

FUNCTIONAL BASIC EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: A CASE FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL STUDIES IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

The aim of education is the preparation of learners for effective life in a knowledge-based economy that is known for its networked and volatile characteristics. This has given rise to a lot of emphasis particularly in recent times for all the citizens of the world especially the Nigerian nation to have access to basic education that is functional for national transformation. The quest for the achievement of this aim of education has led to the introduction of entrepreneurial education in Nigerian secondary schools. This paper therefore, looks at entrepreneurial studies in secondary education as a vehicle for national transformation. The paper highlights on the concept of basic education entrepreneurial education. It also looks at curriculum development as a way of making education functional and entrepreneurial education as a means of achieving national transformation. Some recommendations were made such as laying more emphasis on technical and vocational subjects in secondary schools.

The importance of education to human beings cannot be overemphasized. Education has been defined as all efforts, conscious and direct, incidental and indirect, made by a given society to accomplish certain objectives that are considered desirable in terms of the individual's own needs as well as the needs of the society where that education is based (Fafunwa in Eya and Anih, 2012). Education is a human right that should be accorded to all human beings solely by reason of being human.

The relationship between education and development is well established such that education is a key index of development. It has been documented that schooling improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life such as child labour as well as bringing about empowerment (EFA global monitoring report 2002).

According to Akudolu in Ivowi and Akpan (2012) (eds) over the years, human beings in different societies have sought and embarked on various means to foster the development and maturity of the young ones. The goal was to perpetuate the value system and promote human development in all its ramifications. In this regard, different forms of education have been in practice in different cultures. The introduction of more organized or formal education in schools offered these societies systematic ways for achieving their goals of education and these systematic ways constitute the curriculum. This has given rise to a lot of emphasis particularly in recent times for all the citizens of the world to have access to basic education that is functional for national transformation.

To achieve this goal of education requires a paradigm shift from the present time bound model of education to a lifelong model of education. This is the model of education that is aimed at developing in the learner, the ability to effectively create, acquire, use and transmit knowledge for the promotion of human activities in a knowledge dominated society. In this regard, emphasis in instructional aims is shifting from acquisition of factual knowledge to the acquisition of tacit knowledge and generic skills while that of the instructional process is shifting from teaching for examinations to teaching how to learn, how to communicate and how to perform effectively in a teamwork. By implication, curriculum development for a knowledge-based economy is based on the development of basic skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), thinking skills, interpersonal management and communication skills, social competencies and other personal qualities such as responsibility, self esteem, self management and integrity (Akudolu) in Ivowi and Akpan (2012) (eds).

The development of these 21st century skills and competencies constitute a driving force for the emergent trends in the aim of education which is the preparation of learners for effective life in a knowledge-based economy that is known for its networked and volatile characteristics. The quest for

the achievement of this aim of education has led to the introduction of entrepreneurial education in Nigerian secondary schools.

This paper therefore looks at entrepreneurial education as a vehicle for national transformation.

Concept of Basic Education

Basic education refers to the whole range of educational activities taking place in various settings (formal, non-formal and informal) that aim to meet basic learning needs. According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), basic education comprises primary education (first stage of basic education) and lower secondary education (second stage). In countries (developing countries in particular), basic education often includes also pre-primary education and/or adult literacy programmes.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) is regarded as a priority for developing countries and is the focus of the Education for All (EFA) movement led by UNESCO. It is also included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as goal number 2: “achieve universal primary education by 2015.”

An extensive number of studies have proven its benefits on public health (lower spread of HIV/AIDS, better vaccination, prevention and medication of disease, better nutrition, lower maternal, infant and child mortality) demography (longer life expectancy, accelerated demographic transition through better birth control) and economy (increase of purchase power, increased productivity in traditional sectors, increased demand on service sectors). Other benefits, although more difficult to measure, include impact on democracy, human rights, governance and political stability through increasing understanding of non-violent ways to solve problems and mutual understanding between groups in conflicts (en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki)

In Nigeria, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) launched in 1999 is an example of functional basic education. The UBE according to FRN (2004), shall be of a nine year duration comprising six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary education. The programme aims at making education compulsory and free at the primary and junior secondary school levels. UBE is conceived to embrace formal education up to age 15, as well as adult and non-formal education including education of the marginalized groups and also out-of school youths. According to Elechi (2012) the major objective of the programme is to wipe out illiteracy and ensure the acquisition of functional skills for alleviation of poverty.

A nation’s policy on education is government’s way of realizing that part of the national goals which can be achieved using education as a tool. No policy on education however can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and goals of the nation. According to Nwangwu (2003), the principles of national policy on education were based on five major national objectives of the country as a nation, namely

- a free and democratic society
- a just and egalitarian society
- a united, strong and self-reliant nation
- a great and dynamic economy
- a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens

Nigeria as a nation believes in the efficacy of education in national development and integration. In the formulation of its philosophy of education as contained in NPE (2004), it states inter alia.

We believe that;

- a. Education is an instrument for national development. To this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education.
- b. Education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual’s sake and for the general development of the society.
- c. Every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his or her ability.

d. There is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria; to this end school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive; while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education.

According to Nwangwu (2003), it is on this last point that the major thrust of the 6-3-3-4 policy lies. In addition to the above set national goals, the NPE listed four major objectives of Nigerian education of which one of them is "the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.

It is on these that the need for entrepreneurial education arose as a vehicle for the production of individuals that are employable, employers etc that will contribute meaningfully to the society for national transformation.

Curriculum Development for Functional Education

In old African society, the purpose of education was clear: functionalism was the main guiding principle. Education was generally for an immediate induction into society and a preparation for adulthood (Ahura and Ageh, 2012). African education emphasized social responsibility and moral values.

Learners engaged in participatory education through ceremonies, rituals, imitation, recitation and demonstration. Practical subjects included farming, fishing, cooking, carving, knitting, acrobatic display, racing etc. Intellectual training included the study of local history legends, local geography, plants and animals, poetry, reasoning, riddles, proverbs, storytelling etc. Education in old Africa was an integrated experience. Secret cults served as institutions of higher learning. This was made of native philosophy, science and religion. Irrespective of the level of education and training given during the pre-colonial days in Africa, it was functional because the curriculum was relevant to the needs of the society.

By the 19th century, after the arrival of the British in Nigeria, Christian churches were introduced. Schools were also established, and western education began to take root. The main objective of the establishment of schools by the early missionaries was to use the school as a means of converting the people to Christianity. Education was based on the three R^s – reading, writing and Arithmetic. This prepared individuals for only white collar jobs. It was not functional to the needs of the society.

After independence in 1960, the agitation of Nigerians regarding the inadequacy of the colonial curriculum to prepare learners for effective life in Nigerian society and for contribution to the development of a new nation intensified. This culminated in the first national curriculum conference in 1969 which was aimed at taking a sector-wide review of education system, identifying new national goals of education and proposing strategies to make the curriculum at all levels of the education system relevant to the Nigerian society.

After the national curriculum conference, a seminar of experts drawn from a wide range of interest groups within Nigeria was again convened in 1973. The outcome of this seminar was a draft document which after due considerations of the observations and comments from the states and various interest groups gave birth to what is now referred to as National Policy on Education, first published in 1977 with 2nd, 3rd and 4th editions published in 1981, 1998, 2004 respectively. This educational policy was launched as 6-3-3-4 system of education after its review in 1981 and was to be implemented in 1982 (Nwangwu, 2003).

The NPE is the pivot of curriculum development in the country. It specifies the type and quality of instruction that should be provided so as to help learners at all levels of education achieve the aims of permanent literacy, numeracy and effective citizenship. In this regard, curriculum development "has to be geared towards self realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress" (FRN, 2004:7).

According to Akudolu (2012), a close look at these efforts in curriculum development and global educational trends indicate the emerging or new issues that are still unfolding in curriculum development in Nigeria. The global trends in curriculum development are tilting to the direction of

using the curriculum as an instrument for achieving total development of every citizen so as to prepare the nation not only for local and national development but also for international competitiveness. The issues are curriculum in education for peace, education for global citizenship, electronic learning, teacher education, gender studies, entrepreneurial education as well as diversification and enrichment of learning content.

Since one of the goals of education is to prepare the learners for effective life in the society, curriculum development efforts that cover both national, international affairs as well as entrepreneurship is the ideal. This is the type of curriculum that will bring about functional education.

Entrepreneurial Education

Since education is a key factor in the development of the individual and society, and there is a strong need for meaningful development to take care of both the individual and the society, the process of educating that individual should not be left to planlessness, if the goal must be achieved. Part of the planning required to make the education of a society is being able to keep up with globalization, the demands of the society and the provision of jobs for the teeming number of graduates as their population makes up 65% of the population of the country (FGN, 2006). The government therefore cannot but look out for means to cater for the products of the Nigerian education. According to Nwufor in Ivowi and Akpan (2012) (eds), the unemployability of these graduates has compounded the dimension of this problem as their having no skills means that the graduates turned out from the secondary schools and higher education institutions have not acquired any saleable skills to be gainfully employed. The unemployability of these graduates has also compounded the dimension of the quantum of school leavers without any job. The result of this is the agitation for entrepreneurship education as one of the ways of solving the problem of youth unemployment in Nigeria in order to achieve of the five national objectives.

Nwufor in Ivowi and Akpan (2012) defined entrepreneurial education as that which seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings. Variations of entrepreneurship education are offered at all levels of schooling from primary to secondary schools through graduate university programmes. Through entrepreneurship education young people including those with disabilities, learn organizational skills including time management, leadership development and interpersonal skills all of which are transferable skills sought by employers.

Specifically, the entrepreneurship education is structured to achieve the following objectives.

1. Offer functional education to the youth so as to enable them to be self-employed and self-reliant.
2. Offer graduates adequate training that will enable them to be creative and innovative in identifying novel business opportunities.
3. Provide university/college graduates with adequate training in risk management, to make uncertainty bearing feasible and easy.
4. Provide the young graduates with enough training and support that will enable them establish a carrier in small and medium sized businesses.
5. Offer graduates adequate training in the acquisition of skills that will enable them meet the manpower needs of society
6. To stimulate both individual and economic growth of rural and less developed areas.
7. Provide both small and medium business enterprises the opportunity of recruiting graduates who will be trained and tutored in the skills relevant to the management and operation of small business centres.
8. To inculcate the spirit of perseverance in the youths and adults which will enable them to persist in any business venture they embark on (Nwangwu, 2006).

With entrepreneurial education among youths, there will be increased interest in the following areas;

- Attending college
- Occupational aspirations
- Independent reading
- Leadership behaviour
- Belief that attaining one's goal is within ones control

In an attempt to produce this crop of skilled manpower, the federal government is now paying attention to entrepreneurial education across the different levels of education apart from that of higher education.

Entrepreneurship Education for National Transformation

Entrepreneurship according to Nwufor (2012), is the act of employing noble ideas or strategies to start a business that succeeds. Entrepreneurship is the engine fuelling innovation, employment generation and economic growth (Klans Schwab in Nwufor, 2012). He went further to say that only by creating an environment where entrepreneurship can prosper and where entrepreneurs can try new ideas and empower others can many of these issues affecting the world be addressed. This environment is entrepreneurial education.

Entrepreneurship without education is meaningless because it is education that helps the individuals in the development of the skills that generate an entrepreneurial mindset and in preparing future leaders for solving more complex, interlinked and fast changing problems. Entrepreneurship and education are therefore two such extra ordinary opportunities that need to be leveraged and interconnected if we are to develop the human capital required for building the societies of the future.

As earlier stated, entrepreneurial education helps in the development of entrepreneurial mindset. The development of entrepreneurial mindset in the products of this education contributes in the following ways:

1. It helps the in economic growth in both the developed and developing countries.
2. It helps in the production of entrepreneurs that will start businesses, thereby creating jobs for themselves and those they employ.
3. Entrepreneurial activities often increase competition and can increase productivity as well.
4. Entrepreneurs innovate, which is an important ingredient in any country's development.
5. Entrepreneurship gives people exposure to a wide range of activities, helping them develop a broad skill set; and
6. For young people in particular, who often face joblessness, entrepreneurship is a good option because it is a way for them to channel their energy, creativity and fresh perspectives into innovations and problem solving, so that they can contribute to their community and the Nigeria nation in general.

With entrepreneurial education, entrepreneurship is encouraged and more entrepreneurs are produced. These efforts help in making the products of this education functional and self reliant. With entrepreneurial education, there will be national transformation.

Conclusion

The importance of education to human beings cannot be overemphasized. Nigeria as a nation believes in the efficacy of education in national development and integration. In the formulation of her philosophy of education, Nigeria stated that education should be an instrument for national development. Therefore there is the need for a functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria. To this end school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive, while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education. This can be achieved through entrepreneurial education at all levels of the education system. Through entrepreneurial education, entrepreneurial skills, attitudes and behaviours can be learned, and that exposure to entrepreneurship education through an individual's lifelong learning path, starting from youth and continuing through adulthood into higher education is imperative for national transformation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to help promote functional education for national transformation.

1. There should be curriculum reforms to reflect the emerging issues in globalization so as to help in meeting the needs of the people. This should include entrepreneurial education.
2. More emphasis should be laid on technical and vocational subjects in order to produce the needed manpower to meet up with the ever growing technological world.

3. Teachers education especially technical teachers should be encouraged in order to keep producing technical teachers that will help in imparting these technical and vocational skills to the students.
4. Government should provide adequate funds in order to help in the procurement of the needed equipment for the effective teaching of these skills.

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