerbo University in Ouagadougou, one of the largest higher-education institutions in Burkina Faso. The university enrolls tens of thousands of students each year across several teaching and research units (UFRs) covering a wide range of disciplines, including the humanities, social sciences, economics, law, medicine and technology. It constitutes a major hub for education and research in Burkina Faso and plays a central role in the country's intellectual and economic development. In recent years, schemes to support student entrepreneurship have been put in place, such as the Entrepreneurial Pre-incubation Hub (PPE), entrepreneurship clubs, and partnerships with incubators such as INNOVA. This study area was chosen because of the high concentration of students and the diversity of entrepreneurial initiatives emerging there. Joseph Ki-Zerbo University therefore constitutes a relevant setting for analysing the factors influencing the socio-professional integration of student entrepreneurs.

In this research, the methodological approach adopted is a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative methods. This methodology allows for both an in-depth and a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study, drawing on the complementarity between the two perspectives while compensating for the limitations associated with relying exclusively on either one. The quantitative component measures the frequency of certain obstacles or motivations, while the qualitative component provides a better understanding of the individual, social and institutional dynamics at play in the socio-professional integration of student entrepreneurs. The type of study adopted is analytical, in line with the main objective of this work, namely to analyse the determinants of the professional integration of student entrepreneurs at Joseph KI-ZERBO University. This research aims to provide detailed insight into the main personal obstacles and levers influencing entrepreneurial success and youth integration, the role played by socio-economic and environmental determinants in the integration pathway of student entrepreneurs, and the effectiveness of institutional support schemes.

The target population comprises student entrepreneurs at Joseph Ki-Zerbo University engaged in entrepreneurial activity, whether formally supported by an assistance scheme or operating independently. Key informants, such as those responsible for the business incubator (UO Innova), officials from the Ministry of Sports, Youth and Employment, and former student entrepreneurs, were also interviewed. With regard to sampling, for the quantitative component, a non-probability technique was used, based on the so-called snowball technique. This method involves identifying an initial group of student entrepreneurs through known support schemes (incubators, PPE, clubs) and then expanding the sample through peer recommendations. In total, 285 student entrepreneurs were effectively surveyed, of whom 47.4% were women and 52.6% were men.

As for the qualitative approach, we favoured purposive sampling. The sample comprised 15 individuals, including former student entrepreneurs, youth-employment specialists and incubator staff. Key informants were selected on the basis of their expertise and their institutional role in supporting the professional integration of student entrepreneurs. They were chosen according to the positions they held and their experience relevant to the field of study. This approach makes it possible to collect rich and relevant data, essential for understanding the determinants of the professional integration of student entrepreneurs, notably the personal obstacles and levers, and the

environmental factors likely to influence the integration of student entrepreneurs into working life. With regard to the choice of key informants, purposive sampling was again used. These individuals were chosen according to the positions they held and their experience relevant to our field of study.

In terms of data-collection techniques, four sources of data were used: documentary review, questionnaire survey, individual and focus-group interviews, and direct observation. Interview guides and questionnaires were developed for collecting empirical data. Mobile data collection was thus used to gather primary statistical data through a digitised questionnaire deployed on the KoboCollect software and administered to student entrepreneurs. As for the qualitative data, they were collected using interview guides addressed to key informants involved in supporting the professional integration of student entrepreneurs. At the end of fieldwork, the interviews were also transcribed and processed by grouping them under different themes and sub-themes according to the study's objectives, taking into account convergences and divergences with a view to presenting and analysing the results. The statistical data were analysed and processed for the presentation of the findings.

Results:-

Sociodemographic Profile of Student Entrepreneurs:-

In total, 285 student entrepreneurs were surveyed. Their sociodemographic profile was established on the basis of several variables: sex, age, level of education, possession of an entrepreneurial project, and the actual start-up of an activity. The results show that 52.6% of respondents are men, compared with 47.4% women. This slight male predominance reflects an inequality in women's participation in student entrepreneurship. However, several female students indicated that entrepreneurship represents for them a pathway to financial and social empowerment, marking a positive shift in women's perception of, and engagement with, this field. The majority of student entrepreneurs belong to the 24–26 age bracket (37.9%), followed by the 22–24 age bracket (34%). These results show that entrepreneurial engagement is observed mainly towards the end of university studies, a period conducive to seeking professional alternatives in the face of a restricted labour market. Incubator managers confirm that this stage often coincides with a desire for economic independence and a quest for professional stability.

The results reveal that 77.9% of student entrepreneurs are enrolled on a Bachelor's degree, while 21.8% are pursuing a Master's degree. This strong representation of Bachelor's students is explained by early awareness of support schemes and by the growing influence of entrepreneurship clubs on university campuses. All respondents (100%) report having an entrepreneurial project, reflecting a strong entrepreneurial intention within the student population. The analysis shows that 59.3% of respondents have started an activity, compared with 40.7% who have not yet done so. This gap between intention and action reflects the idea that the transition from intention to actual implementation depends on perceived feasibility and the level of self-confidence. Financing difficulties and a lack of support are also cited by students as the main obstacles. Thus, although the entrepreneurial spirit is well established, the ability to turn an idea into an activity remains conditional on the availability of resources and institutional support.

Structured Institutional Support for the Socio-professional Integration of Student Entrepreneurs:-

The assessment of structured institutional support for the socio-professional integration of student entrepreneurs is based on participation in a university incubator, access to entrepreneurship training, the existence of a mentor or support arrangement, and satisfaction levels with support schemes. In terms of access to a university incubator, the analysis shows that 36.8% of students had access to an incubator, compared with 63.2% who did not. Institutional officials acknowledge that demand far exceeds capacity, which limits the impact of these structures despite their being essential to the development of student projects. Regarding participation in entrepreneurship training, the results reveal that 79.6% of respondents had undertaken entrepreneurship training, compared with 20.4% who had not. This high rate reflects the growing integration of entrepreneurship into university curricula, as well as students' clear interest in acquiring practical skills.

As for personalised support, only 17.9% of students had benefited from personalised support, compared with 82.1% who had not received any. This low proportion shows that, despite the widespread availability of training, mentoring remains insufficiently developed, thereby limiting the concrete impact of training on project development. Regarding the effectiveness of the schemes, the opinions collected indicate that 69.1% of students consider the schemes to be of limited effectiveness, 24.9% consider them moderately effective, while 2.5% consider them highly effective. These results highlight the need to strengthen the quality of existing support schemes.

Regarding project development and access to the university incubator, the data reveal that 64.7% of incubated students report having a project under development, compared with 28.3% among those not incubated. Access to the incubator thus fosters significant project development, through structured mentoring, specific training and personalised follow-up. These results confirm the key role of incubation in consolidating and sustaining student entrepreneurial initiatives. With regard to skills acquisition, among students who undertook training, 66.1% believe they have acquired entrepreneurial skills. These skills relate to financial management, marketing, planning and leadership. The testimonies collected confirm that this training helps structure projects and strengthens young entrepreneurs' self-confidence. Regarding perceptions of the effectiveness of support schemes, students who benefited from incubation perceive the schemes as more effective, particularly in terms of mentoring, regular follow-up and networking. By contrast, non-incubated students point to gaps in communication and follow-up. These findings call for improvements in the quality of, and equity of access to, support programmes.

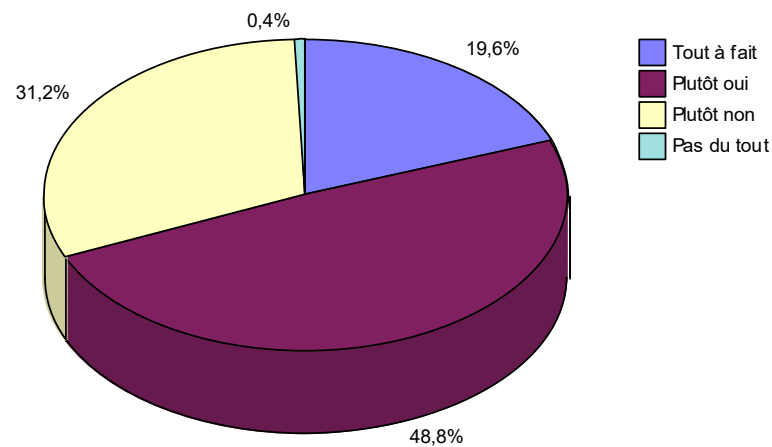
Gender, Education and Personalised Support in Relation to Student Entrepreneurs' Turnover:-

The analysis examines the relationship between institutional support schemes (incubation, training, mentoring) and the level of socio-professional integration of student entrepreneurs. In terms of gender, the data show that 42% of men had access to an incubator, compared with 31% of women. This disparity reveals an inequality of access to The data analysis indicates that student entrepreneurs' turnover is a function of their level of education and the individualised support they receive. In terms of cumulative turnover by level of education, the results reveal that Master's students record higher cumulative turnover (56.4%) than Bachelor's students (10.36%). This difference is explained by more thorough training, a higher level of skills, and greater practical experience. The interviews conducted confirm this trend. One Master's student states that 'thanks to project-management and entrepreneurship courses, I learned to organise my expenses better and to plan my activities.'

With regard to turnover according to specific support received, students who benefited from personalised support show better economic outcomes: 40% of them generate turnover exceeding 1,000,000 FCFA, compared with a low proportion of those without support. Mentoring and regular follow-up promote project structuring and profitability. As one student confirms: 'before being supported, I managed everything alone and lost a great deal. Thanks to my mentor, I learned to plan my activities better.' These accounts reveal that support constitutes an essential lever for success and durable integration. The results also indicate gender gaps in economic performance, linked to differences in access to resources and support. These observations reinforce the need for an inclusive approach in policies supporting student entrepreneurship. Among student entrepreneurs with turnover of between 500,000 and over one million FCFA, 64.4% are men and 35.6% are women student entrepreneurs.

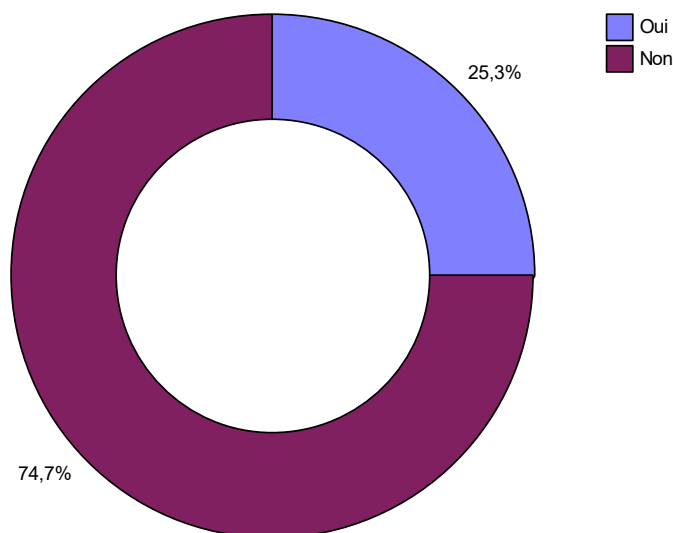
Personality Traits of Student Entrepreneurs and Capacity for Integration:-

Personality traits play a decisive role in student entrepreneurs' capacity for socio-professional integration. Indeed, an internal locus of control fosters individual accountability and leads students to attribute their success to their own efforts, thereby strengthening their entrepreneurial engagement. The level of motivation directly influences perseverance in the face of obstacles, an essential element in any integration process. Likewise, self-confidence nurtures a sense of competence and the conviction that one can achieve one's goals, which facilitates taking initiative and managing unforeseen circumstances. Decision-making autonomy, for its part, reflects the entrepreneur's ability to make strategic decisions, take risks and adapt to change. Finally, the capacity for innovation stimulates creativity and the pursuit of new opportunities, qualities that are essential for establishing oneself in a competitive socio-economic environment. These personality traits therefore constitute major levers for success and durable integration into professional life.

Capacity to Manage an Entrepreneurial Project and to Seize Opportunities:-**Figure 1: Distribution of surveyed students according to their capacity to manage an entrepreneurial project:-**

Source: field surveys, July–August 2025

The results indicate that 68.4% of students feel capable of managing an entrepreneurial project, compared with 31.6% who do not yet feel ready. This majority reflects a high level of personal confidence, a determining factor in the implementation and sustainability of entrepreneurial initiatives.

Figure 2: Distribution of surveyed students according to whether they have seized an opportunity

Source: field surveys, July–August 2025

The chart shows that 25.3% of respondents have already seized an opportunity to launch or improve their activity, while 74.7% have not yet done so. These data highlight the difficulty of turning an opportunity into concrete action, often owing to a lack of confidence or resources.

Self-confidence and Project Development, and the Capacity to Seize an Opportunity and Generate Turnover:-

Regarding self-confidence and project development, it is noted that 97.48% of confident students report positive project development, compared with 2.52% of less confident students. These results confirm that self-confidence

fosters initiative-taking, resilience in the face of setbacks, and the ability to mobilise resources. One student illustrates this dynamic well: 'I hesitated before starting, but once I believed in my idea, everything accelerated.'

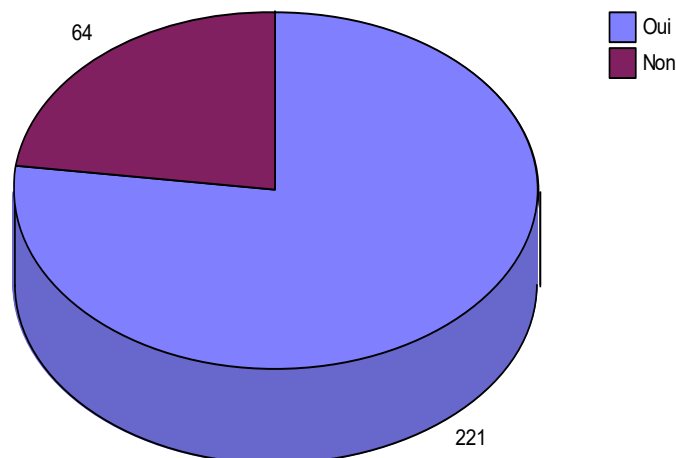
As for the capacity to seize an opportunity and generate turnover, the data show that 71.43% of students who managed to seize an opportunity generate regular turnover, compared with 28.57% who did not. This result confirms the correlation between proactivity and economic performance. One account sums it up as follows: 'I noticed strong demand for natural products. I started small-scale production, and today it is my main source of income.' These observations underline that the ability to identify and exploit an opportunity confers a decisive competitive advantage. Proactivity therefore emerges as a driver of success and a strong indicator of durable integration.

Institutional and Socio-economic Environment and Integration Prospects for Student Entrepreneurs:-

A favourable institutional and socio-economic environment is an essential pillar of student entrepreneurs' success. Clear public policies, access to financing and social support facilitate the creation, development and sustainability of student businesses. Conversely, administrative burden, a lack of information, and limited availability of credit hinder entrepreneurial dynamism.

Information Received on Public or Private Policies:-

Figure 3: Distribution of surveyed students according to the information received on public or private policies



Source: field surveys, July–August 2025

The results reveal that 77.5% of respondents report being informed about public policies supporting entrepreneurship, compared with 22.5% who are not. These data show a relatively wide dissemination of information, although further efforts are needed to ensure its accessibility to all students, particularly those in rural areas or in non-economic fields of study. Regarding access to public or private financing, only 29.5% of students have ever attempted to obtain public or private financing, compared with 70.5% who have not. This result illustrates a limited culture of recourse to financial schemes, often linked to the complexity of procedures or the guarantees required.

Support from Their Social Circle, Skills Acquisition and Project Development:-

Regarding support from their social circle, the data analysis indicates that 6% receive strong support, 25.3% moderate support, 51.2% weak support, and 17.5% no support at all. This shortfall in social and family support weighs on young entrepreneurs' motivation and resilience, both of which are nonetheless essential to their integration. Regarding the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, just over half (53.3%) of respondents believe they acquired sufficient entrepreneurial skills during their training, compared with 46.7% who consider these skills insufficient. This reflects a real, though uneven, impact of university training on the development of entrepreneurial abilities. Regarding project development, the results indicate that 41.8% of projects are under development, 8.1% are stagnating, 6.3% have been abandoned, and 3.2% are being relaunched. These figures reflect an overall positive dynamic, although sustainability remains a challenge for some projects.

In terms of turnover generation, approximately 19.6% of projects generate regular turnover, 27.4% generate turnover occasionally, while 7.7% have not yet generated any income. This highlights the diversity of projects' stages of maturity and the need for differentiated support according to the level of progress. The figures show that 13.3% of projects generate less than 100,000 FCFA, 17.9% between 100,000 and 500,000 FCFA, 11.6% between 500,000 and 1,000,000 FCFA, and 9.1% exceed 1,000,000 FCFA. These results reflect marked economic heterogeneity, linked to the diversity of sectors and levels of experience.

Support Received and Project Development, Access to Financing and Turnover Generated:-

In terms of information received about public policies and attempts to obtain financing, the analysis shows that 38% of informed students attempted to obtain financing, compared with 62% of uninformed students. Access to information therefore plays a catalytic role in the entrepreneurial process. This is echoed in the words of a Master's-level student entrepreneur: 'I discovered the State support programme during a training session; that is what prompted me to submit a funding application.' These results demonstrate that insufficient dissemination of information limits the impact of public policies on youth entrepreneurship. It can therefore be inferred that information received about public policies plays a determining role in motivating students to seek financing, and that better access to this information would strengthen the effectiveness of existing schemes.

In relation to support received and project development, the results show that students benefiting from strong support experience positive project development. This support may be financial, moral or logistical, and acts as a motivating factor. Testimonies confirm this, as illustrated by one Bachelor's student: 'My brother lent me a small amount of capital to get started. And when my family encourages me, I feel more motivated to carry on.' These findings reveal the importance of social capital and personal networks in economic success. The data thus show that support received, whether material or moral, acts as a catalyst for the progress of entrepreneurial projects and constitutes a pillar of students' socio-professional integration.

Regarding the distribution of surveyed students according to access to financing and turnover generated, the data show that 52.3% of financed students have turnover exceeding 500,000 FCFA, compared with 7.4% among those not financed. Access to financing enables investment in production, communication and equipment modernisation, thereby increasing profitability. However, the majority report the complexity of procedures and the lack of guarantees. This confirms that limited access to credit remains a major obstacle for young entrepreneurs. Thus, through a triangulated analysis of the data, it can be argued that access to financing directly influences the economic performance of student entrepreneurs; it also highlights the structural obstacles that limit access for the majority.

Discussion:-

The analysis of sociodemographic characteristics provides a better understanding of student entrepreneurs' profile and situates their relationship with integration through entrepreneurship. The data show a slight male predominance (52.6% men compared with 47.4% women), but also a significant female presence in student entrepreneurship. This result reflects growing interest among women in self-employment despite persistent social constraints, as noted by Kaboré (2023) regarding the economic engagement of young Burkinabè women. The age of respondents confirms the youthfulness of the population studied: 81.4% are aged between 20 and 29. This age bracket corresponds to a period of seeking autonomy and experimentation, which explains their propensity to engage in entrepreneurship. The level of education reveals that 77.9% are enrolled on a Bachelor's degree, compared with 21.8% on a Master's degree and 0.3% on a Doctorate. Student entrepreneurship thus emerges from the earliest cycles of study, often in response to uncertainties in the labour market (Sawadogo, 2020).

It is evident that structured institutional support constitutes an important lever for the socio-professional integration of student entrepreneurs. The results show that 36.8% of students had access to a university incubator, 79.6% undertook entrepreneurship training, and 17.9% benefited from personalised support. Beneficiaries of these schemes record better economic performance and faster project development, confirming the positive effect of institutional support. These observations align with the work of Fayolle and Redford (2019) as well as Loué and Baronet (2019), who demonstrate that entrepreneurial training and mentoring strengthen skills, self-confidence and management capacity. University incubation, according to Wright and Siegel (2019) and Ndione (2016), acts as a catalyst for professionalisation through networking and mentoring.

However, the limited coverage of these schemes and the perception of only moderate effectiveness (only 2.5% consider them highly effective) confirm the structural limitations identified by Kaboré (2023) and Ndedi (2018),

namely a lack of coordination, insufficient financial resources, and limited accessibility. Youssef and Boubaker (2020) call for pooling institutional efforts to improve the quality and reach of support.

The findings reveal that self-confidence, motivation and the ability to seize opportunities strongly influence entrepreneurial success. Thus, 97.48% of students with strong self-confidence observe positive project development, and 71.43% of those able to exploit an opportunity generate regular turnover. The work of Loué and Baronet (2019), Fayolle (2004) and Nakku et al. (2020) shows that entrepreneurial success depends both on internal factors (motivation, resilience, creativity) and on the support environment. Students with a strong internal locus of control appear better able to develop their projects and to achieve durable integration into the economic fabric.

Regarding the socio-economic environment and integration prospects, it is noted that, despite the dissemination of information on public policies (77.5% informed), only 29.5% attempted to obtain financing, and a majority (69.1%) consider the schemes to be of limited effectiveness. Although social support remains weak, students who are financed or well supported by those around them record better economic outcomes. These findings reflect a gap between the formal existence of schemes and their actual effectiveness, echoing the analyses of Brixíová, Kangoye and Yogo (2020) and the OECD (2021) regarding structural obstacles to accessing financing. The lack of social capital and weak family support, also observed by Belhadj and El Amrani (2018) and Granovetter (1985), limit the stability of projects.

Conclusion:-

Unemployment and underemployment among young graduates today represent a major challenge for Burkina Faso, owing to the saturation of the formal labour market and the lack of durable opportunities. In this context, student entrepreneurship is increasingly promoted as a credible alternative for fostering socio-professional integration. However, the conditions for success along this pathway remain insufficiently documented. This is what motivated the present study, which focused on student entrepreneurs at Joseph Ki-Zerbo University, the country's foremost public institution. The main objective of this article was to analyse the determinants of the professional integration of student entrepreneurs. To this end, a mixed-methods approach was deployed, combining a questionnaire administered to student entrepreneurs with qualitative interviews addressed to key informants (former students, incubator managers and institutional actors).

The analysis of the results highlighted that the socio-professional integration of student entrepreneurs depends on three closely related dimensions: individual profile, institutional support, and the socio-economic environment. Students who benefit from structured mentoring, relevant training and a favourable environment record better economic and professional performance. Conversely, shortcomings in financing and institutional support limit the transformation of entrepreneurial intentions into durable activities. These findings justify the need to strengthen support policies and improve equitable access to schemes, in order to consolidate the role of student entrepreneurship as a durable pathway to socio-professional integration.

The University plays a central, yet still insufficient, role in transforming the local student-entrepreneurship ecosystem. The effectiveness of the schemes put in place by the University, such as incubators and entrepreneurial training, remains limited. Only a minority of students have had access to personalised support, and the majority consider these schemes poorly suited to realities on the ground. However, a significant proportion remain stuck at the intention stage, for lack of sufficient resources. Finally, the institutional and socio-economic environment remains constraining: access to financing is limited, social support is often weak, and administrative burdens persist. As a result, the socio-professional integration of student entrepreneurs cannot stem from isolated initiatives, but must be embedded within an integrated, partnership-based approach.

It requires combining individual accountability, greater University engagement, and effective support from public policy. Only under these conditions can student entrepreneurship fully play its role as a lever for employment, innovation and the socio-economic development of Burkina Faso. The study nonetheless has certain limitations. It focuses solely on Joseph Ki-Zerbo University, which limits generalisation to other institutions; it relies partly on self-reported data, which may introduce bias; and it does not assess the long-term sustainability of entrepreneurial pathways.

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