



Research Paper

Entrepreneurship Mentoring Post Covid-19 Nigeria: Disruptions and Matters arising, Strategic Issues in Business reopening and increasing demand for Mentoring

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ABSTRACT

Pressed by disruptions in the business environment induced by Covid-19 outbreak, the conduct of this study became inevitable in order to highlight matters arising from the disruptions, strategic issues in reopening businesses and the inclination of entrepreneurs towards business mentoring lately. The study was a survey and involved entrepreneurs from Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, South South, Nigeria. The survey sampled 300 entrepreneurs from four business sectors. The questionnaire was the primary instrument and achieved 62% response rate. Analysis of data was by descriptive statistics. Findings of the study indicated that before Covid-19 outbreak in Nigeria, about 36.56% of entrepreneurs had utilized mentoring; it was also established that about 83.33% of entrepreneurs in Nigeria are aware of the emerging business space induced by Covid-19. The study also showed that about 80.65% of entrepreneurs are currently inclined to embracing business mentoring to reposition their businesses. It was recommended that entrepreneurs tap from the experience and expertise of mentors to survive current reality in the business environment; that mentors make themselves and their services more visible to new entrepreneurs and that upcoming entrepreneurs realize the critical importance of building and sustaining their capacity, hence get involved in mentoring at various stages of their entrepreneurial pursuits.

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurship Mentoring, Disruptions, Strategic Issues, Post Covid-19 Nigeria

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I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria inherited from its colonial master, Britain, a formal education system that largely produces those that can read and write. During colonialism however, those Nigerians who passed through the education system then were later absorbed into the colonial administration and civil service. However, with the country's population growing geometrically relative to the arithmetic progression of available employment opportunities, it became obvious that Nigeria as a nation following the departure of Britain and years after independence in 1960 can no longer absorb its teeming graduates. This national reality informed the introduction of entrepreneurship in institutions of higher learning in the country, designed to among other things stimulate self-reliance, self-employment, fight unemployment and ultimately reduce poverty.

Okoye (2016) observes that entrepreneurial skills are developed in learners exposed to the concept. Furthermore, Oguejiofor and Umeh (2017) opine that in present-day world, entrepreneurship is considered an important source of economic growth and competitiveness, employment creation, creation of wealth and offering the interests of the society as a whole. Again, Egwu(2012) identifies modern business mentoring as possible solution for world economic distress, failure of organizations and poor succession plans in business.

Mentoring is needed to support and encourage individuals in managing their affairs so as to achieve their full potential and develop their skills. Indeed, Anekwe (2019) sees mentoring in entrepreneurship as the foundation for continuing in business and being innovative. The author observes that mentoring in entrepreneurship arises where an individual called a mentor who has more experience in entrepreneurship than another, called mentee serves as a trusted confidant over an extended period, offering service free of charge to the latter, bringing to bear his/her unique experience and willingness to share skills and knowhow with the mentee. Mentors are said to rely on their prior experiences in gaining empathy that enables them understand

mentees' issues in order to know how to relate with the latter (Pollyn and Emeti, 2013). They are particularly needed in various aspects of entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship is said to have originated from the French word 'enterprende' which means an undertaking. It is concerned with establishing various businesses whose mission is that of either offering goods or services to the public. The importance of entrepreneurship is globally acknowledged. Specifically, entrepreneurship creates jobs, wealth, new products and services; supports economic growth and reduces poverty.

Today's world of entrepreneurship has been reshaped by Corona virus outbreak. The implication of this is that entrepreneurial pursuits have to be reshaped such that the business adapts to the new normal that it faces, grows using appropriate strategies and prospers without compromising Covid-19 safety requirements. Presently, entrepreneurs are encountering challenges never anticipated or seen before. This is a pointer to the fact that mentoring in entrepreneurship is more important currently than previously perceived.

Statement of the Problem

Like every other area of human endeavor, entrepreneurship has been seriously affected by the Covid - 19 pandemic which caused lockdowns by countries for months with attendant negative effect on business activities and the economy as a whole. In Nigeria the net effect of this has been the worsening of endemic poverty, unemployment and loss of livelihood which predated Covid-19 outbreak.

As businesses reopen after lockdown, they need to draw on the expertise and experience of mentors whose skills would be needed in guiding entrepreneurs into embracing the evolving new business models in designing their business plans, sourcing funds, hiring employees, evaluating their portfolio of products and services, dealing with customers and competition, branding and the like. This Covid-19 induced structural shift in entrepreneurial pursuits triggered the interest to conduct this study.

Research Objectives

This study had their objectives:

- i. To investigate the extent to which entrepreneurs utilized mentoring services before the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria
- ii. To examine the level of awareness of entrepreneurs on the emerging business space induced by Covid -19 outbreak in Nigeria.
- iii. To ascertain current disposition of entrepreneurs towards business mentoring following disruptions caused by Covid -19 Pandemic.

Research Questions

In this study, three researches questions were raised:

- i. What is the extent to which entrepreneurs utilized mentoring services before the outbreak of Covid-19 in Nigeria?
- ii. What is the level of awareness of entrepreneurs on the emerging business space induced by Covid -19 outbreak in Nigeria?
- iii. What is the current disposition of entrepreneurs towards business mentoring following disruptions caused by Covid-19 pandemic?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Concept of Mentoring

Oguejiofor and Umeh (2017) define mentoring as the relationship which offers individuals opportunity of sharing their professional and personal experiences and skills coupled with the opportunity of growth and development in the process; according to these authors, mentoring plays a major role in updating the competencies of beginning and subordinate entrepreneurs. For Bilesanmi and Aronu (2013), mentoring is a set of tailor-made advice and incentive that a more experienced individual offers innovatively to a less experienced individual in a variety of ways and on a range of competencies .It is a close, developmental relationship between two people in which a partner willingly avails himself/herself of the full range of superior experience, knowledge, skills or status of the other partner in all spheres of human endeavor (Okurame and Balogun, 2013).Mentoring is said to bring about improvement in efficiency and professional growth (Schooley, Moore and Vitti, 2010).

In Nigeria, the practice of mentoring is common among traders, politicians, farmers and educationists in situations where mentors using their superior experience offer mentoring to their mentees to become their successors. Mentoring may also come in the form of guides and trade apprenticeship where young people who acquired technical skills are availed the support of more experienced and established professionals in their area(s) of trade.

Two mentoring styles here been explained by Oguejiofor and Umeh (2017). These are equipping and empowering styles. In the former, the mentor's approach is to serve as a teacher, telling the mentee what to do and how to go about it. This approach, however, makes the mentor to dominate the relationship with little or room for the mentee to exercise his/her initiative in entrepreneurship. In the latter, the approach is different as the mentor offers the mentee an outline of what should be done but with the initiative to decide on the appropriate strategy or solution. Such an approach empowers the mentee to be self-reliant and independent in entrepreneurial pursuits. Thus, while availing himself/herself of the mentor's advice he/she ultimately makes decision using his/her judgment.

Four types of mentoring relationships have been identified by Dudman, Lowbridge and Stevens (2011) to include: Face-to-face, one to- one mentoring, face –to- face mentor group mentoring, telephone mentoring and e-mentoring. Face-to-face one to – one mentoring is the type of mentoring where majority of interaction between the mentor and mentee is by face – to – face and on one to one basis. In the face-to-face group mentoring, a group of people say six-eight come together to discuss issues they face, barnstorming from different perspectives and experiences with a view to helping individual members. It is also called peer mentoring. Telephone mentoring is used to support face-to-face mentoring and on specific issues that may be faced by the mentee. E-mentoring is another type of mentoring used in supporting face-to-face mentoring. It focuses on specific issues of the mentee and may leverage on any electronic devices available for use.

Entrepreneurship and Covid-19: Matters arising from the pandemic

The operations of businesses, both large and small were suddenly halted in the early months of 2020 following the outbreak of Covid-19, said to have originated from Wuhan, China in December, 2019. This was the same picture in almost every country of the world. Thus, the outbreak of this pandemic led to forced closure of many businesses and disruptions of several business operations, causing a shift in how businesses should operate. Countries began to impose lockdown as a measure to curtail the speed of the virus. This was the case in the United States of America, Germany, United Kingdom, France, Nigeria and several other countries of the world.

Thus, the lockdown became a major constraint for businesses due to control measures including social distancing, transport restrictions and a ban in the operation of markets. Indeed, the pandemic has had a devastating impact and disrupted the value chain of many businesses in the world generally and Nigeria in particular. The impacts of the pandemic on entrepreneurial start-ups and SME activities are both short term and long-term. The former, short term, is through the business cycle impact brought about by lockdowns and containment measures taken by different governments (Hale, *et al.* 2020). The effect of this included a reversal of economic growth, break in supply-chains and contracting aggregate demand and a decline in new business formation. The pandemic's impact in the long term can result in a permanent reduction in the rate of start-ups, the growth of SMEs, employment creation and innovation (Fairlie, 2020).

Currently, the world continues to grapple with the Covid-19 pandemic and its profound impact on businesses. With lockdown being eased by nations, businesses are rebooting with a focus on how they are to survive. Indeed, the pandemic had caused disruptions to business operations, and its impact on business mostly negative is still being felt by businesses of all sizes. There have been significant drop in the income of businesses, insolvency as well as job losses. Travel bans, restrictions and border closures have not been fully lifted in some countries. This will continue to have some negative impact on business for some time to come.

Business reopening: Strategic Issues to consider

As businesses begin to re-start their operations, their current situation should be properly assessed with a view to formulating appropriate strategies for the future. Thus, effort at formulating new strategies for use in the unfolding business space should take into consideration a number of strategic issues begging for experience, expertise and mentoring. Key among these issues are:

i. **Assessing the financial difficulty caused to the business by the pandemic-** Financial information on this may be sourced from Profit and Loss, Balance Sheet and Cash flow forecast. This will position the business to restart in the new business environment.

ii. **Refreshing the business Plan**

Reopening post covid-19 requires a touch on the business model, a re-examination/ analysis of the industry and markets reflective of changes that have taken place from the pandemic and the possible strategies appropriate for use.

iii. **Estimating funding requirements in support of business reopening and source of funding-** In restarting and re-planning the business, funds are required. Understanding the cash flow forecasting and needed funds will assist in delivering the business strategy in the new arrangement. However, inability to raise resources needed could pose a constraint to delivery on the new strategy.

- iv. **Revamping Business recovery forecast and future budget-** As the business recovers post covid-19, it may require extra cost. However, in recovering, the aim should be that of increasing business income as well as customer base so as to have the projected business profitability. Hence, cost containment is required at the stage.
- v. **There is need to have in place a recovery time table-** It is important to have in place a time table for the business reopening as part of the business strategy. Having this will help with timing and implementation with responsibilities.
- vi. **Developing a Contingency plan-** It is critical to have contingency plans for any emergencies or extreme conditions. This will assist in insulating the business to the fullest extent possible against any future threats. In this way, issues to deal with may include, risk reduction tactics, increase in funding, human resources and the like.
- vii. **Improving upon business adaptability -**Adapting the business to current business scenario is key to succeeding post Covid-19. There is need for flexibility in various business areas including being creative in improvements, finding new markets, evaluating new changes, business re-structuring, debt rescheduling and refinancing working with debt providers and the like.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). This theory was propounded by Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994). The theory argues that individual interests as reflected in their careers, goals and choices are linked to self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. In line with this, mentoring is targeted at enhancing entrepreneurs’ self-efficacy and outcome expectations and this will increase their goals towards their entrepreneurial pursuits. In the context of current study, the SCCT becomes important owing to the fact that it is useful in inculcating and predicting entrepreneurial behaviour through instructions and training which mentoring seeks to achieve.

Empirical Review

Recent and relevant studies in this area include Oguejiofor and Umeh(2017) assessed the imperatives of entrepreneurship mentoring in promoting economic development in Nigeria. The study established the importance of mentoring to entrepreneurship and by extension economic development and recommended incorporation of entrepreneurship at all levels of education.

Chukwu and Uzochukwu(2013) in their study of business mentoring in entrepreneurship development found out that effective learning impacted entrepreneurship development and recommended the introduction of business mentoring as a University curriculum in Nigeria.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study used the survey research design. Purposive sampling was used in selecting four business sectors in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, South South, Nigeria to partake in the survey. These business sectors were agric business, services, construction business and manufacturing. As at the time of conducting this study, it was difficult to ascertain the actual number of entrepreneurs in these states owing to no reliable data. However, it was decided that a sample of 150 entrepreneurs that have been in business for a minimum of ten years should be studied in each of the two states to make for a total of 300. The questionnaire was used in obtaining data from entrepreneurs in the business areas surveyed. The questionnaire which was in the Likert format, was subjected to reliability and validity tests. The instrument recorded 62% response rate. Analysis of data was by descriptive statistics.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Entrepreneurs’ utilization of mentoring before outbreak of Covid-19 in Nigeria

Variables	Responses	100%
Very high extent	7	3.76
High extent	61	32.80
Low extent	83	44.62
Not used at all	22	11.83
No opinion	13	6.99
Total	186	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 1 indicates the extent which entrepreneurs utilized mentoring before the outbreak of Covid-19 in Nigeria. It shows that 7(3.76%) respondents had utilized mentoring to a very high extent; 61(32.80%) respondents utilized mentoring to a high extent; 83(44.62%) respondents utilized mentoring to a low extent; 22(11.83%) respondents had not utilized mentoring at all while 13(6.99%) respondents supplied no opinion in the question. The analysis suggests that only about 68(36.56%) of the respondents had utilized mentoring in the high and very high extent before the outbreak of Covid-19 in Nigeria.

Table 2: Entrepreneurs’ level of awareness on emerging business space induced by Covid-19 outbreak in Nigeria.

Variables	Responses	Percentage (%)
Very High Awareness	86	46.24
High Awareness	69	37.10
Low awareness	16	8.60
Not aware at all	9	4.84
No opinion	6	3.22
Total	186	100.00

Source: *Field Survey, 2020*

Table 2 presents analysis on entrepreneurs’ level of awareness on emerging business space induced by Covid-19 outbreak in Nigeria. The analysis indicates that 86(46.24%) respondents had very high awareness of the emerging business space induced by Covid-19 outbreak in Nigeria; 69(37.10%) respondents had high awareness; 16(8.60%) respondents had low awareness; 9(4.84%) respondents said they were not aware at all while 6(3.22%) respondents offered no opinion on the question. The analysis indicates that majority of the respondents, 155(83.33%), had high and very high awareness of the emerging business space induced by Covid-19 outbreak in Nigeria.

Table 3: Current disposition of entrepreneurs towards business mentoring following disruptions caused by Covid-19 pandemic.

Variables	Responses	Percentage (%)
Very High acceptance	52	27.96
High Acceptance	98	52.69
Low acceptance	18	9.68
No acceptance	12	6.45
No opinion	6	3.22
Total	186	100.00

Source: *Field Survey, 2020*

Table 3 is on the current disposition of entrepreneurs towards business mentoring following disruptions caused by Covid-19 pandemic. In the analysis, 52(27.96%) respondents indicated very high acceptance currently towards business mentoring following disruptions caused by Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria; 96(52.69%) respondents indicated high acceptance; 18(9.68%) respondents opined low acceptance; 12(6.45%) respondents indicated non acceptance while 6(3.22%) respondents gave no opinion on the question. In the analysis, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that majority of entrepreneurs in Nigeria currently have high and very high acceptance for mentoring to help them out in their business following disruptions caused by Covid-19 pandemic.

Analysis in this study indicates that entrepreneurs in Nigeria are conscious of evolving business scenario occasioned by Covid-19 outbreak, hence their increased disposition towards mentoring to get their businesses back on track and to bring about the strategies needed for success. Earlier studies such as Oguejiofor and Umeh(2017) and Chukwu and Uzochukwu(2013) had established entrepreneurship could be boosted by mentoring.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study focused on entrepreneurship mentoring post Covid-19 Nigeria. Findings of the study indicate that before the outbreak of Covid-19, many entrepreneurs may not have given serious thought to business mentoring. However, the outbreak of this pandemic, disruption caused business and the evolving chaotic business space combine to make mentoring a highly sought service among entrepreneurs in Nigeria to both help out in effective business reopening and strategies for success.

Based on findings in this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Entrepreneurs in Nigeria should embrace mentoring to tap from the experience and expertise of mentors in order to survive current reality in the business environment. This will require their effort and enquiries where necessary.

- ii. Mentors should make themselves and their services more visible to new entrepreneurs. This could be done through trade associations and business clusters.
- iii. Upcoming entrepreneurs should realize the strategic importance of mentoring in building and sustaining their entrepreneurial capacity, hence should leverage on such tutelage at various stages of their business.

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