
ASSESSING THE ROLE OF
ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN CUSHIONING
THE IMPACT OF YOUTH
UNEMPLOYMENT AMIDST COVID-19
SITUATION: A CASE STUDY OF DELTA
STATE, NIGERIA

[Document subtitle]

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the role that entrepreneurship played in cushioning the effect/impact of unemployment amidst the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, using Delta state as a case study. The study was borne out of the author's personal quest for answers as the pandemic led to loss of jobs for many employed youths in the region, and the study sought to empirically determine whether entrepreneurial venture played a part in reducing the impact of job losses on the youth populace in Delta state, Nigeria.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study adopted an inductive, qualitative approach, using semi-structured interview questioned, and the data was collected from ten (10) active entrepreneurs in Delta State, Nigeria. The data was analysed using NVivo 12 CADQAS software and the data presented via tables and network aps.

Findings: The study found that entrepreneurship had a net positive effect on youth employment in Delta state, Nigeria, amidst the pandemic and led to the creation of new jobs/roles. The second main finding was the government policy implementation was suboptimal for SMEs, and mainly benefitted large firms only. The last major finding was that the potential for entrepreneurship to create jobs was immense, as the youth populace in the state were highly educated and ready to work

Originality/value: The thesis was written from primary data gathered via face-to-face interviews with respondents in Delta state, Nigeria.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Youth unemployment, SWOT Analysis, Business Creation

Paper-type: Master's Dissertation

Declaration

I at this moment certify that this material, which I submitted for assessment of the programme of study leading to the award of Master of Science in Entrepreneurship, titled " ASSESSING THE ROLE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN CUSHIONING THE IMPACT OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AMIDST COVID-19 SITUATION: A CASE STUDY OF DELTA STATE, NIGERIA" is entirely my work and has not been taken from the work of others.

Signed: EJIRO WILSON AGBROKO.....

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Acknowledgment

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Chapter 1 Introduction to the study

1.1 Introduction

The current Covid-19 pandemic has affected all parts of the global economy and has resulted in massive job cuts and unemployment, particularly in developing countries (Rodela et al., 2020). Economic impacts of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in developing countries. Several

countries have slipped into depression as a fallout of the pandemic, and leading economies such as France have recorded a slump in economic output of 5.8%, the most significant slump in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) since World War II period (AA.com.tr, 2021). In a similar pattern, the number of unemployed persons in the United States of America (USA) as of August 2020 passed forty million due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with other leading nations across the world witnessing similar record unemployment numbers as a fallout of the pandemic (Pew Research Center, 2021). In this regard, Ihejiamaizu (2020) suggests that for economies to rebound and return to growth, there needs to be a conscious effort to remove barriers to young people becoming successful entrepreneurs, which will help advance sustainable development goals and tackle the socio-economic effects of Covid-19. In other words, it is in the economic interest of any country looking to rebound from the Covid-19 induced crisis to encourage entrepreneurship through different means such as creating access to start-up funds, training, technical support, markets, and networks for aspiring entrepreneurs to start-up businesses.

Nigeria, in particular, was hit economically by the pandemic as unemployment rose to 33.3% in Q4 2020 from 27.1% in Q2 2020, based on statistics showing the number of economically active people with the ages of 15-64 years (ProshareNG, 2021). This means that the unemployment rate soared by 22.8% due to the pandemic, wreaking severe havoc on the country's economy that is currently mired in ethnic crisis and other problems. Despite the abundance of natural and human resources, Nigeria struggles with structural unemployment and attracting foreign direct investment due to its largely unemployed workforce. With employment ballooning rates from very low figures in the colonial days to double digits in more recent times (Afolabi, 2015), the issue of unemployment in Nigeria can no longer be wished away or ignored, especially since the onset of the pandemic.

1.2 Background to the study

Several researchers have established the link between entrepreneurship and job creation (Baumol, 1996; Mair & Marti, 2009), with researchers empirically proving that entrepreneurial activity drives economic growth and job creation (Szabo & Herman, 2012). Knowing this means that there might be a way for Nigeria to stimulate its economy to create more entrepreneurs to reduce unemployment and help its trajectory to grow post-pandemic. The question remains about how this can be done and the motivation/barriers to doing so, especially in Nigeria's restive South-South Region.

Delta State is an oil-producing state in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, with a population of over 5 million people (almost the same population as Ireland) and an unemployment rate of 31.14%, as of 2020 (Nigeria: unemployment rate by state | Statista, 2021). The state is one of the hardest hit by the pandemic and dwindling oil prices in Nigeria, and there is an urgent need to design economic rebound strategies that will stimulate the state and help it return to growth and productivity. There is a gap that exists in regards to the role that entrepreneurship plays in reducing unemployment within this state in Nigeria and how this can be used to drive economic growth within the state and across Nigeria.

In this respect, a review of the state-of-the-art around entrepreneurship, job creation and economic recovery will be conducted and linked in with solving unemployment in Delta state, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on young people aged between 15 and 47 years old, based on the United Nations age group classification.

1.3 Problem statement

This study seeks to address the relationship between entrepreneurship and job creation/reducing unemployment within Delta State, Nigeria. The need to explore this relationship is of considerable policy importance since national and state governments within Nigeria are scrambling to stimulate the economy to return back to a trajectory of growth after falling into recession in 2020 (Bloomberg, 2021). Being the continent's most populous country and with the highest youth population, the government needs urgent answers to its teeming youth population, especially after the impact of Covid-19. Currently, the Nigerian economy is a product-oriented one, dominated by the oil and gas sector, which is the core driver of its economy in terms of revenue generation, foreign investments, and exchange. With the harsh economic realities ushered in due to the pandemic, priorities need to be re-aligned to redeem the ailing economy and create more jobs.

This study will therefore seek to explore how entrepreneurship can be used as a tool for stimulating job creation and economic rejuvenation within the selected Nigerian case study state. This will be done via theoretical investigation of the literature, empirical research to test the assertion within the Nigerian context, and the findings used to recommend best practices for implementation locally within Nigeria.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

The central aim of this study is: *"To explore links between entrepreneurship and job creation/reduction in unemployment among youth in Delta state, Nigeria."*

The study has three main objectives:

- To explore the role of entrepreneurship as an answer to youth unemployment in Delta State, Nigeria in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Determine if the government policies targeted at increasing entrepreneurial activity have empirical justification, and if they have led to an increase in job creation in practice;
- To explore how business creation impacts entrepreneurship and implications for this on the future of entrepreneurial venture for young people within Delta state, Nigeria.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This research investigation will be split into five major chapters, and the purpose and description of each chapter is outlined below. Each chapter is unique and will contain will converge towards achieving the research aims and objectives. Figure 1.1 below outlines the process map for the study.

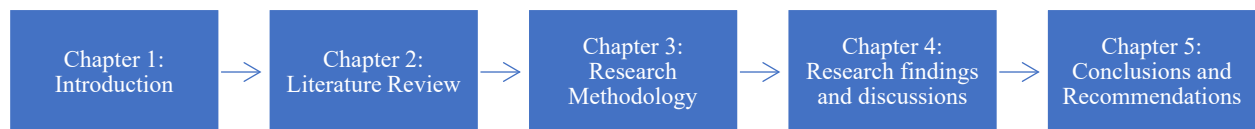


Figure 0.1 Thesis process map

Chapter 2 State-of-the-art/Literature review

2.1 Historical perspective of Entrepreneurship

Over the years, debates about entrepreneurship have been intense amongst practitioners and researchers. This is traceable to Richard Cantillon, a renowned economist who originally defined entrepreneurship and has given rise to several other definitions (Ahmad & Seymour,

2008). Cantillon defined an entrepreneur as an 'adventurer', who invests in the purchase of goods and materials with the plan to sell them in the future at a better price. Despite being the first person to really define entrepreneurship, this definition has been improved on by Joseph Schumpeter, whose more updated definition has formed the basis for the modern research into the topic of entrepreneurship. Schumpeter & Nichol (1934) described those involved in entrepreneurship as innovators that can exploit changes in different ways, thereby exploiting the loopholes found in the market place to create opportunities for themselves. This change can be described in the context of entrepreneurship as an opportunity for development and innovation (Betta, Jones, & Latham, 2010). Creativity is an essential factor that is needed for sustainability and enterprise development. However, the main aim of entrepreneurship is to create value (Kobia & Sikaleh, 2010).

In defining entrepreneurship, Olutunla (2001) explained that the word was derived from a Francophone phrase known as "entreprende" meaning to "undertake", therefore an entrepreneur is someone who undertakes to create businesses and opportunities for wealth creation. Renowned authors Zimmerer and Scarborough (2006) also opine that despite business creation being the central theme of entrepreneurship, it does not paint the full picture. Entrepreneurship means much more than business creation, but it also involves bringing change through innovation for the maximum social good. Entrepreneurship goes beyond just creating businesses, but it involves doing service to humanity for the greater good via job creation as well as human, economic and societal development (Odi & Njoku, 2013).

2.2 Entrepreneurship and development of the Economy

Entrepreneurship has been found to be a driver of economic growth and development, and its role has been affirmed by researchers across the globe (Ekore & Okekeocha, 2012). Over the years, developing an economy that is entrepreneurial has been one of the key objectives of governments (De Clercq, Menzies, Diochon, & Gasses, 2009). The main aim of entrepreneurship is to be able to create ventures (Drucker, 1985); this also means to create viable means of employment. The link between entrepreneurship and governments is duplex. First, entrepreneurship helps the government to tackle the rate of unemployment in a country which leads to a reduction in poverty and increased economic growth (Tamvada ,2010). Governments on the other hand promote policies and create an enabling environment for entrepreneurship to thrive (Odi & Njoku, 2013). Small and medium scale enterprises, otherwise known as SME's come to the fore when understanding the importance of entrepreneurship within the Nigerian context. They form an integral part of the private sector and drive economic development. The SME's also have a great potential for creating jobs and reducing poverty in developing economies (Hashi & Krasniqi, 2011). They have accounted for over 90% of the manufacturing sector in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and over 5million jobs in sub-Saharan Africa of Kenya in 2003 (SRIRAM & Mersha, 2010). In Nigeria, there is a Federal Government Special Intervention Fund for MSMEs (National Enterprise Development Programme), which provides subsidized loans to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) at single digit (9% per annum) all-inclusive interest rate. This fund makes it easy for SMEs to thrive, and the role that this type of support plays in the establishment and survival of SME's based on these statistics and others to facilitate economic development needs to be investigated (Aligba & Fusch, 2017).

There are different ways of measuring the impact of entrepreneurship in an a economy, and this study will focus mainly on those related to youth unemployment. The issue of youth unemployment is linked in with the research objectives of the study, and will be explored in more detail in subsequent sections. The measures used in this entrepreneurship study will be based on implicit views of the individual respondent's views of entrepreneurship (e.g., entrepreneurship as a means of employment creation), and other measures of entrepreneurship that reflect how entrepreneurship is being used to solve challenges with unemployment within the Nigerian society.

Therefore, the following sections will explore the contributions of entrepreneurship to the well-being of the economy, particularly the macro-economic factors of unemployment, government policy and business creation within Delta state in Nigeria.

2.3 Entrepreneurship, unemployment and youth development

Several researchers have researched the link between entrepreneurship and tackling unemployment, with several studies highlighting that entrepreneurship is key to youth development, empowerment and solving unemployment (MacIsaac, 1996; Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010). For the purpose of this study, youth will refer to individuals between the age range of 15-47, based on the United Nations age group classification. Entrepreneurship has also been linked to encouraging innovation, economic growth and job creation, especially for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), who contribute greatly to any country's economic activity and provides employment opportunities for an increasing number of graduates. Ndedi (2009) argued that African countries cannot develop beyond their investments in the entrepreneurial talent of their young people, and stressed that these initiatives must be taken

seriously in view of the increasing unemployment being faced on the continent. The most recent data for average unemployment across Africa is 6.19% (Macrotrends.net, 2021), and since most job creation initiatives around the world are driven by SMEs, it is critical to explore the subject of entrepreneurship and their job creation and unemployment reduction activities within individuals of the youth age bracket. This study is crucial as it will form a basis for African countries and individual states taking advantage of the opportunities inherent in the promotion of entrepreneurship among young people – and ultimately the training of entrepreneurs. This is very important, given this period of Covid-19 restrictions, where normal jobs and livelihoods of individuals have been affected, and entrepreneurship may present itself as the much needed panacea. The veracity of this hypothesis/claim will be established in more detail as the thesis progresses.

Although, some studies have shown that not all young people are required to be entrepreneurs, but entrepreneurship creates jobs that employ young people instead (Timmons & Spinelli, 2007). Maina (2013) in his study on entrepreneurship within the Nigerian context also cited that not only does entrepreneurship have immense benefits for the young, but training young people in entrepreneurship education is also critical for the development of skills acquisition, ideas and innovation capabilities that lead to job creation. Therefore, within a society where entrepreneurship is promoted, people will be encouraged to create jobs rather than seeking jobs. This type of orientation is needed by the Nigerian economy, as pro-entrepreneurial measures are being adopted by the government to ensure speedy recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (KPMG Nigeria, 2020). It is forecasted that the government will continue this trajectory of entrepreneur support to stimulate the economy and cushion the effects of the fallout of the pandemic.

The figure below outlines the link between entrepreneurship, job creation and national sustainability based on a review of a number of studies (Odi & Njoku, 2013; Aligba & Fusch, 2017; Ihejiamazu, 2020).

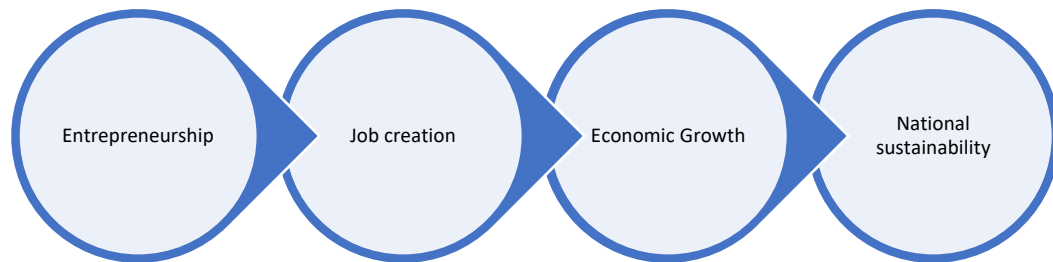


Figure 2.1 Link between entrepreneurship, job creation and economic development (Author's own)

The links between entrepreneurship, job creation and employment in figure 2.1 above is mostly a summary, but a brief exegesis of the other benefits of entrepreneurship, particularly within the context of developing countries such as Nigeria will be provided:

- Entrepreneurship allows young people to gain skills that will allow them proceed to self-employment, empowering them and making them less dependent on government and other social support systems (Desai, 2009).
- Entrepreneurship holds the potential to reduce social unrest and vices, as it helps young people channel their energies into productive endeavour, whether or not they have a job (Olorunmolu, 2008), consequently helping the individual increase their overall per capita income and living standard.

- Improves mental well-being, comfort and happiness of individuals in the society at large, as entrepreneurs feel empowered and have the feeling that they are contributing something meaningful to the society (UNFPA/Population Council, 2002)
- Entrepreneurship is critical to stimulating rural, economic and industrial development. When entrepreneurs thrive, especially in rural areas, they contribute to the development of these areas and discourage rural-urban migration (Todaro, 2000).
- Another way the entrepreneurs contribute to economic activity is that they utilise local resources, leading to more creation of wealth and jobs, and consequently poverty reduction (Deakins & Freel, 2012).

Having explored the contributions of entrepreneurship to job creation, unemployment reduction and youth development, the stage is now set to examine how entrepreneurship leads to new business creation and the consequent effect on rural markets.

2.4 Entrepreneurship and business creation

Entrepreneurs not only create jobs for people, they also create businesses for other organisations, allowing them to attain self-reliance and implement their innovative capabilities (Agetue & Nnamdi, 2017). Entrepreneurship training: A tool for job creation and sustainable national development, Nigeria. *Journal of Teacher Perspective*, 5(3), 475–482. This is especially true in developing economies, where a lot of innovative capability is left untapped and raw materials unexploited (Maina, 2013). This is why some countries prefer to promote initiatives such as apprenticeships ahead of standard credentialled educational initiatives, as apprenticeships have the reputation of preparing young people for entrepreneurial work and to be independent workers as opposed to preparing them to be employees (Odora & Naong, 2014).

Authors have criticised the Nigerian educational model as being anti-entrepreneurship and lacking the needed structures for preparing young people for a lifetime of self-reliance and risk-taking (Okafor, 2011). However, the benefits inherent in preparing young people for entrepreneurship are numerous, as businesses are interconnected and will need each other (Chigunta et al., 2005). An example of the connected nature of the entrepreneurial process is highlighted below, using an example of a *grocery* entrepreneur:

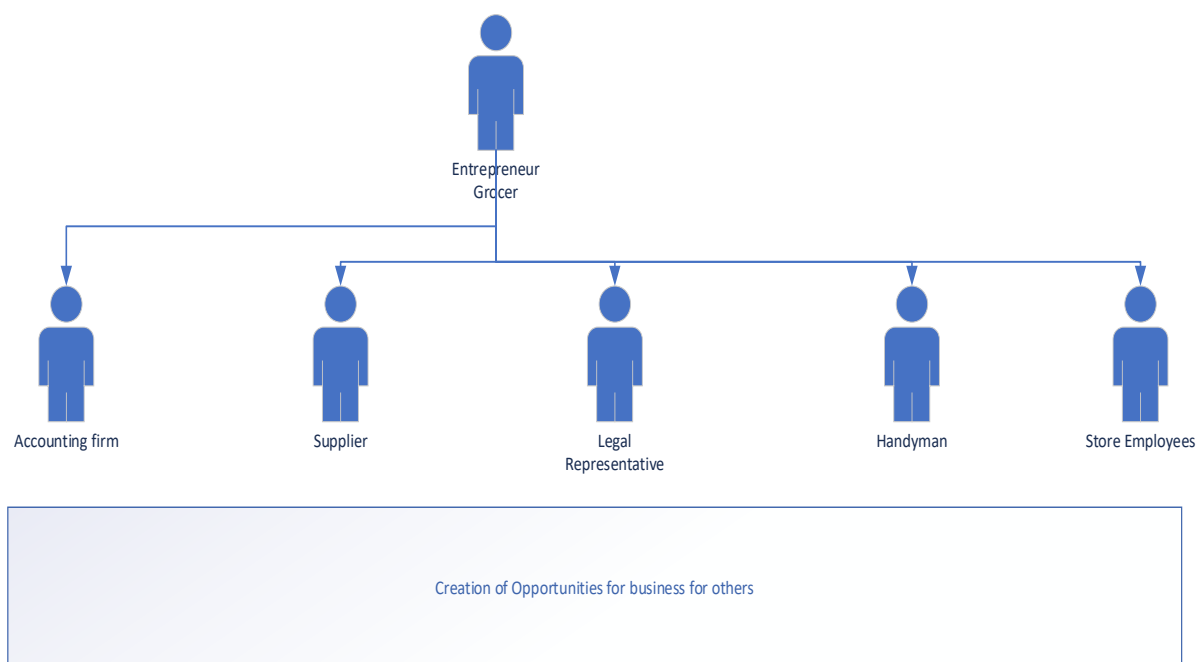


Figure 2.2 Outline of how entrepreneurs create business for others (Author's own)

Figure 2.2 above describes how a sample entrepreneur (i.e. grocer) creates opportunities for business for other businesses around them to earn extra income. Entrepreneurs also contribute to people achieving autonomy by not depending on monthly salary, but being able to be in control of their own time (Sternberg & Wennekers, 2005). They also serve as a learning point for other entrepreneurs who wish to embark on business, especially when they fail, upcoming

entrepreneurs can learn from them and use them as a benchmark to prevent future failure (White & Kenyon, 2000).

Now that the basis for entrepreneurship and how it fosters business creation has been established, the linkages between the concept and government policy will now be discussed.

2.5 Entrepreneurship and government policy

The importance of entrepreneurship development to governments worldwide cannot be overemphasized; as such it is not surprising that several governments around the world develop programs and policies that support entrepreneurship locally (Obaji, 2014). Through the introduction of policies and laws that support business creation and sustenance, governments try to foster entrepreneurship within their societies, since entrepreneurship benefits their citizens in the short and long-term. One of the ways through which government can leverage policy for supporting entrepreneurship is via the creation of business incubators that spur entrepreneurship development (Chigunta et al., 2005). Business incubators are key to developing entrepreneurial ventures and government-led ones have been noted to contribute to the growth of successful firms that will go on to become financially sustainable (NBIA, 2009).

It is important that governments implement pro-entrepreneurship initiatives, and Acs et al. (1994) identified nine policy focus areas that governments as the primary investors in entrepreneurship should focus on, including *access to financial capital, R & D Knowledge transfer, training and education, government support and programs, favourable commercial and legal infrastructure as well as cultural and social norms*. These key policies must support entrepreneurship to thrive and government has a responsibility to ensure that the business environment is conducive and supportive of the entrepreneurial process, using the policy tools

outlined above. While it is important to state that these policy tools are non-exhaustive, they are critical to the functioning of any entrepreneurial ecosystem, where the government serve as enablers and regulators (Branstetter et al., 2014).

Another way through which local governments can use policy to foster entrepreneurship is via actively soliciting and recruiting large-scale entrepreneurs through offers of tax breaks, training programs and relocation assistance, development/enhancement of key infrastructure and other incentives that will bring entrepreneurs to their regions. infrastructure development or enhancement, or any of a host of other incentive programs or proposals (Sriram & Mersha, 2010). These efforts have been proven to be major sources of job growth within such regions or states (Carland & Carland, 2004).

It is important to highlight that the purpose of this investigation is not just to explore what is theoretically meant to be happening in terms of entrepreneurship, but to investigate the link between entrepreneurship and youth unemployment mitigation in practice, using a hands-on approach. Having established that a link exists between entrepreneurship and economic development, there is now a basis for exploring its connections to job creation within Delta State, Nigeria.

2.6 Delta State as a Case Study

Delta State (recognized on August 27, 1991) is one of Nigeria's main oil and agricultural producing state, located within the region known as the South-South geo-political zone with a population of over 4 million and with an estimated land area of 16,842 square kilometres (Deltastate.gov.ng, 2021). Despite being a state blessed with various solid mineral deposits such as industrial clay, silica, lignite, kaolin, tar sand, decorative rocks, limestone, etc, the state

still has an unemployment rate of about 40% based on the Nigeria Economic Alert 2020 and data from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics on Unemployment (PwC, 2020). One of the flagship programs implemented by the government to curb unemployment led by Covid-19 is the S.M.A.R.T Ambassadors program, which was implemented by the current governor, His Excellency, Senator Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa. The entrepreneurship support and training program was introduced to upskill young people, especially women in a bid to combating unemployment and poverty.

Programs like this were implemented during the pandemic to help young people attain life skills training, vocational instruction/internship, and business management. The program is first of its kind to be introduced during the pandemic, under a government-led Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) and Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) for young people. Although the program has been largely appraised as successful, there is no empirical studies exploring perspectives from the young people themselves to give first-hand account of how programs like these that seek to foster entrepreneurship are effective in creating opportunities and jobs for young people in the pandemic ravaged Nigerian economy. This study will therefore fill the gap in knowledge in this area on the role of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship-led programs in easing unemployment during these times,

2.7 Summary

The review of literature has established that entrepreneurship is a key tool being employed by the government to stimulate growth, create jobs and business and for economic development. On the basis of the literature review, three key themes stand out as being crucial to the role of entrepreneurship in cushioning the effect of unemployment within the context of Delta state,

Nigeria: government-led policy initiatives, creation of opportunities and innovative capability.

These three key elements are used to prepare a theoretical framework in figure 2.3 below, and

will be the frame of reference for the study:

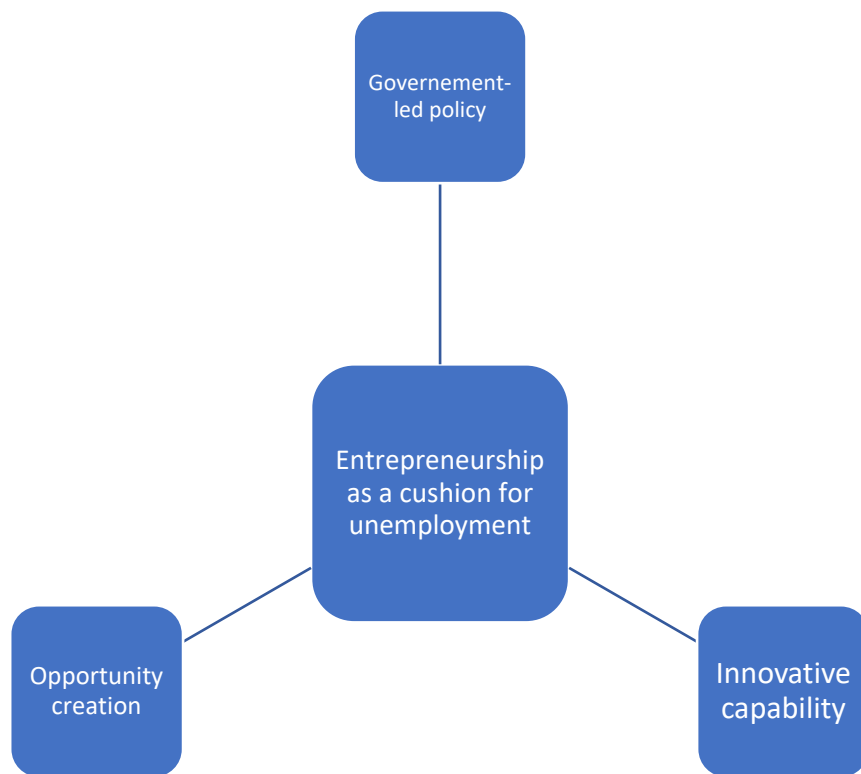


Figure 2.3 Theoretical framework

The figure shows the three key themes that emerged from the literature review and which will form the basis for the questions that will be developed in the methodology section. The methodology is designed to explore ways through which the research question can be answered, building on the state-of-the-art established in the literature review.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Why adopt a structured methodology

Research methodology is critically important to any empirical study, and the method means the procedure for gathering data for the study (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The methodology to be employed will support the research objectives and will determine the kind of data to be gathered (Navarro Sada & Maldonado, 2007). The nature of the research at hand is such that it is organised, systematic and addresses a specific problem; hence there needs to be a customised

approach to reaching a solution. It has been argued that the research methodology is a process offering a description of the method used to collect and interpret data (Al Zefeiti & Mohamad, 2015). Cooper and Schindler (2000) presented four main streams of management research, namely, descriptive, reporting, explanatory and predictive. Perhaps the most comprehensive framework for research investigations was presented by Saunders et al. (2012), known as the Research onion. The framework is presented below in figure 3.1:

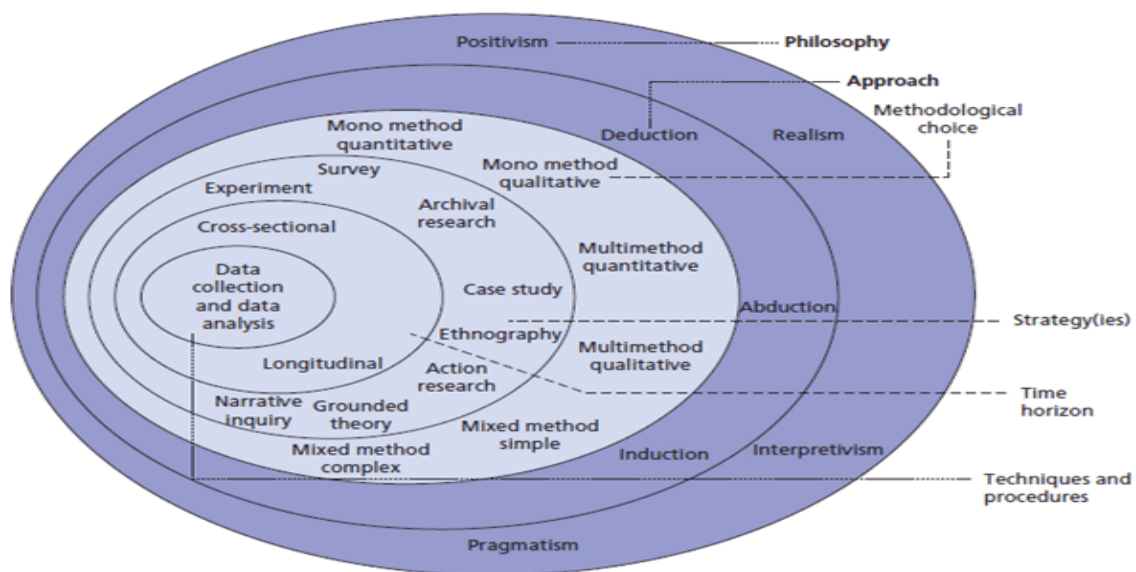


Figure 3.1 Research process "onion" adapted from Saunders et al. (2009, p.108)

From the figure above, there are six different layers of the research onion that need to be considered in the methodology. These are now considered in detail below:

3.2 Research Philosophy

This is the first layer of the research onion and is related to the belief or worldview about the collection, interpretation, and analysis of data collected (Levin, 1988). Research philosophy allows the researcher to adopt this layer in a specific study to reflect critical assumptions about

their opinion, views and how they understand the world (Simpson, 2009). The research philosophy influences the researcher's strategy and approach to the study, and while the research onion lists several philosophical stances, pragmatism is the preferred option for this study. This philosophical position considers the meaning of a claim (the link between entrepreneurship and job creation in this case) consists of all the possible effects we associate with it and the eventual outcomes we expect it to have (Ulrich, 2005).

The main types of philosophical stances employed in management research are positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, post-modernism and pragmatism (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015). The interpretivist approach is adopted in this study due to three main reasons:

- It is the main philosophical stance that respects the differences between people and their opinions, and able to grasp the subjective meaning of social action (Hinkelmann, 2012).
- Interpretivism allows for the acquisition of knowledge via the development of in-depth understanding of a phenomena (entrepreneurship in this case) through deep-level investigation and analysis of those phenomena (McManus et al., 2015)
- It does not claim generalisability of outcomes, but rather provides results that are limited to a certain context - Delta State, Nigeria in this case (Neuman, 2014).

3.3 Research Approach

The approach to be undertaken in this study is induction, which proceeds from a number of single cases and seeks to establish a connection between observations (Gephart, 2004). The inductive approach is selected for this study ahead of its deductive and abductive counterparts due to the following reasons:

- Allows for the collection of data that informs about the experience of individuals within a chosen sample. This approach allows for the collection of data that can be operationalised and not just probable inferences drawn (Reichertz, 2004).
- Induction, or inductive reasoning allows the researcher to go from the particular to the general, from a set of specific observations to the discovery of a pattern that represents some degree of order among all the given events (Babbie, 2010).
- Induction is the process of reasoning from a part to the whole i.e. allows for understanding a portion of a sample population and for possible generalisation to the whole sample (Kothari, 2004).

It is important to state that there are other pros and cons of adopting the inductive research approach that are not highlighted above. One of the popular criticisms to the inductive approach is the subject of the inability of the approach to identify causality i.e. inductive reasoning helps to discover patterns but it does not necessarily explain why the pattern exists — just that it does (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). However, this criticism does not apply to this study as the investigation does not seek to explore causality i.e. it does not deal with ‘how’ entrepreneurship impacts youth unemployment, but ‘whether’ it does so and the implications of same within the context of an economy recovering from the shock of Covid-19.

3.4 Methodological choice

Due to the current challenges of the pandemic and the target audience under consideration, the mono-method qualitative method is preferred for gathering data from the population of young people in Delta State, Nigeria. This means that a single tool will be used for data collection, with the focus of the tool being qualitative i.e. collection of textual data only and adopting an

interpretive, naturalistic approach to the subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This is partly because the majority of the earlier studies in entrepreneurship adopt this method, and they are used as a guide in this study as recommended by (Dale Bloomberg & Volpe, 2017). In addition, due to the remote, rural nature of Delta state, it is intuitive to adopt a qualitative method, as most of the sample populace would not be able to respond to or understand quantitative questionnaires.

3.5 Research Strategy

This explains the approach taken to empirical data collection and is linked with the research objectives, the environment from which the data will be collected, and other issues (Seriki, 2020). It is recommended to select a strategy that aligns with the aim of the study, and its central theme, while considering other environmental conditions such as accessibility to data, tools for analysis and timeframe for the study. The selected research strategy for this study is the *survey*, particularly the qualitative interview survey (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Qualitative interviews allow for the collection of rich, detailed data for understanding the experiences of participants, how they lived their experiences, and the meaning they extract from the same.

Textual analysis will be used to analyse the qualitative data collected in order to provide systematic understanding of texts and narratives from respondents (Boje, 2001).

3.6 Time Horizon

This can be either cross-sectional or longitudinal. The time horizon selected for this study is cross-sectional, which takes place during a snapshot of time (Saunders & Tosey, 2013).

3.7 Techniques and Procedures

This study will employ semi-structured interviews that will likely take place over Zoom or MS Teams. The questions will be analysed thematically using *NVivo 12* software for qualitative analysis using thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Since the study is mono-method, only interviews will be conducted as a tool for data collection. The procedure for developing the interview protocol i.e. questionnaire, is detailed in the next section.

3.8 Interview protocol Development

The interview protocol/interview questions were developed using a mix of rigorous review of the literature, benchmarked against the research objectives. This was done in order to ensure that the questions are aligned to the objectives and that each interview was conducted to obtain the desired outcome of the study (Wells, 2002). The procedure for developing the questions for the interviews are presented in table XX below, with careful detail taken to ensure that each question is relevant to the study, backed up by the literature and linked to a research objective (Montoya, 2016). This procedure used in this study ensures three key things:

- (1) Ensures that the interview questions align with research questions,
- (2) Ensures that the questionnaire supports an inquiry-based conversation,
- (3) Allows for strengthening the reliability of the interview, by ensuring that only empirically grounded questions are included.

Table 1 Sample Interview protocol sheet

Theme	Question topic	Link to objective	References
Demographics	Age range	All objectives	Sriram & Mersha (2010); Odora & Naong (2014); Kareem (2015).
	Gender		
	Educational level		
	Program of study		
	Home town (Urban/Rural/Semi-urban)		
Role of Entrepreneurship in curbing youth unemployment	Duration of engagement in entrepreneurship	Research objective 1	Awogbenle & Iwuamadi (2010); Mehari & Belay (2017); Lambovska, Sardinha & Belas (2021).
	Any employees /trainee taken on during Covid-19?		
	Impact of Covid-19 on entrepreneurial venture		
Government policy, Entrepreneurship and Covid-19	Government Policy, entrepreneurship and links to youth unemployment (-if any)	Objectives 1 & 2	Carland & Carland (2004); Obaji (2014); Quilter-Pinner, Webster & Parkes (2020).
	Challenges faced by entrepreneurs and links to youth unemployment		
	Government support to cushion effect of Covid-19 on entrepreneurs and unemployed youth		
Business creation	Thoughts on entrepreneurship, business creation and unemployment	Objectives 2 & 3	Vespignani & Yanotti (2020); Naudé (2020); Churchill (2021)
	Opportunities for future entrepreneurship drive		
	Empowering entrepreneurs		

3.9 Sampling Strategy and Administration of Interviews

The sampling strategy adopted in this study is the probability sampling method, where a random sample of at least twenty young entrepreneurs will be identified across fulltime entrepreneurs in Delta State, Nigeria. This sampling approach is used when a sample of interviewees is taken randomly, however ensuring a uniform spread by ensuring a ‘spread’ in terms of stratifying criteria (Daniel, 2012). This approach allowed the researcher to sample purposively, ensuring a wide range of characteristics of interviewees (Wells, 2012).

The interviews were administered via the Delta State branch of the Small & Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), who have a database of all registered entrepreneurs in the city. Appropriate ethical approval processes were observed and data protection procedures obtained, after which the researcher visited a physical meeting of members of the organisation to recruit participants. Only entrepreneurs who volunteered to take part in the study were contacted further, and the interviews were organised within public, socially distanced meeting rooms.

Consent forms were handed out to the interviewees before data collection was commenced, and all participants were notified that they could pull out of the study at any point during the interviews. A copy of the consent form and interview sheet is attached in *Appendix A*.

Chapter 4 Data Collection and Analysis

4.1 Demographic information

The data collected in the study is analysed and discussed in the chapter. The subsections in this chapter will explore the demographics of the respondents, analysis of the three key themes of the research and discussion of the implications of same for the research objectives. The data will be presented in tables, charts and network maps, and the findings analysed thematically as previously outlined. The software NVivo 12, produced by QSR international is used for importing, organising, exploring and connecting themes within qualitative data. The software allows for a structured, replicable method of analysing data and allows for ease of analysis and presentation of qualitative data (QSR International, 2021).

4.2 Approach to analyse empirical data

The study adopted a three-step process in analysing the data, based off the recommendations of Braun & Clarke (2006) for thematic analysis. The first step is to notice and look for patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data, which is called the Coding step. This step also involves highlighting interesting findings from the data in a systematic way across the entire data set into a relevant code. Secondly, the next step is linking/reviewing themes, to see if the coded extracts can be synthesised into similar themes and then generated into a thematic map of the analysis. The third and final step in the process is to produce a report, using a selection of vivid, compelling extract examples and linking them back to the research questions, objectives and literature in the form of a scholarly report and a copy of the codebook is attached in *Appendix B*. All three steps highlighted above will be undertaken in this section and the findings will be discussed and summaries produced from each step of the analysis.

4.3 Demographic information

The study received ten (10) respondents in total, mostly due to the Covid-19 pandemic and also due to the low level of internet penetration in Delta state. Hence, it was impossible to conduct online interviews, and the data needed to be collected manually. However, due to the rising number of cases of the Delta variant of Covid-19, the data collection was stopped and analysed as it is. This forms one of the limitations of the study, as a more robust sample could have been used. The data from the respondents is presented in table 2 below, which points out that the data is skewed towards a predominantly male and young population. This is not unusual in a parochial society as Nigeria, where women are not encouraged to work but to be home keepers. Sajuyigbe & Fadeyibi (2017) had earlier highlighted that women in Africa, especially in Nigeria have been historically been disadvantaged in gaining access to resources that encourage entrepreneurship, hence it is not surprising to find them been hardly represented in the study. The table also points to the fact that most of the respondents in the study conduct their business in an urban area (90%) and also have a predominantly (80%) non-business related educational background. This may be an issue of consideration in the study, as the data would be difficult to generalise to a rural population as it is more suited to an urban area based on the respondent's data. In addition, the respondents are quite educated, with about 80% of them having at least a Level 8 NFQ degree equivalent to an Irish bachelor's degree. The study population is also quite experienced in entrepreneurship, as at least 60% of them have more than 3 years' experience in running a business.

The stage has now been set to delve into the data and conduct detailed analysis.

Table 2 Demographic data of respondents

Respondent	Acronym	Gender	Age range	Educational Level	Location	No. of years in Entrepreneurship	Academic background
Entrepreneur 1	ENT1	Male	25-35 years	Bachelors or Undergraduate (NFQ Level 6-8)	Urban	1-3 years	Non-Business
Entrepreneur 2	ENT2	Female	25-35 years	Bachelors or Undergraduate (NFQ Level 6-8)	Urban	1-3 years	Business
Entrepreneur 3	ENT3	Male	35-45 years	Masters Level (NFQ Level 9)	Urban	More than 5 years	Business
Entrepreneur 4	ENT4	Male	25-35 years	Bachelors or Undergraduate (NFQ Level 6-8)	Rural	1-3 years	Non-Business

Entrepreneur 5	ENT5	Male	25-35 years	Bachelors or Undergraduate (NFQ Level 6-8)	Urban	More than 5 years	Non-Business
Entrepreneur 6	ENT6	Female	Less than 25 years	Leaving Certificate (NFQ Level 4-5)	Urban	1-3 years	Non-Business
Entrepreneur 7	ENT7	Female	Less than 25 years	Leaving Certificate (NFQ Level 4-5)	Urban	More than 5 years	Non-Business
Entrepreneur 8	ENT8	Male	25-35 years	Bachelors or Undergraduate (NFQ Level 6-8)	Urban	3-5 years	Non-Business
Entrepreneur 9	ENT9	Male	25-35 years	Masters Level (NFQ Level 9)	Urban	3-5 years	Non-Business
Entrepreneur 10	ENT10	Male	25-35 years	PhD (NFQ Level 10)	Urban	More than 5 years	Non-Business

4.4 Role of Entrepreneurship in curbing youth unemployment amidst Covid-19

The data reported in this section sought to address the research objective I, and collected in the study is analysed and discussed in the chapter. The subsections in this chapter will explore the impact of Covid-19 on entrepreneurship in Delta state Nigeria, especially on employment of young people and the challenges that arose from Covid-19 within the entrepreneurial landscape.

4.4.1 Impact of Covid on Entrepreneurship and youth unemployment

This sub-section reports the findings from the study in relation to how the respondents' businesses was affected by Covid-19. Figure XYZ presents the data, with the positive impact on one side and the negative on the opposite side. The figure shows that the perceived impact of Covid-19 on entrepreneurship on entrepreneurship and employment was overall positive, as the positive comments outweigh the negative. Some of the positive responses are outlined below:

“Based on experience the covid restriction gave room for most youths to become entrepreneurs which reduced unemployment that even after the first and second wave and lock down. Most youths don't want to go back to their paid jobs as some got involved in logistics and others.”-

ENT5

*“On the positive side, we had to become more agile, flexible and more responsive. In our work. We have expanded our business, and we've had to survive, adapt and to increase our service offerings, moving into sectors we were not operating in before.”-***ENT10**

From the comments above and those presented in figure 4.1 below, it is clear that the pandemic has had an overall positive effect on the entrepreneurial ecosystem and youth employment

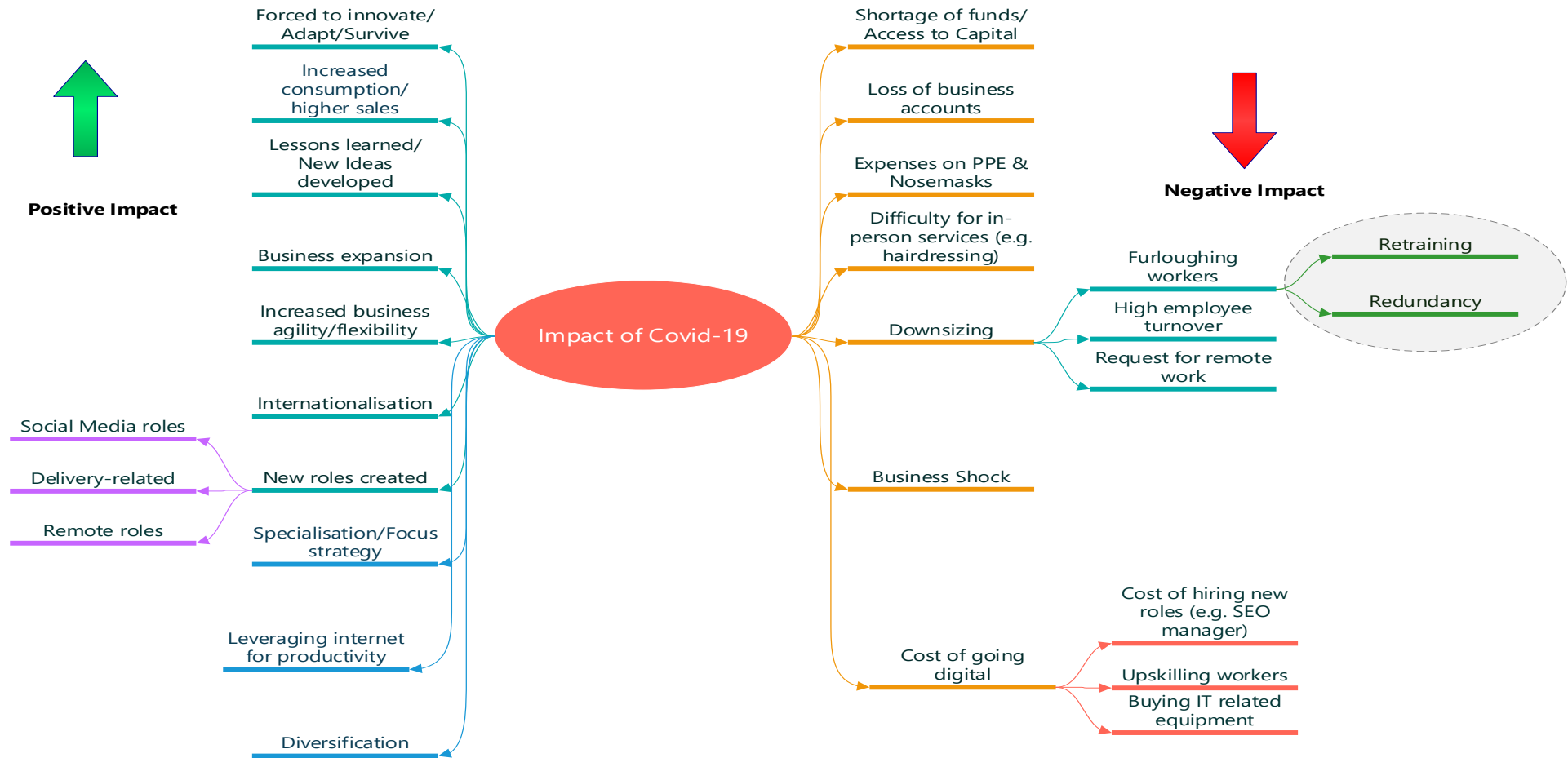


Figure 4.1 Impact of Covid on Entrepreneurship and youth unemployment

within Delta state, as it led to the creation of more jobs and forced companies to adapt and become more creative/innovative in the process. The overall sentiments from the study were not positive and some of the negative perspectives are examined in detail below.

“The covid 19 pandemic affected the sales as not much customers came out to patronize us due to lockdown”- ENT3

“The kind of business I am involved in which is 3D wall instalments and wall paper designs for interiors of houses was affected due to low patronage because it of houses was affected due to low patronage because it is only those with money can afford the luxury of decorating their homes.”-ENT4

The negative sentiments presented are mostly evident in businesses that require in-person attendance or physical labour intensive businesses as outlined above. This reduction in business is not unexpected, however, since the main focus of the study was to examine how Covid-19 affected unemployment, the sentiments showed that it was overall positive in spite of the negative impact on business. In the next subsection, the net effect on youth unemployment is examined, to conclusively determine whether the pandemic led to more youth employment or not.

4.4.2 Covid-19 and Youth Unemployment

This sub-section reports on how Covid-19 has influenced unemployment patterns i.e. whether firms were more inclined to hire more people or reduce their workforce. The overall picture of the employment landscape was net positive, as most of the respondents highlighted that they had to recruit more people during the pandemic especially young people with specialist skills related to the internet and social media:

“My experience during the pandemic was fair as I was able to add one more staff to my company.”- ENT2

“I had to increase my online presence with the help of a social media manager.”-ENT4

“It [Covid-19] has played a significance role for my company by enabling us to move our services online or making use of the digital space in doing our business as a media consulting firm. Jobs created include social media manager and SEO specialist.” – ENT9

“Personally, my business thrived through the use of the internet by running adverts via various social media platforms we had to work from home. This enabled us to employ the services of youths who ran adverts, create online banners, media influences etc.”-ENT2

“Essentially the pandemic saw us employing more young people, as we are a very youth focused company and our work is youth oriented and all. We have roughly 5 people working for us, and some additional ad-hoc staff that work with us when we are overwhelmed.”-ENT10

From the data presented above, we see that the firms had employed more young people to cater for the new, innovative demands of the pandemic, which required expertise that are found mostly in young people such as social media managers, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) specialists and other social media/new technologies related roles. As a result, it is easy to conclude that the effect of the pandemic on youth employment was not overtly negative,

however, it created opportunities for them to be able to use skills that they otherwise use in their everyday lives, and adapt them as a career path.

4.5 Government Policy, Covid-19 and Youth Unemployment (SWOT ANALYSIS)

Under this heading, the themes and nodes relating to how government policy and supports contributed to either cushioning or exacerbating the effects of the pandemic on youth unemployment and entrepreneurship are outlined. In order to ensure brevity, these issues are condensed into figure 4.2 below, separating them into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). The SWOT analysis is perhaps one of the most utilised management analysis tool, and was adopted to review the policies implemented by the Delta state government during the pandemic in relation to entrepreneurship and youth unemployment.

The SWOT Analysis tool has been used by several entrepreneurship studies such as Bernard & Victor (2013) and Uma (2013), and is a tried and tested tool for analysing the issues related to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within entrepreneurial ecosystems. In terms of the strengths, the policy of the government to provide Covid-19 supports/loans for businesses as well as training for entrepreneurs. These were regarded as some of the key policy strength areas implemented by the local government within Delta state in relation to entrepreneurs. In terms of weaknesses, some entrepreneurs complained about the refusal of the government to reduce taxes during the pandemic, despite many countries adopting this position. One of the weaknesses highlighted by the respondents is outlined below:

SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE POLICY DIRECTION IMPLEMENTED BY GOVERNMENT DURING COVID-19 IN DELTA STATE

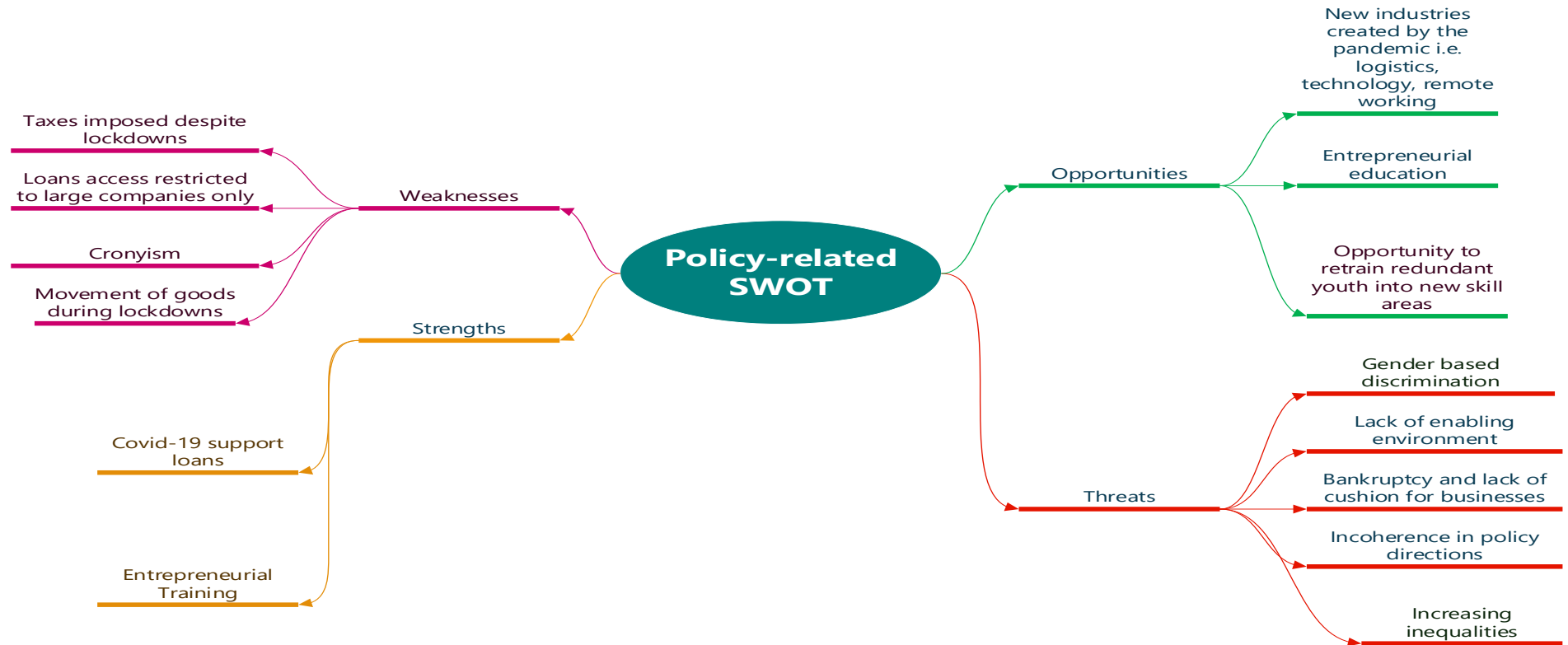


Figure 4.2 Government Policy, Covid-19 and Youth Unemployment (SWOT ANALYSIS)

“During the pandemic, the big companies really enjoyed engagement with the government as they were able to get the Covid-19 loans and other funds released by the government. We could not access these funds as an SME as the government focused on saving the big businesses. So for small businesses, we did not get the required support in comparison to the kind of supports that were provided in other countries. As an SME, we were not opportune to get any of those funds as an SME. In terms of government engagement, we didn’t get as much support as we expected, and the support was available only to large firms. Small scale firms like us were not given access to these funds. I know an entrepreneur of a large firm that got like a billion Naira. A very few number of SME got part of that funding.”- ENT10

The issue outlined above is a serious one faced by entrepreneurs, as government is more disposed to favour large firms as opposed to SMEs, despite most entrepreneurial ventures being SMEs. Access to funding and government support is critical for SMEs, but it appears the Delta state government entrepreneurial policy was weak in this sense and did not allow small scale entrepreneurs access funding support during the pandemic. This was not the case in a country like Ireland, where all types of firms were allowed access to the Covid-19 support funds. This goes to highlight that such issues may be peculiar to developing countries like Nigeria only, as opposed to developed ones like Ireland.

Moving on to the opportunities and threats, one of the key issues mentioned is the increasing inequalities caused by inadequacies in government policies. An example is given below:

“There was no [clear] policy on employment implemented; in fact people barely made it out alive. The situation is terrible most especially in Delta state as youths have resorted to crime.”-

ENT3

Apart from the rising inequality mentioned above and propensity for young people to engage in crime as a result of unclear Government policy, and additional threat mentioned is the issue of gender discrimination especially against women in terms of policy support.

“In Delta state, the government does not offer any support for the women.”-ENT1

With no clear policy on empowering women, especially young women, the government runs a risk of jeopardizing the future of its entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Lastly, there are myriad of opportunities for policy implementation by the Delta state government as shown in figure 4.2. One of the highlighted opportunities is for the government to increase focus on entrepreneurship education and retraining young people into the new/emerging areas that have become popular during the pandemic. A lot of the respondents highlighted having to hire for new skills and sometimes having to bring on consultants such as SEO analysts and social media managers. There is set to be an explosion of requirements for these skills as the pandemic drags on, hence it is a huge opportunity for the government to invest in training and supporting entrepreneurs in this area.

4.6 Business Creation, youth unemployment and the future of entrepreneurship

The aim of this portion of data collected is to understand what the entrepreneurs think of entrepreneurship, how it has led to business creation and the future of entrepreneurship, especially in relation to youth employment in Delta state, Nigeria. The data regarding these three areas are presented in figure 4.3 below, and discussed in further detail afterwards.

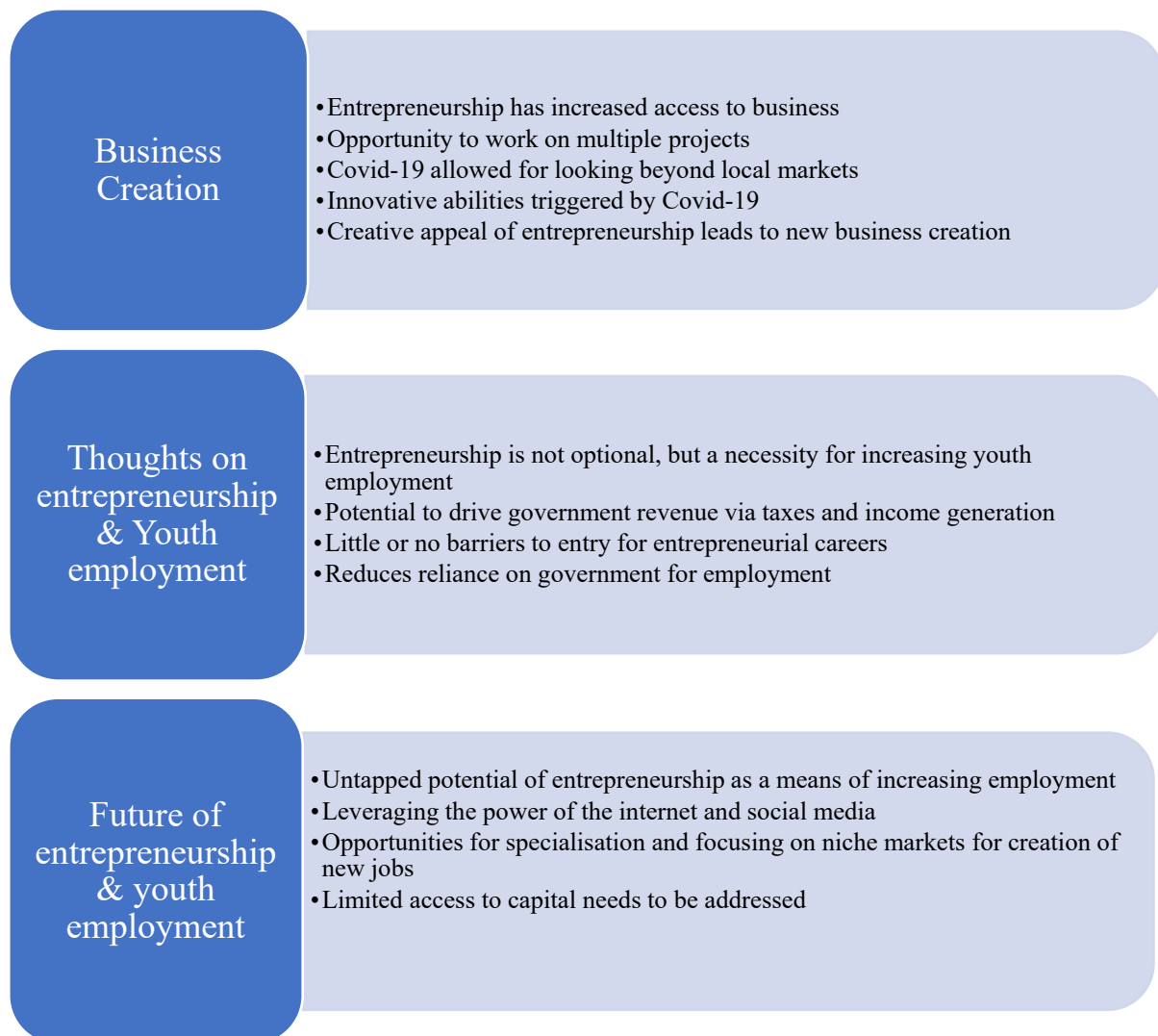


Figure 4.3 Business Creation, youth unemployment and the future of entrepreneurship

From the above diagram, the key issues that emerge is that entrepreneurship is valued as being critical to business creation as seen in the study. Some of the comments from the respondents are outlined below:

“Entrepreneurship ensured that a lot of us here in delta state were able to feed and take care of our families as I was able to create job for myself in the absence of none due to the pandemic. Entrepreneurship helped open up new vistas for wealth creation for us overall”- ENT3

“Entrepreneurship has helped to put food on my table because as a hair stylist, I don’t know what I would have done this period without this hand- work, so it has helped me to feed and take care of myself and family.”-ENT7

The value of entrepreneurship in creating business opportunities during turbulent economic times cannot be underestimated as seen from the responses above, and it is clear that entrepreneurial ventures were really helpful in helping young people stayed engaged and employed during the pandemic.

The last issue for consideration is the future of entrepreneurship and implications for the employment of young people in Delta state in Nigeria. Many of the respondents believe that entrepreneurship will continue to be on the increase in this Nigerian state due to several reasons ranging from the power of the internet/social media to the opportunities for specialisation within the field. The potential for entrepreneurs offering very specialised and niche services was highlighted, as well as the business opportunities present in international markets. The pandemic has made world economies truly borderless, and entrepreneurs can sit in Delta state, Nigeria and work for clients in Europe, Asia and the Americas online. As a result, the consensus is that the internet is crucial to the sustainability of youth entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

4.7 Summary of findings

This chapter has presented the key findings from the study in relation to how entrepreneurship cushions the effect of unemployment during the Covid-19 pandemic. A total of fifteen key summaries can be deduced from the research, five in relation to each research objective identified at the start of the study.

4.7.1 Findings in relation to research objective 1

- Entrepreneurship had a net positive impact on youth employment during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- New jobs were created or increased via entrepreneurship during the lockdowns such as social media managers, search engine optimisation (SEO) specialists and delivery managers.
- The internet was central to the creation of jobs and unemployment reduction via entrepreneurship.
- Porter (1980) diversification and focus strategies were key strategies engaged by entrepreneurs to stay in business during the pandemic.
- While some firms were downsizing, opportunities for starting new ventures and creating niche businesses arose, leading to more potential jobs for young people.

4.7.2 Findings in relation to research objective 2

- Overall, government policy was not favourable to entrepreneurs during the pandemic i.e. the negative impact of policy outweighed the positives
- Government policy focused on provision of palliative funding and training for entrepreneurs.
- The policy direction did not strive to produce enabling environment for the implementation of policies and for entrepreneurs to thrive.
- The government persisted in its restrictive tax policies despite other countries adjusting tax policies to cushion the effect of the pandemic and encourage youth employment
- Policies were targeted at large firms only, with SMEs not feeling the effect of the policies, and consequently affecting their ability to take on more employees.

-

4.7.3 Findings in relation to research objective 3

- Entrepreneurship has increased access to business opportunities and employment in general.
- Entrepreneurial venture triggers the drive for innovation and creativity among young people.
- Limited barriers to entry for young entrepreneurs in Delta state, Nigeria
- Potential for government to increase overall internally generated revenue and gross national product via the promotion of entrepreneurship.

- Entrepreneurship reduces youth reliance on government for employment and promotes independence.

Chapter 5 Conclusions & Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The objective of this research investigation was to explore To explore links between entrepreneurship and job creation/reduction in unemployment among youth in Delta state, Nigeria. The study found that during the pandemic, entrepreneurship had an overall net positive effect on employment creation for young people in Delta state, Nigeria. Ten (10) semi-structured interviews were held with entrepreneurs currently based in Delta state, detailing their experiences within entrepreneurship during the pandemic and drawing lessons from same. The research enquired about how entrepreneurship contributed to job creation and business resilience during the pandemic, especially in terms of employment for young people aged between 18 and 45 years old.

Concerning the creation of jobs, perhaps the most significant finding is that several non-traditional jobs were created during the pandemic via entrepreneurial ventures ranging from tech focused roles such as social media marketers to SEO analysts, while non-tech roles such as drop shippers and logistics roles were also crucial. The study also found that there will be a possible long-term demand for this roles and we would see a surge in entrepreneurial venture into this space.

Policy-wise, entrepreneurs felt that the government policies were not comprehensive enough and also did not address their current needs in sufficient detail. Issues such as access of SMEs to finance and inability of government to follow up training with funding were some of the

issues highlighted, and policy wise, the SWOT analysis conducted showed that the weaknesses and threats far exceeded the strengths and opportunities. This is not a good sign for a government claiming to be pro-business and pro-entrepreneurship, hence it would be a future recommendation that policy-makers engage with entrepreneurs on a one-on-one basis as this study has done to highlight areas of focus of future policymaking.

Lastly, the future of entrepreneurship and youth unemployment is bright and full of potential, based on the findings of the study. The respondents largely believe that due to the low barriers to entry posed to entrepreneurs within the Delta state economy, and the young and highly educated workforce, the state has the potential to become the outsourcing capital of the nation. With its youthful and well education population, there is potential to increase its IGR and foreign generated revenue by leveraging its entrepreneurial populace and equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge required to excel as entrepreneurs. The study also found that entrepreneurship fosters innovation, and this is a great future potential for Delta state and Nigeria as a whole for sustainable job creation and economic growth.

5.2 Research Limitations

There are a number of limitations that posed challenges to the study and limited the generalisability of the findings to the entire Nigerian populace. Three (3) key limitations will now be identified.

First is the issue of Covid-19 itself, which formed part of the basis of the study and became a limitation as well. The researcher could not hold long, detailed, in-person interview sessions due to the limitations on outdoor meetings and restrictions around gatherings implemented during the time of data collection. This affected the quality of data collected as well as the

sample population, as only ten (10) interviewees agreed to be a part of the study despite over thirty (30) people contacted.

Secondly, the cross-sectional nature of the interviews posed another bottleneck to the study as the data was collected only within a particular snapshot of time within one month. Therefore, the study cannot account for variations or difference in opinions of the respondents based on time changes. This limitation was further compounded by the fact that this thesis was written as part of the requirements for a Master's degree award, which needed to be completed within a specific time frame.

Thirdly, the study did not control for what Rosenthal (1979) called the 'file drawer problem', which implies a bias of selection of literature review articles to review. The author acknowledges that the study adopted predominantly Nigerian-focused literature, as they were more closely aligned to the location focus of the study, however, studies from other regions or countries may have been excluded which would have informed richer insights in the analysis.

5.3 Recommendations

Following from the limitations mentioned above, three key recommendations will be provided in line with the limitations encountered. First, the study could have targeted more technology savvy respondents, who would have been able to use tools such as Zoom, Skype or MS Teams to attend interviews. This would have solved the challenges faced due to the in-person interviews conducted. The second recommendation is for the introduction of more engaging methodological approaches, that would have seen the elicitation of more robust findings from respondents such as focus groups or social experiments.

Lastly, future studies are recommended to move beyond subjective, state-specific studies to a wider, more generalisable sample size, such as National studies. These kind of studies will yield data that can be benchmarked against available data from other countries.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form

Dear Ma/Sir/Dr.,

Assessing the role of entrepreneurship in cushioning the impact of youth unemployment amidst covid-19 situation: A Case study of Delta state, Nigeria

I would like to thank you once again for indicating your willingness to be contacted about participation in this M.Sc. Research study. As mentioned to you before, this study seeks to understand how entrepreneurship is helping cushion the effect of youth unemployment amidst Covid-19 situation in Delta State. The study also seeks to understand how you have engaged your entrepreneurial venture to remain in employment and create opportunities, despite the negative impact of the pandemic and suggestions that you might have for government policy regarding entrepreneurship as a means of mitigating youth unemployment.

This survey is completely anonymous and your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this interview, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

Our interview will last approximately one hour during which I will be asking you about your entrepreneurial journey during the Covid-19 pandemic and its link with youth unemployment.

In my initial contact with you at SMEDAN office, you indicated that I have your permission (or not) to contact you to participate in this interview. During this initial contact, you were informed that I may need to record our conversation to aid transcribing. Are you still comfortable with me recording (or not) our conversation today?

Consent: ___ No ___ Yes

If yes: Thank you! Please let me know if at any point you want me to turn off the recorder or keep something you said off the record.

If no: Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our conversation.

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? [Discuss questions]

If any questions (or other questions) arise at any point in this study, you can feel free to ask them at any time. I would be more than happy to answer your questions

CONSENT STATEMENT: ‘I have read the above information and understand the purpose of this study, and I voluntarily agree to participate, understanding that I can leave the survey at any time and under no obligation to complete it’

Consent: ___ No ___ Yes

Date:

Signature:

Kind regards,

Mr. Ejiro Wilson (M.Sc Candidate, National College Ireland)

Appendix B: Code Book from NVivo

Name	Description	Files	References
Business Creation, youth unemployment and the future of entrepreneurship	This node contains information about responses related to how entrepreneurship supports business creation, curbs youth unemployment and what respondents think about the future of entrepreneurship and youth unemployment	10	40
Empowering entrepreneurs	This sub-node contains information on how entrepreneurship empowers young people during the Covid-19 pandemic	6	9
Entrepreneurial Education	This child node chronicles thoughts from the respondents in relation to Entrepreneurial education	2	2
Opportunities for future	This child node contains data on the opportunities for entrepreneurship in curbing future youth unemployment	10	16
Thoughts on Entrepreneurship	This child node contains thoughts on strengths and perceived weaknesses of entrepreneurship in relation to youth unemployment	10	13
Demographics	This node contains information on the demographic information of respondents	10	60
Age Range	This child node contains the age range of the respondents	10	10
25-35 years		7	7
35-45 years		1	1
Less than 25 years old		2	2
Educational Level	This child node contains the educational level of respondents	10	10
NFQ Level 10		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
NFQ Level 6		1	1
NFQ Level 7		0	0
NFQ Level 8		4	4
NFQ Level 9		2	2
Secondary School Education		2	2
Gender	This child node contains the gender of respondents	10	10
Female		3	3
Male		7	7
Home Town	This child node contains the home town or location of business of respondents	10	10
Rural area		1	1
Urban Area		9	9
Number of years in business	This child node contains information on the number of years of entrepreneurial experience held by respondents	10	10
1-3 years		4	4
3-5 years		2	2
Less than a year		0	0
More than 5 years		4	4
Program of Study	This child node contains information on whether respondents have a business background or not	10	10

Name	Description	Files	References
Business Related background		2	2
Non-Business Background		8	8
Government Policy, Covid-19 and Youth Unemployment	This node chronicles the information related to how government policy affects unemployment and entrepreneurship.	10	51
Government engagement with young entrepreneurs and unemployed youth	This child node contains information as to how government policy affects	9	12
Impact of policy on youth employment	This child node contains information regarding how policies have impacted youth unemployment	9	16
Policy strengths and opportunities	This child node contains information on the strength and opportunities present in current government policy towards entrepreneurship amidst the pandemic	9	13
Challenges (Weaknesses/Threats)	This child node contains information on the weaknesses and threats to businesses present in current government policy towards entrepreneurship amidst the pandemic	8	10
Role of Entrepreneurship in curbing youth unemployment	This node contains information on the role of entrepreneurship in cushioning the effects of pandemic induced unemployment	10	32
Impact of Covid-19 on entrepreneurship	This child node contains information on how Covid-19 impacted the entrepreneurial process within Delta state , Nigeria	10	25
Number of employees taken on during Covid-19	This child node contains information about employment/downsizing that occurred during the pandemic	7	7

Appendix C: Sample transcribed/anonymised interview response (ENT10)

How have you engaged entrepreneurship to remain in employment during the Covid-19 pandemic?

10 years in entrepreneurship

male

PhD

Engineering background

25-35 years old

Home town: Ughelli, Delta state

Nature of business

We support clients across a broad range of sectors, and we serve both local and foreign firms in terms of business support, strategy and project management

Impact of Covid-19

The effect of the pandemic on our business was overall positive, as we expanded and were able to take on more employees. Since our office was vacant, we were able to ask employees to work remotely, saving time on their daily commute and also getting more productivity from the employees in the long run. Due to the service-based nature of our business, we discovered that we didn't need to have so many locations, so we downsized and restricted ourselves to one location and we operated out of this office mostly. While our main office stayed open, all of our work was done remotely and all our workers worked offsite for the most part. Essentially the pandemic saw us employing more young people, as we are a very youth focused company

and our work is youth oriented and all. We have roughly 5 people working for us, and some additional ad-hoc staff that work with us when we are overwhelmed. The pandemic has had its positives and negatives, but looking on the positive side, we had to become more agile, flexible and more responsive. In our work. We have expanded our business, and we've had to survive, adapt and to increase our service offerings, moving into sectors we were not operating in before.

On the negative side, we lost some business sectors and closed some business areas that needed lots of physical interactions as people were limited to going out and most physical interactions were required. We also had a high employee turnover due to the pandemic, and we had a lot of people that stopped working with us and moved into new organizations. Overall, entrepreneurship had a very positive effect on our organization during the pandemic.

Govt policy and engagement

During the pandemic, the big companies really enjoyed engagement with the government as they were able to get the Covid-19 loans and other funds released by the government. We could not access these funds as an SME as the government focused on saving the big businesses. So for small businesses, we did not get the required support in comparison to the kind of supports that were provided in other countries. As an SME, we were not opportune to get any of those funds as an SME. In terms of government engagement, we didn't get as much support as we expected, and the support was available only to large firms. Small scale firms like us were not given access to these funds. I know an entrepreneur of a large firm that got like a billion Naira. A very few number of SME got part of that funding.

Unemployment, young people and entrepreneurship

Covid-19 drove a lot of people into entrepreneurship, as a lot of young people were forced to use their skills to create jobs. The pandemic has been positive, as when the regular employment stopped, a lot of people were forced to use the tools they have to create jobs for themselves. We have been able to take on more people and a lot of young entrepreneurs have sprung up, and a lot of young people now use social media to create jobs. We ourselves now market on Upwork and Fiverr, and we not take jobs abroad especially in the US. Covid-19 essentially forced us to start looking beyond the local market to international markets for work and opportunities. So in my opinion, it has been largely positive for the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Access to business opportunities

In terms of opportunities available to me, I would say Entrepreneurship has actually increased my access to businesses and opportunities that I would never have had in paid employment. The kind of people I would never have met, I have met them in the course of being an entrepreneur. I have met clients who have introduced me to bigger projects, and I would say that the opportunities are seamless. We can work for a very diverse audience, including government, corporates and individuals. In paid employment, you may sometimes only work for one single client for years, but at the moment, we have over 46 active clients and projects. That is the joy of being an entrepreneur.

I think the risks of paid employment are more than that of being an entrepreneur, as in paid employment, you can get fired anytime. I know a lot of colleagues who lost their jobs during the pandemic. The barriers to entry for entrepreneurs is low, especially in Delta state. There are lots of ground to cover, and the mistake many make is to only sell to one kind of audience.

The advantage we have is to look beyond the local market, and we go across the country to reach client as well as internationally. We operate in a niche market and the only competition we have is from big consulting firms, so we don't really have that problem with barriers to entry. We are very focused, operate in a niche market and we are very specialist, having a target market. Being an entrepreneur, especially being small scale and lean firm, our numbers are doing quite well.

Future of entrepreneurship in a post-Covid world

The future is positive. We will see more people in entrepreneurship especially in Delta state. If the right support systems are in place, and the private and public sectors work hand in hand, we will see a greater uptake of entrepreneurship in the state, and lead to greater employment. This has the potential to increase the internally generated revenue, and with a very young population and highly skilled/educated one, this state has the potential to be a leading one within Nigeria. This is a huge gold mine that is left untapped, and entrepreneurship has the potential to unlock this potential in the state.