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# Editorial: international enterprise and entrepreneurship education

Editorial

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Since its emergence in December 2019, the ongoing Covid-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019) pandemic has dramatically impacted the infrastructure of most countries, as well as their economies and the behaviour of the population. National, regional and global socioeconomic, cultural and political systems had to radically adapt in an effort to contain the pandemic and protect individuals and communities from health dangers and loss of life. The impact of consecutive “lockdowns”, in general, and physical distancing measures, in particular, have negatively affected both younger and adult individuals that were involved in compulsory and post-compulsory education and training. People engaged in a variety of enterprise and entrepreneurship education courses, in industrially developed and developing countries, as well as in nations in transition, were also affected by the ravages of the ongoing global pandemic. The emergency policies adopted, at short notice, by government agencies appear to have mitigated, at least to some extent, the worst effects of the Covid-19 virus crises. The extent of the overall impact of the pandemic on various levels of the educational system is yet to be fully ascertained.

The first cases of Covid-19 emerged in December 2019 in Wuhan, the capital city of the Hubei province of China. The number of infection grew exponentially, and on 31st December 2019, the Chinese government duly notified the World Health Organisation (WHO) about the emergence of the novel Covid-19. Following the rapid spread of infection cases from China to other countries and regions, on 30th January 2020 the WHO issued a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” warning, which was followed, on 11th March 2020, by a “Global Pandemic” announcement. Regular WHO updates charted the rapid spread of the Covid-19 virus and related variants across most countries and all continents, with the exception of Antarctica.

At the time of writing (June 2021) the Editorial to the 22nd consecutive double special issue to be published in *Education + Training* since it first appeared in late autumn of 2000, it is still not possible to establish the full extent of the Covid-19 crisis and its impact upon the education and training endeavours of individuals. Much of what we know about its impact on schools, colleges and universities across the world originates from incomplete formal and informal data, as gleaned from government publications, media outlets and “grey” literature. Although the estimated number of individuals in education varies from hundreds of millions to nearly two billion, it is becoming increasingly clear that a considerable proportion has been negatively affected by intermittent closures of educational outlets. In addition, some important shortcomings have emerged in relation to the ability of such institutions to adapt to life threatening crises and pandemic related barriers to learning and knowledge transfer. The combined efforts of teachers and parents to deliver home schooling resulted in some resemblance of educational continuity, albeit with considerable decline in standards, expectations and levels of success. Undergraduates, as well as postgraduates and doctoral students, also experienced severe difficulties caused by the drastic reduction in teaching and research standards, despite the concerted efforts of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to compensate for, and overcome the, lack of face-to-face contact and non-campus attendance. Even institutions than previously relied on distance learning modes of teaching and assessment, still experienced a marked decline in education delivery, fluidity and loss of direct control.

As an important component of international education and learning provision across industrially developed and developing nations, enterprise and entrepreneurship education was significantly affected by the difficult socio-economic and political conditions generated by the



global Covid-19 crises. A wide range of this type of education was traditionally delivered by universities, in general, and business schools, in particular. Despite the recent growth of entrepreneurship-related education within compulsory education and relevant provision within non-business faculties, the monopoly of entrepreneurship education and training remained firmly entrenched in teaching taking place in business schools. During the initial phases of the pandemic, however, an inherent lack of flexibility and adaptability in teaching and assessment methods became visible in business schools. Specifically, the rigidity of business school managerial, administrative and teaching structures proved a disadvantage. It manifested itself in relatively low levels of innovation abilities and a lack of alternatives to its traditional, face-to-face teaching and formal assessment methods. At the height of the first Covid-19 wave, and in order to safeguard their staff and students, a large proportion of HEIs discontinued all their face-to-face education provision and campus attendance. The sudden, crisis enforced transfer to off-campus learning. This, however, largely failed to maintain the pace, quantity and quality of enterprise and entrepreneurship education. Furthermore, in the first phase of the pandemic, priority was given to “bread and butter” courses and the fulfilment of full-time student contracts. As social distancing and restrictive movement policies continued, a number of virtual teaching and distance learning strategies were adopted, developed and tested. These also met with various levels of success, but the quantity and quality of enterprise and entrepreneurship education slowly improved, towards more acceptable levels.

I remain confident that beyond the ravages of the Covid-19 global pandemic lays the promise of a better, more effective and highly efficient international enterprise and entrepreneurship education. The magnitude and multitude of barriers to learning that were faced, and largely overcome by the international community, resulted in a more positive, collaborative and enhanced approach to individual and community learning. The new, inclusive approach allows for a better understanding as well as a wider conceptualisation and contextualisation of stakeholders’ attitudes, needs and expectations. It also facilitates better communication and enhanced collaboration strategies between a variety of major and minor stakeholders, along well-defined and mutually agreed enterprise and entrepreneurship goals. Over the last three decades or so, I endeavoured to champion for better and more focused use of available resources. I suggested ways to ensure a collaborative and transparent approach to educational delivery and assessment at all levels of the educational system. I offered an agenda and relevant models for a continuing enterprise and entrepreneurship education approach, well beyond pre-start up provision. In this context, I sincerely hope that the Covid-19 crises will provide not only the opportunity for more effective, efficient and focussed enterprise and entrepreneurship education but also the socio-economic and political support that would herald the beginning of a truly entrepreneurial, sustainable and equitable society.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to our authors, referees and advisors, who contributed their expertise, hard work and commitment to the delivery of the 2021 double special issue. I would like to also thank Dr Martin McCracken, the Editor of *Education + Training*, and the production team at Emerald Publishing Group, for their continuing and generous support.

**Harry Matlay**