RESEARCHING AFRICAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE UK

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Abstract: This chapter discusses some methodological difficulties the UK's African entrepreneurs face and the strategies that may be applied to overcome the constraints. Situated within the interpretive research paradigm, idiosyncratic sampling procedures were systematically applied to select a useful/reflective sample. To achieve a higher level of data purification and reliability, non-Black Africans were screened out of the sample. To control for errors/biases, a 'control group' was created and used throughout the pre-fieldwork, data collection and analyses stages of the research – in a discovery-oriented way. There is a general lack of appreciation of the spatial and temporal contexts of African entrepreneurship in the UK. Efforts at researching the phenomenon using normative approaches have been fuzzy and fraught with complications. This chapter heightens the need for pragmatism and reflexivity in research ethnic entrepreneurship. Adherence to established conventions is useful but may not be adequate in all cases to uncover and communicate the object under study. The research protocol described in this chapter needs to be replicated in order to improve its richness. Many researchers in this particular area of inquiry grapple with poorly understood problems largely due to their single reality methodological orientations. Those seeking to enter the field may sometimes find themselves going outside the 'regulated path' of inquiry. The chapter identifies a lacuna that need to be addressed in order to advance ethnic entrepreneurship research and offers practical help in researching a theme on which 'so little' is known.

Keywords: African entrepreneurship; research methods; London.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, encouraging ethnic minority communities into business has not only been an implicit feature of the government policy on entrepreneurship but also a key plank of the 'social inclusion' agenda. However, although, there is a rich and growing body of knowledge on entrepreneurship among the UK's ethnic minority population, concerns have been expressed about the general lack of awareness of how ethnic enterprises might be defined, differentiated and characterised (Nwankwo, 2003). Essentially, ethnic minority enterprises are far more diverse than is generally

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assumed (Nwankwo and Lindridge, 1998). Consequently, there are gaps in the existing knowledge and these tend to manifest themselves in a range of intervention strategies targeted at the sector. What is generally observable is that while the more historically and entrepreneurially visible sub-groups (e.g., Asians) have tended to attract research interests, the 'emergent' entrepreneurial subgroups (e.g., Africans and Caribbeans) have become subsumed in generalisations ascribable to the former. This is rather surprising in view of the fact that the UK has the largest population of people of Black origin in Europe. Also, the findings of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report (GEM, 2002) provides some interesting insights into how African-owned businesses are evolving. It indicates that Africans are five times as likely to be involved in an autonomous business start-up compared to Whites.

> "African people are the most likely to see good business opportunities and have the highest *Total Entrepreneurial Activity Index* (TEA) overall of all ethnic groupings."

Recently, however, there has been a gradual recognition for Black African business skills. In fact, the past two decades have seen profound increases in the number of Black African men and women entering self-employment and business ownership in the UK. This trend imposes an urgent need to generate better information to enable an informed and empirically grounded profile of African entrepreneurship to be developed. Whilst the need to fill this long-standing gap in knowledge is indisputable, those who have undertaken research on the topic are all too clear about the inherent difficulties involved in engaging and researching the phenomenon (Nwankwo, 2003).

Accordingly, this chapter, based on insights gained from a study of "African Entrepreneurship in London", funded by the Leverhulme Trust, illustrates some of the underlying methodological difficulties in researching this population group and the strategies applied to overcome some of the constraints.

THE THEORETIC CONTEXT

Methodological issues, generally, have always been contentious in social science research (Fusari, 2004), even so in the specific field of entrepreneurship (Busenitz et al, 2003; Cope, 2005) and ethnic research (Stanfield, 1994). This is not surprising, after all, "researchers never seem to agree" in matters of 'truth' and methods (Lithman, 2004, p.155).

We are constantly reminded that methodology in any research situation is a minefield, "put a foot wrong and you are blown away". In many situations, methodological issues are treated sanctimoniously. For this reason, many researchers see themselves are as "tightrope dancers in a scientific arena" – performing all sorts of balancing acts (Gummesson, 2001). In order to conform to the orthodoxy, investigative approaches are guided by a desire to adhere to formal rules or standardised procedures. For example, the work by Coviello and Jones (2004) was aimed at "developing a unifying methodological approach" in the field of international entrepreneurship. But, as Collin (1985) argues,

> "... rules are rules by virtue of social conventions ... it is not the regularity of the world that imposes itself on our senses but the regularity of our institutionalised beliefs that imposes itself on the world." (quoted in Mishler, 1990, p.415)

Contemporary researchers of the interactive persuasion (e.g., Gummesson, 2001) have

argued that an assessment of research protocol should depend on the tacit understanding of actual, situated, practice in a field of inquiry. This is not a weakness, but a

> "hallmark of interpretive research in which the key problem is understanding how individuals interpret events and experiences, rather than assessing whether or not their interpretations correspond to or mirror the researchers' interpretive construct of 'objective' reality." (Mishler, 1990, p.427)

In the specific area of entrepreneurship, the debate on the method of research has ranged over a vast array of topics (Coviello and Jones, 2004; Busenitz et al., 2003; Westhead and Cowling, 1998). Whilst enormous efforts have been made to shed light on this contested topic (e.g., Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004), success has been modest especially when related to the particular field of ethnic entrepreneurship (Stanfield, 1994). The causes are inextricably linked to the high degree of dynamism, pervasive fragmentation and scope of the informal ethnic economy (Nwankwo, 2005). Thus, the intensification of work on these aspects has revealed the inadequacy of traditional research methods and analysis (Nwankwo, 2003). This may not be peculiar to ethnic entrepreneurship research but nevertheless points to the fundamental methodological problem: drawing up analytical criteria capable of identifying general principles and sound, reliable knowledge (Fusari, 2004). Therefore, doing research that is useful to the practice of ethnic entrepreneurship (Mohrman et al., 2001) implicitly requires pragmatism and sensitivity to the contextual nature of the phenomenon (Cope, 2005). This is possible when efforts are made to remove the wage that is often but inadvertently created between the researcher and the researched. In many instances, this wage arises from a single reality philosophical orientation prevalent in established research conventions especially in some of the traditional sciences. Consequently, the ontological stance of the procedure illustrated in this chapter is that ethnic entrepreneurship research should be firmly rooted in the acceptance of multiple realities and in an epistemological approach which recognises the importance of minimising the distance between the researcher and the researched (Hill and McGowan, 1999). This procedure implies a shift from group or organisational levels of analysis to detailed, situated and concrete practices and interactions (Allard-Poesi, 2005). From this interactive/interpretive perspective, the research focus is on the idiosyncratic and inter-subjectively created meaning that people attach to their entrepreneurial experiences – driven by a desire to enter the world of the informant, they take the point of view of those studied and understand the situated character so as to be able to develop second-order interpretation that is grounded in first-hand data (Allard-Poesi, 2005).

RESEARCH PROTOCOLS AND PROCEDURES

Methodological appropriateness rather than orthodoxy was fundamental in the design of the project – a clear departure from the 'structuro-functionalist perspective' of conventional 'scientific' research protocols (Allard-Poesi, 2005). One of the recurrent concerns about action research in the study of entrepreneurship revolves around sample selection, that is, whether samples used by researchers have any similarities to the overall population studied. This is a problem that confronts nearly every research context, irrespective of methodological approaches (Newby et al., 2003). Gartner (1989) suggests that idiosyncratic sample may be used

when the population to be studied is diffused. This is particularly the case with immigrant Africans in the UK. Many of them are not on the electoral roll due to immigration problems and/or concerns over a range of issues related to legitimacy of residential or work status in the UK (Nwankwo, 2003). With information gained from the samples, selected idiosyncratically at the outset, it may subsequently become feasible to apply methods that allow 'grounded theory' to be derived from the data (Dey, 1999; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In this approach, researchers will immerse themselves in all responses and, out of a thorough knowledge of this information, employ a methodology that enables the "grounding of theory upon data through data-theory interplay" – by making of constant comparisons, asking of theoretically oriented questions, theoretical coding, and the development of theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.294).

Given this principle, a clear choice was made at the outset to use context-driven 'focus groups' and personal interviews as means of data collection. This position was informed by a number of factors, viz.:

- wide consultation with specialist researchers in the field of ethnic entrepreneurship
- insights gained from related studies but carried out in different contexts (e.g., Basu and Goswami, 1999; Fadahunsi et al., 2000)
- discovery oriented positioning of the project (Mahrer, 1988)
- result of an initial attempt to generate statistical information (using questionnaires) at the preliminary phase of the research.

The last point needs further elaboration. The choice of a methodological approach (i.e., context-sensitive face to face interviews) was largely forced by the setback suffered with an attempted use of the questionnaire method at the start of the project. We sought to generate 'hard data' that would not only provide an indication of issues to drill-down during the full-scale fieldwork but also provide initial statistical information regarding patterns, perceptions, and attitudes of African entrepreneurs. For this purpose, a total of 270 questionnaires were sent to African-owned businesses – using a sample drawn from databases maintained by Black Training and Enterprise Group, Black African Enterprises in London, African news magazines and ancillary databases (e.g., local ethnic press). Out of this figure, only 26 duly completed and usable questionnaires were returned. A significant percentage was returned as 'undeliverable'. Given this disappointing response rate a decision was made to discontinue this method of data gathering. However, a clear lesson emerged from this experience. We relied too much on the notion that self-identity of both the Principal Researcher and the Research Assistant (both of Black African origin) might generate enthusiasm and thus ensure a high response rate. Seemingly, we underestimated the depth of initial, informal, 'get-to-know-you door-knocking' (links and networks) that needed to be accomplished before this type of venture could yield positive results. The experience was not an isolated case. In a study by Fadahunsi et al. (2000) covering the same sample group, in-group facilitators were employed and these proved useful in negotiating access into tightly-knit intra-ethnic groups.

Consequently, an alternative procedure was considered which could afford a wealth of insight that a structured survey might not. Therefore, the 'idiosyncratic sample of convenience' protocol was adopted (Allard-Poesi, 2005), which was considered appropriate for the purpose. This approach is popular among qualitative researchers and was recently applied by Foley (2003) in an

examination of indigenous Australian entrepreneurs (see also Pires et al. (2003) study of ethnic marketing focused on the Portuguese community in Sydney, Australia).

Key features of the research design: The research design was underpinned by three fundamental considerations:

i procedure for identifying and interviewing the entrepreneurs

ii control (sounding) group

iii research instruments and the content of the interviews.

i Procedure for identifying the entrepreneurs

The first stage in identifying and interviewing the entrepreneurs involved large-scale screening to create a representative sample of African entrepreneurial activities. This first effort to locate a random sample of Black African entrepreneurs involved an application of multiplicative sampling (Reynolds, 2000). This required a systematic procedure to identify a representative sample of networks of entrepreneurial activities of Black Africans in the UK. This was a very onerous task largely because of the multifarious nature of African entrepreneurial processes. To overcome this problem, it was decided that any subject who was adjudged suitable for the purpose of this research would be requested to provide a lead to somebody else – a strategy that is broadly similar to snowball sampling. However, it differs procedurally from snowball sampling in one important respect. As recommended by Reynolds (2000), when a person is interviewed, s/he is asked questions that will make it possible to determine the probability that she or he would be nominated by more than one person from the sample population. This allowed the use of the information from the procedure to compute the probability with which entrepreneurship occurs or unravels in the total population. Once the screening procedures were completed, detailed telephone contacts, face-to-face interviews, and focus groups followed.

ii Control (sounding) group

One of the unique features in the design of the project was the use of a control sample. Its major role was to act as a 'sounding board' in ferreting out the mundane and subterranean issues that could be ethnically ingrained in modes of thought and behaviour and, therefore, not easily detectable (Nwankwo and Lindridge, 1998). For this purpose, a representative sample was randomly, but discretionarily, selected and continuously used. The group comprised representatives drawn from;

a The more established entrepreneurs with a sustained record of achievements in their respective sectors of activity. Five people agreed to participate at this level. The idea was to gain well-grounded insights so as to help distinguish entrepreneurial behaviours/activities that may be regarded as either normative or non-normative. It became apparent very early in the project that there were a lot of 'under-ground' activities that often got masked as formal entrepreneurial undertakings, thus making it difficult for 'outsiders' to distinguish genuine entrepreneurs from the not-so-genuine ones.

b *Community leaders*: Five people were co-opted in this capacity. African communities are very difficult to penetrate for research purposes. It was originally expected that 'access' would be easy because of the researchers' ethnic background – being of African ethnic identity. This did not work out as the research itself was viewed with suspicion and distrust at the outset. Therefore, it became necessary

to 'build bridges' – through trusted gatekeeper-networks. This proved to be particularly helpful.

c *Academics*: Five individuals participated in this capacity – helping with the conduct of focus groups and, above all, provided valuable opinions as the research progressed.

The reason for establishing the 'control group' was to be able to tap into the knowledge and 'privileged information' which the members, collectively and individually, share as a result of their long years of experience of advising and working within the population group. One of the important criteria for selection to the group was willingness to participate. In addition to the gate-keeping or door-opening role of the community leaders, for example, they helped to elicit sensitive information. Overall, the control group served as a backdrop for synthesising issues emanating from the fieldwork. The group held meetings periodically at African social centres in London throughout the pre-fieldwork, data collection and analysis stages of the project. Undoubtedly, this dimension substantially increased the cost of the project as 'refreshments' were provided during each meeting – this proved to be a major incentive for attendance. Information and opinions generated from this group afforded novel insights into a wide range of issues relating to the dynamics of African entrepreneurship. As the research was designed for discovery rather than confirmation of hypotheses and theories, this 'discovery oriented' approach (Mahrer, 1988) was useful and consistent, in principle, with procedures prevalently used in management research (Nwankwo, 2000).

i Research instrument: content of the interviews

For the reason given above, the attributional questions used in the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics (PSED), and adopted by Shaver et al. (2001), were first used during the exploratory interview stage. The four open-ended questions are:

- Why did you start this business?
- Why do you expect the business to be successful?
- What are the major problems you have had in running this business?
- What other major problems do you expect in the future?

Interviews utilised open-ended questions to elicit stories and perceptions about the experiences of Black Africans in the context of their entrepreneurial processes. Participants were contacted by telephone or linked up through the 'network' and invited to participate in personal interviews conducted at the office of the respondent or an appropriate public location (usually African social centres). Interviews were conducted in English. Data were recorded in the form of field notes and tape recordings (having obtained clearance for the use of the latter prior to taping). The objective of this method was to promote 'story telling' through qualitative analysis of informant oral histories that resulted in a delineation of consistent and consensual meanings within the specialised context of entrepreneurship. To achieve this, informant histories were elicited through in-depth and group interviews to accomplish 'script interrogation' (for a detailed procedural guide, see for example, the collection of work by Hjorth and Steyaert (2004)).

Based on an analysis of the exploratory attributional questions, the interview scope was widened. The format was adapted from the databases of the National Panel Study of US business startups (Reynolds, 2000).

Items (questions) were organised around the following domain:

- Introductory conversation
- Start-up activities
- Firm registration
- Nature of start up
- Start-up team
- Social network
- Start-up funding requirements
- Market, competition assessment
- Competitive strategy
- Knowledge, use of assistance
- Future expectations
- Personal decision-making style
- Current labour force activity
- Work, career experience
- Residential tenure, migration
- Respondent birth order
- Family business background
- Household structure
- Household income and net worth.

Focus group questions were based on the thrusts of the in-depth open-ended interviews. The questions were designed to generate responses that were undirected by the focus group facilitators and to maximise the discussion forum by minimal restriction of the discussion material. Complementarily, the guide was taken from Fielden et al. (2000), encompassing the following seven question guides:

- Why do/did you want to run your own business?
- What problems have you encountered in starting-up your business?
- What help have you had in setting-up in business?
- What other help/assistance would be/would have been useful?
- What are your future plans?
- What have you learned from your experiences that you feel may help others who are interested in setting-up their own businesses?
- Is there anything we have not covered that you feel is relevant?

Data analysis: Data were analysed using an iterative strategy to extract thematic categories that cut across cases (Huberman and Miles, 1994). First, the comments were grouped by similarity of content. This gave weight to the informants' implicit theories of the world (Harre and Secord, 1973). Next, a variety of questions were asked of the data to find support for the research questions; relevant comments were extracted, and categories were formed. Cross-referencing systems were developed to allow data to be easily located while retaining its original context.

Fourty sessions were held (both focus and in-depth interviews) – amounting to over 2000 min of tape-recorded data. This excludes data generated through the exploratory phase of the project. After the interviews, the tapes and field-notes were transcribed and subjected to ethnographic analysis (Weitzman and Miles, 1995). We were particularly interested in coding those comments about ethnic-related business activities. Both the Principal Researchers and the Research Assistant read the entire interview transcript and compared notes about the range of remarks and the similari-

ties and differences among them. Principal strands of interview data were also cross-checked with the control group. The pattern that emerged was coded, and definitions were constructed for the codes. The codes were then checked by an independent rater for reliability. Consistency was estimated at 96% – well within the range of acceptability. In addition, the validity of findings was cross-checked by the members of the control group. Given the exploratory purpose of the project, this validity check was considered sufficient.

Although a large of amount of data was generated during this project, it was felt that an iterative strategy that cut across cases (Miles and Huberman, 1994) would be more useful and, thus, was applied in presenting the findings. This was mainly because of the underlying motivation to use cases to draw specific implications and contribute rich insights into the subject matter of the research. To achieve this, it was important that a 'connected narrative' approach (Nwankwo, 2000) was applied in order to maintain richness of context, enhance transparency of the analysis and, very importantly, share authorship with respondents (Mishler, 1990).

Respondent anonymity: For some understandable reasons (e.g., issues related to tax and immigration status, confidentiality of net/personal worth, to which many respondents showed sensitivity), the majority of the respondents wanted and were promised anonymity. Their names, addresses and phone numbers are not disclosed.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY: EXCLUDED SAMPLES

From the planning phase of the project, it was felt that a proper delineation of the scope of the study was necessary because of the heterogeneous nature of the population of interest. Without this, it will be difficult to make sense of the data, in a way that could uniquely and robustly capture the underlying objectives of the study. In this regard, we sought to mark out the boundaries of the study by specifying the reasons why some sectors of the sample population would be excluded from the project. Two principal concerns emerged in this context:

a What dimension of 'business' to include or exclude

b Whether the focus should be on African entrepreneurs in general, irrespective of racial divide.

a Types of enterprises to include or exclude

From the outset, there was a compelling need to separate the UK's mainstream African ethnic economy from the 'informal African ethnic economy'. A significant proportion of Africans interviewed during the 'profiling' phase of the project classified themselves (in terms of occupation) as being 'in business'. Thus, "I am in business" or "I am a businessman" (or woman) resonated as a core professional identifier; an identity catchphrase that was in many cases amorphously and surreptitiously applied to capture a range of non-mainstream but nevertheless entrepreneurial activities. In some instances, the phrase was used when respondents intentionally wanted to say very little about the particular field of activity in which they were engaged. Thus, 'being in business' could euphemistically mean that respondents were engaged in activities that may be 'unreportable' in any formal sense. For this reason, it was considered necessary to seek to distinguish formal entrepreneurial activities from the informal economy activities. For the sake of simplicity, we classify the informal economy as largely,

but not exclusively, a non-entrepreneurial activity sector and broadly analogous to the informal sector. We adopted this simplistic stance because of our awareness that 'informal economy/informal sector' is a contested concept, value-laden and context-dependent (Rauch, 1991). Perhaps, a little more detail could help shed more light on this.

Although there is a wide range of perspectives on, and definitions of, the informal sector (Fall, 1989; Gang and Gangopadhay, 1990) it loosely refers to economic activities that are not recorded in the national accounts, and not subject to formal rules of contract, licensing, labour inspection, reporting and taxation (International Labour Organisation, 1993). Much of what is labelled as informal sector activities would seem to comprise basic personal survival activities that creates little in the way of sustainable employment or wealth, demonstrating more of an 'instantaneous opportunity mind-set' on the part of participants. This explanation may be different in many developing countries where the informal sector has been proved to be a formidable institutional perquisite for efficient distribution of goods and employment creation (Fall, 1989; Qua-Enoo, 2003). However, as Morris and Pitt (1995) argued, the skills needed to operate in the sector are not necessarily those that are taught through the formal education system but acquired through ethnic-based networks. In the UK, severe labour market disadvantages faced by Black people have meant that many highly qualified Africans who are not able to secure employment in the formal sector are increasing being drawn into the informal sector (Nwankwo, 2005). Arguably, the scope and importance of informal activities tend to parallel the level of poverty, marginalisation and underemployment in the economy. A study of informal business activities identifies four main categories (Morris and Pitt, 1995):

- trading and hawking
- production and construction
- services
- illicit activities.

The size of this sector in London is growing very rapidly (and fragmenting) but this pattern is not dissimilar from what is generally observable of other 'disadvantaged' ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, we decided to exclude the sector's activities largely because of lack of transparency in many of the associated activities. Thus, four tests were applied to qualify for inclusion in the sample. These were:

- the business must be registered
- it must be traceable and possibly have an official address
- makes annual tax returns
- have an identifiable official employee.

With these checks in place, it was possible to exclude a range of 'entrepreneurs' and 'enterprises', especially those that may, at best, be described as 'fly by night' type of entrepreneurial activities.

b Black and White or Black African entrepreneurs?

The second maze that needed to be untangled in delineating the scope of the sample related to concerns about how the study was to be focused. Should the focus be on African entrepreneurship in broad terms (irrespective of racial categories) or be more narrowly focused on Black Africans? Why would this be a concern?

It was reasoned that an 'African ethnic economy' is rather a misnomer and could be problematic for this sort of study. The

assumption that the boundaries of 'African ethnic economy' within the UK are coterminous with those of continent-origin immigrant groups could be unstable, unreliable and unsafe. For example, if Black and White Africans were juxtaposed, the African ethnic economy will be found to suffer severe 'internal ethnicity' (Light et al., 1993). Internal ethnicity is said to exist when an immigrant ethnic group contains sub-groups, the immigrants' area of origin is ethnically heterogeneous, or in less heterogeneous cases, there is migrant selectivity along ethnic lines, and derives from presumptive sources of convenience, trust and chauvinism that might explain ethnic economic clustering (Light et al., 1993).

Obviously, there are socio-historical, cultural and religious differences amongst immigrants from different regions of Africa (North/Mediterranean, West, East, Southern, Central, Anglophone, Francophone, etc.). However, the variation in the heterogeneity of UK Africans is more profound among Black than among White Africans. There is a higher degree of 'sameness' between White Africans and the dominant/host (Caucasian) population than it is with Black Africans. Essentially, the dissimilarity index, DI (Massey and Denton, 1988) between White Africans and White British will tend towards zero (low amount of dissimilarity). Comparable DI with Black Africans will tend towards 100% (large amount of dissimilarity). For this reason, it was felt that that any possible inclusion of White Africans in the sample could potentially distort the data. Hence, a decision was reached to focus exclusively on Black African entrepreneurs.

This made a great deal of sense. To check on the 'safety' of this position, a White African Professor of Management (in one of the universities located in London) was consulted for his comments. Having published widely in the field of Human Relations Management, he opined that Black Africans cannot be put on the same pedestal as White Africans in the degree of their respective special acceptance and acculturation into the mainstream British society. More over, 'ethnic disadvantages' faced by both groups vary widely. He argued that

> "one should not also forget the fact that many White Africans in the UK were already established in Africa ... coming to the UK with skills and easily employable capital ... (These) put them at an advantage in negotiating business deals, (e.g., with bank managers), getting to grips with the general economic realities ... social acceptance."

CONCLUSIONS

In line with a reflexive approach, and the exhortation for a methodological rethink in entrepreneurship research (Westhead and Cowling, 1998), it is important that researchers report not just what they found but how they have gone about doing it. Until recently, there has been little discussion of the notion articulated by Johnson and Duberley (2003, p.1279) that in order to understand ourselves as researchers and educators, "we must engage with ourselves through thinking about our own thinking". By emphasising the tools usually applied to make sense of organisational life, researchers have tended to lose sight of the fact that our experience and research are equally structured by the methodological tools we use to uncover and communicate the objects under study. Changing one's methodological tools changes the way one 'sculpts' reality. This encourages us to use or invent new tools so as to make sense differently (Allard-Poesi, 2005, p.191). Whilst strict

adherence to the established convention is desirable in many contexts, Gummesson (2001) reminds us that research strategies revolve around four principal considerations: curiosity, courage, reflection and dialogue. These considerations emboldened us to devise ways of 'letting reality tell its own story on its own terms'. For example,

- The use of a 'control group' was a novelty and proved very useful in checking for errors/biases, facilitating access to the sample population and jointly participating in interpreting the results of the research.
- Management of 'data collection environment' was a critical determinant of success in this research context. To create an environment conducive for data collection, the process was made less officious and more personable (e.g., using African social centres as meeting points) but without losing sight of the overarching goal of the project.
- The method used to target and engage the population of interest has an important lesson: anyone seeking to use public information data sources (e.g., Business Link) to reach African entrepreneurs in significant numbers may not achieve much success. The use of informal networks proved particularly important.
- The approach taken in the sample selection (i.e., excluded sample) helped to ensure an appropriate level of data purification and richness of data itself.

This project heightens the need for pragmatism and reflexivity in ethnic entrepreneurship research. Many researchers in this arena grapple with new and poorly understood problems. For example, broad classifications are typically used in the study of ethnic entrepreneurship (Nwankwo, 2003). While this is of value in terms of the research undertaken, the allocation of ethnic entrepreneurs into such broad undifferentiated categories is of limited use if we seek to understand the processes that account for the spatial and temporal dimensions of their entrepreneurialism. For example, the category 'black entrepreneurs' may probably not mean a great deal unless one is clear about the specific target sub-group within the overall population.

Overall, an empirical investigation of ethnic entrepreneurship is not straightforward. Those seeking to enter the field may sometimes find themselves going outside the regulated paths of inquiry; they are likely to meet with the unexpected, ask and be asked the unexpected and sometimes receive unexpected answers. Therein lies an important lesson for entrepreneurship education. As Fiet (2000a, 2000b) argues, one of the ways of making the teaching of entrepreneurship more interesting is by making teaching less predictable. "Teachers are at fault if they fail to teach students to apply theory in surprising ways" (Fiet, 2000a, p.101). As teachers, we cannot create the classroom surprises if do not seek to enlarge our epistemological perspective by being adventurous in our approaches to research. It is in this realm that this chapter makes an interesting case study.

Furthermore, this project has enabled us to appreciate 'how so little' is generally known about African entrepreneurship in the UK. What we have achieved in this report is to use a big brush to sweep across the whole area in the hope that further attempts will be made to engage, more rigorously, a lot of issues that beg for attention – and there are many of those issues. Interestingly, we generated a robust dataset (a major accomplishment at this stage of development of the research). This will enable follow-on studies to continue and from there, ferret out new areas for scholarly investigation.

However, due to the limitations of the methodology applied, it was not possible to obtain adequate data in a number of thematic categories or engage some issues that are likely to have far-reaching consequences for the development of African entrepreneurship in the UK. Without doubt, it is an area with huge exploratory capacity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research grant from the Leverhulme Trust is gratefully acknowledged.

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