

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: A BRIDGE FOR SELF RELIANCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This was a position paper set out to x-ray the extent to which fresh/young Nigerian graduates could become self-employed after graduation, given the enormous entrepreneurial opportunities at their disposal, but for which they seem ignorant. The paper enumerates the dimensions of benefits (such as skills empowerment, reduction in unemployment and sustainable development, among others) accruing to the individual as well as the nation as a whole if entrepreneurial education is exposed to every individual who passes through a tertiary educational system. The paper thus goes on to highlight the concept of entrepreneurial education, historical antecedents in the Nigerian nation, the anticipated benefits in terms of sustainable development and the challenges of effective implementation of the system, which include among others; huge financial involvement to train resource personnel and provide the equipment for sustaining the system. By concluding that entrepreneurship education is the springboard for self-reliance and sustainable development of Nigeria, it recommended training of facilitators through seminars, workshops, etc, to update their knowledge and methodologies as well as provision of facilities for effective implementation of the courses.

The aim of every society is to prepare every citizen to take his/her place functionally in the society. This implies that as there are ailing problems in the society threatening to annihilate the being of man, education comes in to solve such problems by appeasing such forces. It serves as a vehicle for bringing these aims into reality. In Nigeria for example, there is the ailing problem of unemployment and under employment. This situation is an indication of an unfulfilled goal of education.

The commitment to provide relevant education to enable citizens contribute to their community's growth is enshrined in the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) which in part is stated thus: The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mentally and physically as equipment for individuals to live and contribute to the development of the society. But the problem of integrating the youths in the society's social and economic systems remains unsolved in Nigeria. There exists an alarming increase in unemployment, lack of job satisfaction and frustration especially among young university graduates.

Ogidi (1995), opined that the society sees education as something that guarantees the educated, immediate employment soon after leaving school; so anything short of this is perceived as faulty or defective. Similarly, Babalola (2007), observed that one major human capita assumption is that after finishing formal tertiary education, graduates should be able to afterwards make a successful transition from these institutions of higher learning to become productive workers, self-reliant entrepreneurs, responsible parents, good citizens, selfless leaders and live healthy lives.

Today, however, there are many graduates who are unemployed, and who cannot employ themselves. A survey conducted by the Federal Ministry of Education as reported by Chiachemen (2007) indicated that 71% of students who graduated from Nigerian Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education in the last six years are yet to find jobs. Benson (2004) stated that only ten

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percent (10%) of about 100,000 graduates within the age range (18 – 35) years have the prospect of securing employment on graduation from our tertiary institutions yearly.

In his findings, Onwukwe (2009) recently reported that about 200,000 graduates are produced each year and only 25% are absorbed, leaving 75% in a perpetual labour market without any hope of gainful employment. He added that even the 25% that were lucky to be employed are mostly underemployed. This may be partly due to the curricula of the tertiary institutions of learning, which lay emphasis on training for white-collar jobs. It is explicitly clear that no nation can survive in the face of successive job rates of unemployment because of the attendant waste of human resources. In this era of global economic and other socio-political and cultural challenges, functional knowledge and skills remains the key to sustainable economic development. There is the need to emphasize clearly at this juncture that to overcome untold hardship caused by the global economic meltdown, many countries of the world have introduced one form of economic policy or the other to improve on their economic condition. The most successful and important one has been placed on entrepreneurship. Buttressing on this fact Ucheghara (2008) observed that, many theories from the social science and business discipline have developed theories and hypotheses that tried to explain the relationship between these two variables: economic development and entrepreneurship. It holds that entrepreneurship cuts across academic discipline and affects levels of stratification in societies by shaping life opportunities.

It is therefore against this background that the National Universities Commission (NUC) considered the introduction of entrepreneurship education into the University Education Curriculum. The importance of this is to encourage graduates to create jobs instead of searching for non-existing jobs.

This paper aims at examining the concept of entrepreneurship education in tertiary education as a tool for reducing unemployment rate and enhancing self-reliance and economic sustainability in Nigeria.

Concept of Entrepreneurship Education and Its Historical Development

Entrepreneurship education is concerned with the acquisition of skills in local crafts and proper technological training for self-reliance. It is the basic education that prepares people for organizing, owning and managing a business and becoming self-reliant. Vocational and technical in nature and deeply embedded in practical work, entrepreneurship education focuses on the starting of new business ventures thus bridging the gap of unemployment in the society.

Falkang and Albert (2000) stated that entrepreneurs are people with entrepreneurial spirit. Educational psychologist has shown that entrepreneurs are people who exhibit the knowledge, skills, attitude (KSA) acronym within a definite environment (Kraiger, Ford and Salas, 2003). Entrepreneurs are thus job creators and self-employed rather than seekers of jobs in an over stretched public service society. Entrepreneurship education deals with the process of undertaking a business initiative as an application of knowledge acquired competently for the purpose of self-reliance, self-sustenance and the overall individual and society's development. In a nut-shell entrepreneurship education eradicates poverty and unemployment while enhancing self determination, capacity building/motivational skills and greater business opportunities for citizens of the State.

Entrepreneurship education can be traced to the birth of Nigeria with the practice of our traditional/indigenous education which functionally prepared individuals for the world of work. Entrepreneurship training in the area of woodcarving, cloth-making and selling, goldsmith, farming etc. were often passed on to the first child, heir apparent of the family who more to less has to compulsory learn the business or craft of the lineage.

However, with the introduction of the western education in the 18th century to produce teachers, interpreters, clerks, messengers, and cleaners for the existing church and schools, the philosophy and system of education rather tilted to that of the British. Nwangwu (2006) observed that the criticisms against the British System of education in Nigeria included among others the following:

- a. It laid emphasis on academic subjects;
- b. It laid emphasis on religion with bible and catechism forming the major substance of reading, writing and scripture;
- c. The system encouraged rote learning which does not produce critical mind;
- d. No consideration was given to the culture, environment, labour market, needs and aspirations of Nigeria as a country.

Fortunately, with the birth of the National Policy on Education in 1977 based on the outcome of the Curriculum conference of 1969, the 6-3-3-4 System of education replaced that of the British System. This once again heralded the discourse on entrepreneurship education.

Tertiary Education and Entrepreneurship Education

Globally, tertiary education is viewed as a good investment for national development. This is so because it is expected that this educational system will produce quality and quantity of human resources required for economic growth using the right mix of inputs (Durosaro, 2000). Tertiary education in Nigeria is the education given after secondary education in Universities, Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, Monotechnics including those institutions offering corresponding courses (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004:36). The goals of Nigerian tertiary education include to:

- a. Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
- b. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
- c. Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments; and
- d. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful member of the society.

Based on the above goals, Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning are the most important places to accumulate human capital in the form of relevant manpower training for abilities, skills, attitudes and knowledge. Regrettably, even though one of the major aims of education at the tertiary institutions is to prepare the recipient of the educational programmes for the world of work, this has not been realized as evidenced in the huge number of unemployed graduates. If education is to meet the challenges of preparing youths and adults for self-employment and self-reliance for sustainable development, then there is the urgent need to infuse entrepreneurship education into the programmes of our tertiary institutions of learning. Accordingly, Nwachukwu (2009), stated that the Universities, Polytechnics, and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria could effectively be used for entrepreneurial development. Nigerian tertiary institutions should therefore be geared towards developing people, enterprises and economies, instilling the culture of entrepreneurship in the students and providing the right atmosphere and incentives for domestic and foreign investments.

Consequently, the National Universities Commission recently introduced an entrepreneurship course into the Universities curriculum which is designed to challenge and equip undergraduates with some entrepreneurial skills which could form a foundation for self-employment after graduation. This laudable step should be accompanied by implementation and proper funding for the realization of this goal. What is fundamentally needed here is improved education based on appropriate skills, using data to support teaching, improved students capability for helping themselves as well as the society in general.

Entrepreneurship Education for Self-Reliance and Sustainable Development

The major aim of education is the acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance which gives credence to entrepreneurship education; this means the education that is relevant, functional and provides employment opportunities. Education and training are therefore key tools for achieving sustainable development. Jacob (1999:32) defined sustainable development as “the need to ensure a better quality of life for all now and into the future... For the layman, sustainable development relates to those infrastructural policies and behaviours that are conceptualized, instituted and maintained over a period of time. Interestingly, the objectives of higher education are so well articulated especially as it concerns sustainable development in Nigeria.

In the same vein, the United Nation believes that education can play a huge role in driving sustainable development and has declared this epoch “the decade of Education of Sustainable Development” 2005 – 2014 (UNESCO, 2006). To this end, today’s tertiary institutions would have to be reoriented to address sustainability through expanded curricula that includes entrepreneurial skills such as: critical thinking skills, skills to organize and interpret data, operational skills, ability to analyze issues and ability to make life-style choices. This means that the quality of instruction, should be geared towards inculcating the values of acquisition of competences necessary for self-reliance and reducing unemployment. Self-reliance is a vital key to self-actualization, better human relationship, national efficiency as well as social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress. A self reliant person is one who possesses great creative ability, one who is functional, one who has acquired some values and skills to improve not just himself, but people around him/her; a resourceful individual. This is exactly what Nigerian Tertiary education is out to achieve through entrepreneurship education. Put succinctly by EBo & Ukpong (1993), self-reliant citizens breed self-reliant nation. Our educational system according to Nwangwu (2006) is faulty especially judging from the mismatch between the needs of world of work and what students are taught in schools.

Sustainable development is central for all developing economics, especially Nigeria. To achieve this, nations must develop infrastructurally as well as educationally. Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education is therefore a panacea to guarantee amiable development.

It is glaring to state that entrepreneurship education in the Nigerian tertiary institutions remains a Bridge for self reliance and sustainable development. it contributes immeasurably towards acquisition of new jobs, wealth creation, poverty reduction and income generation for both government and individuals.

Schumpeter (1934) in Keister (2005) argued that entrepreneurship is very significant to the growth and development of economies. In another wise, Adamu, 2001 in Barnabas and Darkwa (2007) asserted that development in any society is anchored primarily on the education process. From the above, one can plainly say that, entrepreneurship education is a sine-qua non for sustainable development.

Sule (2004) is of the opinion that education is a sure pathway to liberation of the mind and the improvement of socio-economic status of people. This, for the purpose of this paper implies that entrepreneurship education and training help individuals to be empowered, self-reliant and escape poverty by providing them the skills and knowledge to raise their outputs, income and wealth. It is interesting to note that entrepreneurs drive American economy. According to United States Census Bureau Survey of Business Owners (2009) – self employed individuals own three quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$) of United States business.

The above record suggests that entrepreneurship education reduces unemployment rate to the barest minimum, empowers people, increases national incomes as well as enhances sustainable development.

Challenges

It is important to point out that entrepreneurship education in Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning is not without some challenges. This is because while we accept the fact that the introduction of entrepreneurship education in our tertiary institutions today is a major step in the right direction, the sustainability of the programme is a great concern.

One of the problems facing Nigerian tertiary institutions is to comprehend and really articulate the three tier relationship between the specific needs of our tertiary institutions and their mission as well as the characteristics of the fast changing world. Coupled with this is the complain of inadequate funds and the effective delivery of entrepreneurship education which requires the adoption of new teaching styles rooted in technology that is costlier than the conventional teaching styles used in our tertiary institutions. A good number of our tertiary institutions also lack basic infrastructures that will enhance entrepreneurship education. For instance, there are insufficient computer facilities for staff and students, ill-equipped laboratory equipment and library books, as well as dilapidated building. The issue of lack of reliable electricity supply and gradual dearth of experienced lecturers should also be seriously looked into if entrepreneurship education is to achieve its aims and objectives in our tertiary institutions.

Conclusion

The path to self-reliance and sustainable development begins with adequate utilization of resources which ensures functional education. Functional education starts with entrepreneurship spirit which provides relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for survival of the individual and the society at large.

Entrepreneurship education is a lifelong experience that opens for self-reliance and sustainable development. This paper concludes that there is great need for the inclusion of entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions curriculum and to ensure its proper implementation for a new Nigeria.

Recommendations

For effective entrepreneurship education in Nigeria and for Tertiary Institutions to bridge the gap for self-reliance and sustainable development, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should organize and sponsor seminars/conferences /workshops on the management knowledge required by teachers for a successful entrepreneurship education;
2. Tertiary education curriculum should be revisited regularly to ensure the inclusion of entrepreneurship education;
3. Sincerely, government should provide instructional facilities (laboratories, farms, workshops, etc) relating to the teaching and learning of vocational (i.e. entrepreneurial) courses in schools.
4. Teacher training and re-training programmes should be organized to renovate the instructional technology (both andragogical and pedagogical) with a view to sharpen entrepreneurship education delivery in schools; and
5. There should be effective monitoring of tertiary institutions of learning in the area of adherence to standards.

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