

# Using the Novel “*A Dancer of Fortune*”1974 by John Munonye to Teach Business Practices.

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## Abstract

This paper examines John Munonye's satirical novel *A Dancer of Fortune* (1974) as a pedagogical resource for teaching business practices in contemporary African classrooms. Focusing on the character of Ayasko—an uneducated yet resourceful individual who rises from street dancing to business ownership—the novel illustrates key aspects of advertising, entrepreneurship, negotiation, and survival strategies in postcolonial Nigeria. Through a socio-economic and textual analysis, the study shows how literary texts can be integrated into Business English courses to develop both language proficiency and foundational entrepreneurial knowledge. The business practices depicted in the novel can thus be operationalized in the classroom to teach advertising strategies, market competition, entrepreneurial risk-taking, and ethical dilemmas. Selected excerpts may be used as case studies, role-plays, and discussion prompts, enabling learners to engage critically with linguistic forms and business realities. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that Munonye's novel offers not only a cultural critique of post-independence African society but also a pedagogically relevant framework for fostering critical thinking, communication skills, and business competencies applicable to 21st-century Africa.

## Mots-clés

Littérature économique ;  
Entrepreneuriat ; Publicité ;  
Négociation ; Anglais des  
affaires.

## Résumé

Cet article examine le roman satirique de John Munonye, *A Dancer of Fortune* (1974), comme une ressource pédagogique pour l'enseignement des pratiques commerciales dans les salles de classe africaines contemporaines. En se concentrant sur le personnage d'Ayasko — un individu non instruit mais ingénieux qui passe de danseur de rue à propriétaire d'entreprise — le roman met en lumière des aspects clés de la publicité, de l'entrepreneuriat, de la négociation et des stratégies de survie dans le Nigeria postcolonial. À travers une analyse socio-économique et textuelle, l'étude montre comment les textes littéraires peuvent être intégrés aux cours d'anglais des affaires (Business English) afin de développer à la fois les compétences linguistiques et les connaissances entrepreneuriales fondamentales. Les pratiques commerciales représentées dans le roman peuvent ainsi être opérationnalisées en classe pour enseigner les stratégies publicitaires, la concurrence sur le marché, la prise de risque entrepreneuriale et les dilemmes éthiques. Des extraits sélectionnés peuvent être utilisés comme études de cas, jeux de rôle et supports de discussion, permettant aux apprenants de s'engager de manière critique avec les formes linguistiques et les réalités économiques. Dans l'ensemble, l'analyse démontre que le roman de Munonye offre non seulement une critique culturelle de la société africaine postindépendance, mais aussi un cadre pédagogiquement pertinent pour le développement de la pensée critique, des compétences communicationnelles et des compétences commerciales adaptées à l'Afrique du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle.

## INTRODUCTION

Literature functions both as an artistic expression and as a socio-economic record, dramatizing the everyday struggles of individuals within specific historical and cultural contexts. In postcolonial Africa, literary texts frequently engage with issues such as poverty, corruption, survival strategies, and the pursuit of social mobility. Within this framework, business-related activities—including trade, advertising, negotiation, and entrepreneurship—emerge as recurring motifs that reflect how ordinary people navigate systemic economic constraints.

John Munonye's *A Dancer of Fortune* exemplifies this literary engagement with socio-economic realities. Written in the aftermath of Nigeria's independence in 1960 and the civil war of 1967–1970, the novel is situated in a period marked by political instability, rapid urbanization, unemployment, and widespread poverty. Although oil had begun to dominate the national economy, wealth remained unevenly distributed, forcing many Nigerians to rely on informal economic activities for survival (EMENYONU, 2020). Within the Igbo socio-cultural context to which Munonye belonged, values such as hard work, adaptability, and commercial ingenuity were highly prized. However, unequal access to formal education and employment limited opportunities for many, making street trading, itinerant marketing, and other forms of informal entrepreneurship essential livelihood strategies.

Against this background, Munonye employs satire to foreground entrepreneurship, opportunism, and corruption as defining features of postcolonial economic life. The protagonist, Ayasko—an uneducated yet resourceful character—rises from street dancing to business ownership through creativity, persuasion, and strategic risk-taking. His trajectory illustrates core business principles such as opportunity recognition, market entry strategies, negotiation, persuasive communication, and the ethical ambiguities associated with profit-making in precarious economic environments. Ayasko's success thus mirrors the resilience and ingenuity of individuals negotiating systemic exclusion in post-independence Nigerian society.

Scholarly work has long recognized business not merely as an economic activity but as a cultural category through which human aspirations, conflicts, and moral dilemmas are expressed (CARRIER, 2013). African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, and John Munonye similarly dramatize the tensions between traditional values and emerging capitalist practices, often focusing on the struggles of the “common man” under new socio-economic pressures. From a pedagogical perspective, literature has also been shown to provide authentic and culturally rich material for language teaching. Foundational studies by WIDDOWSON (1975) and COLLIE and SLATER (1990) emphasize literature's role in

promoting language enrichment, cultural awareness, and learner engagement, while more recent research highlights its contribution to motivation and critical thinking (DASKALOVSKA and DIMOVA, 2012).

Within African educational contexts characterized by high unemployment and the necessity of self-employment, integrating business-oriented literary texts into language instruction offers particular relevance. Teaching business practices through literature allows learners to engage simultaneously with linguistic forms, cultural identity, and practical survival strategies that resonate with their socio-economic realities (FASHINA, 2009). This study therefore argues that *A Dancer of Fortune* can be operationalized as a pedagogical resource in business-oriented English classes. By extracting and contextualizing the novel's representations of business practices, teachers can support the development of both linguistic competence and entrepreneurial insight, thereby bridging literature, business literacy, and language education.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, sociologically informed literary analysis to examine the representation of business practices in John Munonye's *A Dancer of Fortune* (1974, first edition). A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of textual elements and socio-economic contexts, enabling the integration of literary insights into pedagogical applications (CARRIER, 2013; WIDDOWSON, 1975).

The novel was systematically analyzed to identify business practices, including entrepreneurship, advertising strategies, negotiation, market competition, and ethical decision-making. Key passages were selected based on their relevance to the historical and socio-economic context of post-independence Nigeria and the objectives of business-oriented English instruction. Sociological and literary frameworks were employed to contextualize these practices within broader societal and cultural dynamics (EMENYONU, 2020). Building on this analysis, pedagogical strategies were developed to operationalize the identified business practices in the classroom. Selected excerpts are proposed for use as case studies, role-plays, and discussion prompts, enabling learners to develop both linguistic competence and entrepreneurial understanding. This integrated approach aligns with content-and-language integrated learning (CLIL) principles and supports the cultivation of critical thinking and problem-solving skills in business contexts (DASKALOVSKA et DIMOVA, 2012; FASHINA, 2009). Overall, this methodology provides a structured and replicable framework for integrating African literary texts into business English curricula while highlighting the socio-economic realities of postcolonial African societies.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of *A Dancer of Fortune* foregrounds the economic practices and survival strategies of the “common man” within postcolonial Nigerian society, as represented through Munonye’s satirical narrative. In a socio-economic environment marked by poverty, unemployment, and limited access to formal education, earning a livelihood emerges not merely as a matter of entrepreneurship but as an imperative of survival. The novel reflects how informal business practices function as adaptive responses to harsh economic realities, thereby blurring the boundary between subsistence strategies and commercial enterprise.

A significant aspect of these practices is the prominence of patent medicine trade and pharmaceutical marketing. Munonye depicts a competitive informal market dominated by figures such as Sabaco and Sons, Marabu, Avarido, Deo Volente, and eventually Ayasko himself. These actors compete for visibility and dominance among retail dealers, relying heavily on publicity and performance-based advertising. Ayasko’s role as a dancer who promotes medicines in public spaces illustrates an experiential and emotionally driven form of advertising rooted in oral culture and spectacle. His performances attract customers not through rational evaluation of product quality but through entertainment and persuasion, reflecting a broader African tradition in which music and performance play a central role in commercial exchange (CARRIER, 2013). Munonye explicitly emphasizes this cultural dynamic by portraying Dekko as a town deeply attached to music and dancing, a predisposition that advertisers exploit to stimulate consumption (MUNONYE, 1974).

Beyond advertising, the novel offers a sustained reflection on entrepreneurship and resilience in conditions of structural exclusion. Despite his lack of formal education, Ayasko gradually transforms his performative labor into economic capital, eventually establishing “Ayasko Medical Stores.” His trajectory highlights key entrepreneurial principles such as opportunity recognition, networking, adaptability, and strategic risk-taking. Ayasko’s decision to start his own business after manipulating rival employers underscores both his ingenuity and the morally ambiguous strategies often required for economic advancement in precarious contexts. As critics have noted, Munonye constructs Ayasko as a satirical figure whose cunning reflects a broader social reality in which survival frequently depends on deception, negotiation, and opportunism rather than formal qualifications (ZELL et al., 1983).

Negotiation and persuasion constitute another central dimension of business practice in the novel. Ayasko’s interactions with competing employers dramatize strategic bargaining and calculated self-presentation. Although Dekko is a fictional setting, Munonye presents Ayasko as a representative figure whose behavior exposes a socio-economic world

characterized by rivalry, duplicity, and relentless competition. This portrayal aligns with Munonye's broader satirical vision of a society in which individuals, regardless of social status, must deploy rhetorical skill and tactical intelligence to secure economic success (ZELL et al., 1983). Negotiation thus appears not as a formalized business skill but as a lived, improvisational practice embedded in everyday economic life.

The novel also raises critical questions about business ethics and corruption in postcolonial economies. Advertising, while entertaining and persuasive, is shown to prioritize emotional appeal over consumer protection or product efficacy. Munonye explicitly critiques deceptive commercial practices through ironic commentary on medicines that continue to be sold even after losing their curative power, as long as they remain profitable (MUNONYE, 1974). This critique resonates with broader analyses of advertising as a process that constructs desirable images rather than conveying material truth, a phenomenon widely discussed in business anthropology (CARRIER, 2013; PACKARD, 1957). In this context, profit-driven practices overshadow concerns for public health, reflecting systemic ethical deficits in informal markets.

At the same time, Munonye complicates this critique by attributing to Ayasko a degree of moral awareness often absent among advertisers. His acknowledgment that medicines are meant to cure both bodily illness and economic hardship exposes the contradictions inherent in profit-oriented commerce. Through this ambivalence, the novel presents a society increasingly shaped by individualism and material gain, where ethical considerations are subordinated to economic necessity. Survival strategies in the novel are therefore not merely economic acts but responses to political and institutional failure, reinforcing the perception that individuals must fend for themselves in the absence of effective state regulation.

These representations extend beyond the Nigerian context and resonate with broader African realities. Informal practices such as itinerant peddling, small-scale trading, and street-based marketing are common across the continent, including in contexts such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, where similar survival strategies persist. Munonye's depiction of itinerant peddlers who distribute medicines in public spaces illustrates how informal labor operates as both an economic lifeline and a site of exploitation, as workers depend entirely on minimal discounts from proprietors for survival (MUNONYE, 1974).

From a pedagogical perspective, these intertwined representations of business, survival, and ethics provide a rich foundation for teaching Business English in African classrooms. Rather than serving as a mere literary artifact, *A Dancer of Fortune* functions as a contextualized case study through which learners can explore authentic business discourse,

negotiation practices, persuasive communication, and ethical dilemmas. Engaging with the novel allows students to critically analyze language use in commercial contexts while reflecting on the socio-economic realities that shape entrepreneurial behavior. In this sense, Munonye's novel bridges literary analysis and business education, demonstrating how literature can foster linguistic competence, critical thinking, and entrepreneurial awareness within a culturally relevant framework.

## CONCLUSION

John Munonye's *A Dancer of Fortune* emerges in this study as both a socio-political satire and a literary text deeply embedded in the economic realities of postcolonial Africa. Through its representation of advertising practices, negotiation strategies, entrepreneurial risk-taking, and ethical ambiguity, the novel captures the everyday survival mechanisms developed by individuals operating within unstable and exclusionary economic systems. Munonye's portrayal of Ayasko's progression from informal street performance to business ownership reflects broader patterns of resilience, adaptability, and opportunism that characterize post-independence African urban life.

Beyond its literary significance, this analysis demonstrates that *A Dancer of Fortune* constitutes a valuable pedagogical resource for business-oriented English instruction. By integrating the novel into Business English curricula, educators can simultaneously develop learners' linguistic competence and their understanding of fundamental business concepts, including goal setting, persuasion, negotiation, market competition, and ethical decision-making. The narrative's grounding in familiar socio-economic contexts enhances learner engagement and facilitates critical reflection on real-world business practices.

Overall, this study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by bridging African literary studies, business education, and language pedagogy. It underscores the potential of African literary texts not only as vehicles of cultural critique but also as effective instructional tools capable of fostering critical thinking, communicative proficiency, and entrepreneurial awareness among learners in contemporary African contexts.

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