

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Entrepreneurial Perspectives of Federal University of Technology Minna Students

By

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic has drastically shutdown academic activities and other extra-curricular activities that students engage in. For this reason, most students venture into developing their entrepreneurial activities which created a means of adapting to the new normal. This study was carried out to assess the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on students' perspectives on entrepreneurship using a case study of Federal University of Technology, Minna. In order to achieve this study, four research objectives and research questions were constructed. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 379 students in Federal University of Technology, Minna. Closed-ended questionnaire and interview was used to collect data and responses were gotten from 355 participants. Data collected were analyzed using frequency distribution tables and percentages. The findings showed that COVID-19 had positive impacts on the students' perspectives of entrepreneurship. Therefore, it was recommended that the university management should introduce more courses that are entrepreneurial inclined into the curriculum and provide conducive environment that will help to promote entrepreneurial programs.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Entrepreneurship, FUTMINNA, Perspectives.

Introduction

Entrepreneurial activities are pervading across today's world and they are essential factors which determine the growth and development of most countries. It is a vital activity that brings about changes in the economy and society not only in a country but around the world. For this reason, countries, especially the developing ones, are encouraged to promote and facilitate the environment for entrepreneurship to thrive (Iwu 2018).

According to New Webster dictionary of English international edition, entrepreneurship can be defined as the activity of organizing, managing, and assuming the risks of a business enterprise. An entrepreneur is defined as an individual who exploits a business opportunity through some form of innovation (Ratten, 2020). Entrepreneurs are vital contributors to the economy. This means they foresee a gap in the market that can be filled by a new business idea. They play vital roles in the development of any country economy through innovations, utilization of the available resources, skills and creation of employment opportunities (Barrot, 2015).

Entrepreneurship is a concept that has been practiced since the beginning of time but has gained huge recognition and acceptance as the revered tool for economic growth, wealth and job creation, as well as national empowerment (Fems, K. M., Ouserigha, O., Alfred, A. & George, C., 2020). Entrepreneurship is also considered as a viable resource for poverty reduction, economic empowerment and development. It is also seen as the process of creating and offering value to the market to solve a pressing public need at a price exceeding the production cost by marshalling together a unique blend of resources (Fems, K. M. 2020). Entrepreneurship involves understanding how opportunities and new ideas are recognized. This often involves a degree of creativity as different ways of thinking allow new ideas to emerge. Creativity is important for dealing with the

Covid-19 pandemic as it can offer a way of providing a competitive advantage in the global marketplace.

A pandemic is a large scale outbreak of infectious disease that has the capacity to increase mortality and morbidity over a wide geographic area, imprinting a significant socio-economic and political disruption (Madhav, N., Oppenheim, B., Gallivan, M., Mulembakani, P., Rubin, E., & Wolfe, N. 2018). It can also be defined as an epidemic that occurs over a wide geographic area, across international boundaries and borders usually affecting a large number of people. As the Corona virus disease continues to spread all over the world, business owners, entrepreneurs, their enterprises, employees and the entire societies are facing unprecedented challenges. The closure of schools and tertiary institutions has occasioned severe adverse consequences on students around the world especially as it “interrupts learning which results in students’ and youths being deprived of opportunities for growth and development” (UNESCO, 2020). The report also indicates that in Nigeria, 46 million students are at home as a direct impact of the pandemic. These closures as a result of the lockdown measures by governments around the world the curb the spread of the virus is causing a major shift from the traditional in-class learning to online learning.

Recently, entrepreneurship education is written into the curriculum for all year levels and across all subjects. As an approach to education, entrepreneurship students are supported to be innovative and creative and encouraged to use their initiative and be adaptable (Hardie, Highfield & Lee, 2020).

The rapid emergence of COVID-19 requires a focused effort by university communities to change their behavior to take advantage of the change to a digital learning environment. This has meant that a coordinated effort is needed amongst all stakeholders in universities. There is no clear solution on how to cope with the devastating nature of COVID-19, but an entrepreneurial spirit is needed by universities (Bacq, S., Geoghegan, W., Josefy, M., Stevenson, R. & Williams, T., 2020).

Entrepreneurship education assist to prepare young people to be accountable citizens who may later become great entrepreneur thinker, by exposing them to practical experience such as taking risks, managing situations, as well as benefitting from the result of the experiences (Olawolu & Kaegon, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

In April 2020, more than 1.6 billion students had been affected, representing over 91% of the total population of students in the world (DeVaney *et al*, 2020). Thus, the crisis has negatively affected the educational system and has caused severe damage on students. Its effects have necessitated the conversion of classroom learning into an electronic form. Apart from the e-learning that was provided, most students had to derive other means of coping and sustaining themselves during the period. Thus, building on their entrepreneurial capabilities and acquiring vocational skills was seen as the best way to cope with the new change. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to determine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on entrepreneurial perspectives of students in FUT Minna, Niger State, Nigeria. The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

Research Questions

1. What are the perspectives of FUT Minna students about entrepreneurship?
2. What is the level of FUT Minna students' understanding about entrepreneurship before and after the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. To what extent has COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the perspective of FUT Minna students on entrepreneurship?

4. What are the measures taken by the university to improve the perspective of FUT Minna students on entrepreneurship?

Literature Review

A crisis is defined as an unexpected event or situation that can lead to a dangerous situation, disasters or emergencies (Lighthouse Readiness Group, 2015). There is often a little chance of crises to occur but when it does, it can be disastrous. The effect of a crisis occurring very fast may lead to limited time for decision making. As a result of this, it is difficult to prepare adequate plan for a disaster especially when it is uncertain or unpredictable. Most economic sectors will have to derive new strategies to cope during a crisis (Doern, R., Williams, N. & Vorley, T., 2019). The strategies taking to tackle disasters will determine its effect, which means that organizations who view a crisis as an opportunity to learn will view it as favorable effect (Williams, T.A., Gruber, D.A., Sutcliffe, K.M., Shepherd, D.A. & Zhao, E.Y., 2017).

Entrepreneurship education is a type of interactive education that place students in active environment in which they can learn how to accomplish a task. Within an entrepreneurship course, there are usually some activities regarding how to build creativity that can lead to commercial initiatives. Designing a business plan, proposing a concept, or carrying out market survey are examples of learning opportunities provided by entrepreneurship (Ahmad, T., Raju, V., Klobas, J.E & Liñán, F., 2020). The pandemic has had a significant impact on students' education at all levels, from undergraduate to graduate. The necessity to practice and think entrepreneurially has grown as the COVID-19 pandemic has spread over the world (Parnell, D., Widdop, P., Bond, A. & Wilson, R., 2020). Due to changing economic conditions stressing ecological sustainability and social equality, interest in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education has increased. In order

to meet our everyday requirements and promote social welfare, more entrepreneurship education courses have been incorporated to meet both economic and social objectives.

Furthermore, students have been socially and physically isolated from their friends and peer-groups, resulting to mental and psychological trauma such as depressions, mood swings, mental health issues etc. Extracurricular activities such as drama, quizzes, sports and debate clubs have been closed down affecting the social exposure that students acquire as part of their academic programs. The impact of this is that students had to adjust and rethink creative ways of building resilience and ignited entrepreneurial reasoning in students that want to remain relevant and succeed in the new competitive world marketplace.

As a result, students are placing less focus on getting white-collar jobs in large corporations and the government sectors; they are becoming more interested in establishing their own business. This implies that young people should be encouraged to be creative and entrepreneurship education is a good approach to achieve this. Through entrepreneurship education, postgraduate students are expected to gain information and skills that would help them to start a firm as well as build the aptitude and confidence to run their businesses. Students also stated that involvement in the entrepreneurship education or training improved their ability in terms of new mission planning, recognizing, and creating possibilities, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Financial planning was rated as the least beneficial by the students, while market research was rated as the most helpful and creative thinking was rated as the most valuable (Rae, D. and Ruth Woodier-Harris, N., 2013).

Furthermore, during the pandemic period, students were involved in several entrepreneurial activities and skill acquisition programs which include fashion designing, home lesson teaching, graphic designing, programming, web designing, poultry farming, fish farming, online agri-

businesses, digital marketing and so on. Other entrepreneurial activities include POS services, electrical work, plumbing, welding, etc. Several means such as digital marketing and online business have been trending in order for most youth to meet up with daily needs. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has truly and undoubtedly changed the face of entrepreneurship as a whole both to the students and aspiring entrepreneurs. The impact is mostly felt by students of FUT Minna as it gave a paradigm shift on their perspectives on entrepreneurship before and after the pandemic.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to help understand students' perspectives on entrepreneurship in FUT Minna. The population of the study comprises of 15,000 students at Federal University of Technology, Minna. A sample size of 379 respondents was randomly selected from the total population through simple random sampling techniques. Interview and self-designed questionnaires were used in order to assess the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on students' perspective of entrepreneurship. The questionnaire was in two parts: 1 and 2. Part 1 was for the demographic details of the respondent; Part 2 consists of three different sections covering the research questions (1,3&4) of the study, while the interview section consists of research question 2. Face and content validity of instrument used was determined by experts in the area. The data gathered was analyzed through frequency tables and simple percentage.

Table 1-Response Rate

S/N	Questionnaire Response Rate	Frequency
1	Total number of undergraduate students	15,000
2	Copies of questionnaires administered	379
3	Copies of returned questionnaires	355

	Percentage return rate	93.7%
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Results and Discussions

Research Questions 1: What are the perspectives of FUT Minna students' on entrepreneurship?

Table 2: Perspectives of FUT Minna Students' on Entrepreneurship

Statements	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	TOTAL
It provides a means of exploring new opportunities.	250 70.4%	90 25.4%	15 4.22%	-	355 (100%)
It is an ability of the individual to put into practice an idea or concept.	261 73.5%	87 24.5%	7 1.97%	-	355 (100%)
It is a process of taking unnecessary risk.	38 10.7%	48 13.5%	190 53.5%	79 22.3%	355 (100%)
It is a means of generating individual income.	260 73.2%	80 22.5	15 4.23%	-	355 (100%)
It is a sustainable practice of improving the economy of the society	195 55%	149 42%	11 3.1%	-	355 (100%)
It is an added knowledge in learning environment	136 38.3%	191 53.8%	28 7.9%	-	355 (100%)

Key: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree.

From Table 2, it was indicated that majority of the respondents 260 (73.2%) perceived entrepreneurship as a means of generating income, 261 (73.5%) of the respondents also perceived entrepreneurship as an ability of the individual to put into practice an idea or concept. while 38 (10.7%) of the respondents perceived entrepreneurship as a process of taking unnecessary risk.

Research Question 2: What is FUT Minna students' level of understanding on entrepreneurship before and after COVID-19?

Table 3: Level of understanding on entrepreneurship before COVID-19

S/No	Before COVID-19	VH (%)	H (%)	L (%)	VL (%)	TOTAL (%)
1	My understanding on entrepreneurship before COVID-19 was...	23 6.5	38 10.7%	222 62.5%	72 20.3%	355 100%

2	My involvement in entrepreneurial activities before COVID-19 was...	18 5.1%	26 7.32%	253 71.3%	58 16.3%	355 100%
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Table 3 shows that (62.5%) of the respondents had low level of understanding on entrepreneurship before COVID-19 and (71.3%) of the respondents were not involved in entrepreneurship, this is because most of them were busy with their academic activities and this did not create time for them to practice any entrepreneurial activities. The responses from interview further justified their level of understanding on entrepreneurship before COVID-19. Only (8.2%) of the respondents had high level of understanding on entrepreneurship before the pandemic and could practice any entrepreneurial activities.

Table 4: Level of understanding on entrepreneurship after COVID-19

S/No	After COVID-19	VH (%)	H (%)	L (%)	VL (%)	TOTAL
1	My understanding on entrepreneurship after COVID-19 is...	70 19.7%	285 80.3%	-	-	355 100%
2	My involvement in entrepreneurial activities after COVID-19 is...	40 11.2%	315 88.7%	-	-	355 100%

From Table 4, after the COVID-19 pandemic, the level of understanding on entrepreneurship increased to (80.3%) and (88.7%) as respondents became more involved in entrepreneurial activities because the pandemic had created more leisure period and free time, hence, they had to derive other means of sustaining themselves and make productive use of the period. As a result of this, some of respondents learned entrepreneurial skills and engaged in several entrepreneurial activities. This had helped to change their perspectives of entrepreneurship in positive ways. This assertions were also supported from the interview responses.

Furthermore, Table 5 shows the entrepreneurial activities mostly engaged in by students of FUT Minna:

Table 5: Entrepreneurial activities of FUT Minna Students.

S/N	Which of the following entrepreneurial activities were you involved in?	Frequency (%)
1.	Fashion design	50 14%
2.	Poultry and fish farming	95 27%
3.	Programming and Web design	40 11.2%
4.	Catering services	18 5.1%
5.	Graphic design	54 15.2%
6.	Home lesson teacher	44 12.4%
7.	Shoe making	15 4.22%
8.	Point of Sales (PoS) service	39 10.9%
	Total	355 100%

Most of the respondents 27% were involved in poultry and fish farming activities, this is because it is perceived to be a very lucrative business, 15.2% of the respondents were involved in graphic designs, and 11.2% were involved in programming and web design, while 12.4% were involved in home lesson teacher. Respondents observed that the choice of these activities was because they could engage in them remotely with little or no physical interaction to avoid virus transmission.

Research Question 3: What is the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on your entrepreneurship perspectives?

Table 6: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on entrepreneurship perspectives

Statements	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
It has limited the access to acquiring more entrepreneurial skills within and outside the country	86 24.2%	160 45.1%	90 25.4%	19 5.4%

It has discouraged students from practicing entrepreneurial ideas.	48 13.5%	49 13.8%	188 53%	70 19.7%
Has encouraged students to pursue entrepreneurship as a career in the future.	88 25%	220 62%	27 7.6%	20 5.63%
It has served as an eye-opener to see the importance of entrepreneurship education in the school and society at large.	244 69%	80 22.5%	20 5.63%	11 2.87%
It has created awareness about the benefits of being an entrepreneur.	256 72.1%	76 21.4%	13 3.7%	10 2.81%

In Table 6, majority of the respondent 72.1% strongly agree that the pandemic has created more awareness about the need to be an entrepreneur, 24.2% of the respondent strongly agreed that it has limited their access to acquiring more entrepreneurial skills within and outside the country, this is because most organizations and business firms were shut-down due to the pandemic.

Research Question 4: What are the effective measures taken by the university to improve FUT Minna students' perspectives of entrepreneurship?

Table 7: Measures taken by the University

Statements	YES (%)	NO (%)
Establishment of Entrepreneurship School or Faculty	320 90.2%	35 9.8%
Provision of entrepreneurial resources in school and outside school	162 45.6%	193 54.4%
Setting up self-employment opportunity in the school environment for student to establish themselves	154 43.4%	201 56.6%
Skill acquisition programs for student within the university	157 44.2%	198 55.8%
Introduction of entrepreneurship courses	270 76.1%	85 23.9%
Implementation of Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDG) as regards entrepreneurship activities	130 36.6%	225 63.4%

From Table 7, it was observed that most of the respondents, 90.2%, agreed that one of the effective measures taken by the University toward entrepreneurship growth is through the establishment of School of Entrepreneurship.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of this study revealed that FUT Minna students' perceives entrepreneurship as an ability of an individual to put into practice an idea or concept and a means of generating individual income an idea or concept. This is in line with the research carried out by Iwu, *et al.* (2020) on university students' perception of entrepreneurship as a career option. The result of the study shows that students perceive entrepreneurship as 'increasing wealth and capital and this can only be achieved when a means of generating income is created'. Majority of FUT Minna students had low level of understanding on entrepreneurship before COVID-19 and were not involved in entrepreneurship, because most of them were busy with their academic activities and had little/no free periods. Academic activities can be so overwhelming for students and this makes it difficult for them to engage in entrepreneurial activities or even become entrepreneurs while studying (Vanevenhoven & Liguori, 2013; & Gartner, 2017). The effect of the pandemic led to closure of most sectors (academic, sports, economic etc.), as a result, students could no longer study in schools and this created more leisure period for them hence, most students of FUT Minna develops interest in other areas and were engaged/involved in various activities including entrepreneurial activities. To this effect, more students had high level of understanding about entrepreneurship and many became involved in entrepreneurial activities after the pandemic. This finding is similar to Lopes, *et al.* (2021) where the students had more entrepreneurial skills/abilities after the COVID-19 pandemic. The result of this research also shows that the emergence of pandemic has served as an eye-opener to see the importance of entrepreneurship education in the school and society at large. It has also encouraged the desires of FUT Minna students to pursue entrepreneurship as a career in the future. This result is further in tandem with Lopes, *et al.* (2021) where the pandemic changed their opinions, therefore students prefer to become entrepreneurs than being employed. This has made

the society to place more values on entrepreneurship during the pandemic. Finally, the finding shows that most of the measures put in place by the school management to encourage the growth of entrepreneurship are not adequate. This is in line with the view of Francisca & Edith (2014) where they suggested that provision of funds by NGOs/financial institutions to facilitate entrepreneurship activities; training/re-training of lecturers; provision of adequate resources; among others were identified as effective strategies that will help promote entrepreneurship growth.

Recommendations

The study recommended that:

1. The university management should put more efforts in implementing more entrepreneurial programs in the school environment through introduction of entrepreneurial courses and creating practical labs for entrepreneurial activities.
2. Awareness should also be created so that students will know the various entrepreneurial opportunities provided by the university body.
3. The university management should collaborate with NGOs in the areas of skill acquisition programs and practical classes for students.

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