

# **ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: AN ECONOMIC TOOL FOR POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examined entrepreneurial education as an indispensable ingredient in the much needed empowerment of women, with the aim of equipping and positioning them strategically, to play a vital role in poverty reduction/alleviation. In doing this, there was a conceptual framework on entrepreneurial education, women empowerment, and poverty reduction. There were also discussions on Entrepreneurship and poverty reduction, the bases for empowering women through Entrepreneurship education and the modalities for empowering women through entrepreneurial education.*

**Key words:** Entrepreneurial education, women empowerment, and poverty reduction.

Nigeria today like many other developing countries of the world is facing economic, political and social problems, which among other things have given rise to unemployment, poverty and hunger. Okafor (2015) attributed the massive unemployment in Nigeria to the disequilibrium between labour market requirements and lack of essential employable skills.

Presenting an overview of women involvement in economic activities in Nigeria, Anioke, (2007) observed that they were looked upon as not having any responsibility of income generation, but rather dependent on her husband's or father's income for her living. They were economically dependent as they were not given a place in money making venture. She stressed further that men preferred their wives staying indoors for child raising and home management. In those days, women who ventured into entrepreneurial activities were regarded as uncultured and looked at with dismay, and are given all sorts of derogatory names.

It is however heartwarming that the advent of Western education with its social changes, have eroded the belief and old practice of keeping women at home jobless. The lopsided idea of exposing only men to entrepreneurial activities and its risks and profits, has gone with the winds. Against this background Azikwe (1993) observed that

women play major roles in traditional and all human endeavours, like subsistence food production and processing, home craft, trading activities, domestic chores and child bearing and rearing. This has placed the women in a better stead to contribute in the economic well being of themselves and the society at large.

The empowerment of women, which involve the ability to take control of their live activities, doing things their own way, setting their own agenda, and aiming at achieving such set goals, makes it imperative that they should key into the current trend of acquiring requisite skills, through entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship education will empower and equip the Nigeria women with saleable skills, knowledge, abilities and attitude which can enable them to become gainfully employed, self-reliant and self employed, thereby reducing the unemployment and poverty levels in the country.

In an attempt to critically examine the relationship between entrepreneurship education and women empowerment, and its resultant reduction of poverty level in the country, this paper discusses the topic under the following:

- i. Conceptual framework
- ii. Entrepreneurship education and poverty reduction
- iii. The bases for empowering women through entrepreneurship education
- iv. Modalities for using entrepreneurial education to empower women.

Conceptual Framework

Entrepreneurial Education

Women Empowerment

Poverty Reduction

### **Entrepreneurial Education**

The word entrepreneurial is derived from the French word entrepreneur which refers to a person who undertakes to provide capital, organize, manage, makes decisions, takes risks, and reaps the profits or meets the loses of business. The word was first used in 18<sup>th</sup> century by a French economist Richard Cantillon as a technical term associated with risk bearing endeavour in the economy. Entrepreneurial on the other hand is used adjectively to refer to an individual's ability to turn ideas into actions, a process of developing in a person, knowledge, skills, competencies, and mindset needed to create job and manage business decisions, directed towards development, self – sustenance, self-reliant and empowerment of others(Okafor, 2015).

Enem (2017) identified two categories of entrepreneurs

- a. Business entrepreneurs and
- b. Social entrepreneurs skills

He used business entrepreneurial to refer to individuals who carryout business activities with the sole aim of making profit with little of no regard to the value addition to the society. Examples of business entrepreneurs in Nigeria include transporters, traders,

shoe makers, block molders, amongst others. Social entrepreneurs are those who recognize social problems and utilize entrepreneurial principles in finding solution to them. The main motive here is not profit making but value addition to the life of the community, and humanity in general. In Nigeria, Enem (2017) cited the examples of Women Aid Collective (WACOI) founded by Joy Ezeilo, that collaborates with other international and national agencies to promote women liberation, gender equality, and women empowerment. There is also the shining example of Mr. Ike Onyechere's Examination Ethics project. - aimed at curbing examination malpractice and erosion of value systems in schools.

Entrepreneurial Education has been explained by various authors in various ways, relative to time and environment. Osuala cited in Zarma (2011) used it to refer to, a programme that prepares individuals to undertake the formation, and operation of small business enterprises, for the purpose of performing all business functions, relating to a product or service, with emphases given to the social responsibilities, legal requirements and risks for the sake of profits involved in the conduct of a private enterprise. It is the type of education that deals with the acquisition of requisite skills, knowledge and ideas for self-reliance, and easy adaption to the world of work, thus producing not just job seekers, but job creators and employers of labour.

Linan in Enem (2017) highlighted four types of entrepreneurial education open to individuals that aspires to be entrepreneurs. These include

- i. Entrepreneurial awareness education, which aims at promoting the awareness of entrepreneurial knowledge among individuals
- ii. Education for start – up: which is practically oriented and aims at preparing individuals to be the owners of small scale business enterprise, and involves how to take loan or raise fund, legal regulation, taxation, etc.
- iii. Education for entrepreneurial dynamism: which aims at not only nursing the feeling to be an owner of a small scale business enterprise, but the intention to develop dynamic behaviour while in business
- iv. Continuing education for entrepreneurs: this is a special programme for adults designed to guarantee sustenance and replacement of the existing enterprises abilities.

### **Women Empowerment**

Women empowerment as a concept is a compound word consisting of “women” and “empowerment”. Hornby (2006) used the term women to refer to adult female human beings. The term can also be used to identity a female human, regardless of age. It should be noted that for the purpose of this paper, the term women is used in line with the later.

Empowerment on the other hand refers to the idea of giving power or authority to, especially by legal or official means. It implies equipping somebody with skills, resources, authority, opportunity, motivation, as well as holding him/her responsible and accountable for outcome of their actions. Sako in James (2008) used it to refer to

the process of strengthening the existing capacities and capabilities of disadvantaged groups in the society, to enable them to perform towards improving themselves, their families and society as a whole. He stressed further that it is a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation of economic, social, psychological, political and legal circumstances of the powerless. It involves articulating plans, aimed at bridging the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged groups in the society, so as to achieve growth or equitable distribution of income.

Specifically, women empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right for women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights Okafor (2015) describe it as all purposeful efforts aimed at imparting education to women with the aim of repositioning the knowledge, skills, and competences required of them. It involves equipping women with functional skills that can make them live as useful members of the society.

Okafor (2015) observed that the term women empowerment became popular with the feminist movement, whose demand was that women become empowered to take control of their own lives, gain the ability to do things, set their own agenda, of what to do and how to do things that affect them. In tandem with this motive, the United Nations devoted a decade (1975 – 1985) to issues concerning women and development. Also the African Union (AU) in adding its weight to the fight against inequity, declared 2015 as the “Year of Women Empowerment and Development” towards Africa’s Agenda 2063. There is no gainsaying that all these efforts are geared towards empowering women to develop their potentials, and enable them to contribute and benefit from development, on equal basis, as men.

### **Entrepreneurship Education and Poverty Reduction**

Hornby (2006) used the term poverty to refer to “the states of being poor, condition of abject or extreme poverty”. It is a multi dimensional concept, that has social, economic and political elements. In the same vein, Okafor (2015) opined that it is construed as an aberration, deprivation and lack of basic amenities of life needed for human survival. A state of being deficient of social, political and economic goods and services, based on assumed norms, for the society in which he/she lives.

Okafor (2015) identified two categories of poverty, viz: absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to a total lack of means necessary to meet basic necessities of life, such as food and shelter. He stressed further that relative poverty describes the positions of different groups of people with regards to their income and consumption levels in the society. This usually will vary from country to country, and even individual to individual, as some do not enjoy a certain minimum level of living standard, when compared to the rest of the population.

Poverty reduction or alleviation refers to a set of measures, both economic and humanitarian, that are intended to permanently lift people out of poverty (Wikipedia,

2017). The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation cited in Okafor (2015) stressed that poverty eradication is the greatest challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, particularly in developing countries.

There is no gainsaying that entrepreneurial education will empower and equip women with saleable skills, knowledge, abilities and attitudes which can make them become gainfully employed, self-employed, and invariably help to solve the unemployment and poverty problems in the country. Abdulahi and Fanika (2014) corroborating the above assertion opined that unemployment constitute a vicious circle, that explains the endemic nature of poverty in developing countries, which can only be broken through increased productivity, that ensures adequate supply of goods and services.

### **The Bases for Empowering Women through Entrepreneurship Education**

There is no doubt that Nigerian women lack empowerment in all the dimension of human endeavour, be it economic, political, cultural social or educational (Ugwu, 2004, Okafor 2015). It is worthy to note that the beliefs or practices of the old which made some women feel not actually concerned with the economic activities have changed. Okafor (2015) observed that women all over Africa work more hours than the men as they engage in farming activities, which range from planting, weeding, harvesting to processing.

Okafor and Iloakasy (1996) pointed out that women accounted for the production of about 70% of the food production and about 50% of the total labour force. They also feature in commerce and other productive sectors such as petty trading, traditional cloth making, hair dressing, food vending and other economic activities. Regretably, women still earn less income when, compared to men, despite their contributions. The present economic recession in the country, with its associated unemployment and poverty makes it imperative that woman should be empowered economically.

Nigeria as a nation recognizes the fact that education is an indispensable ingredient to emancipation of the mind and the improvement of one's socio-economic status. Regrettable Nigerian women do not have equal educational opportunities with men which tend to ensure that women's lives remain under the control of men (Ugwu, 2004, Okafor 2015). Afebendeugbe 1996) pointed out clearly that education would make a women become aware of herself and her inherent capacity to exploit her environment. The National Policy on Education, see education as involving the development of the whole man to enable him to function effectively in whatever environment he may find himself. (FRN, 2014). In view of the foregoing, women education cannot be over emphasized because Plato cited in Osinulu (1994) contends that a nation where women do not have the same education with men instead of being a whole is reduced to half.

The fundamental human rights adopted by the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, of which Nigeria is a party to, highlighted among their rights, the right to participation, which is one's right to contribute on issues such as choice of leaders and government. He stressed further that many women go to the polls totally ignorant of who the contestants are and any issues at stake in the election. The men on the other hand use them to achieve their political ambition and later formulate policies that favour them at the detriment of the women. Citing the World Development Report, Okafor (2015) noted that only 7.3% of women are members of the Nigeria Federal Legislative Assembly. Ugwu (2004) observed that the subservient attitude of women to societal issues makes them satisfied with whatever exists and not bothered about being involved in any decision making process. The need to change this negative attitude makes women empowerment imperative.

The desire to maintain a healthy family system is another case in point. Anioke (2007) opined that the constant outbreak of diseases, and its subsequent expensive curative measures exposes the women to the challenge of being able to provide for such medical up keep, and to do this they have to be empowered economically. Ugwu (2006) corroborating this view, asserted that a women should meet up with the challenges of adequate dieting to avoid malnutrition, particularly during the developmental period, protect her child from diseases in addition to seeing to his safety from accident and other dangerous conditions, that can retard his development in all dimensions. To rise up to these challenges she ought to be empowered in all dimensions.

Also Okafor (2015) contend that in Nigeria, women are not socially developed because of several socio – cultural constraints placed on them which includes cultural and religious barriers, superstitions, and all manners of discrimination and stereotyping against women. In tandem with this assertion, Ugwu (2004) highlighted the case of preference of male child, the weaker sex/subordinate/helper of men syndrome in Christianity, the purdah system in Islamic religion and the inequality of women to men preached in African traditional religion. He stressed further that all these treatments can depress their intellectual development, erode their confidence, and dampen their aspirations. There is need for empowerment to reignite the spirit of self-realization and actualization in them.

The fact that some women are naturally endowed with many inert potentials and abilities cannot be in doubt. Empowering the women with requisite skills will help tap and harness their technical know-how for the growth of the economy and well being of the individual

### **Modalities of Using Entrepreneurship Education to Empower Women**

Economic empowerment has been the main focus of entrepreneurial education, as it aims at making the products of the system to be economically responsible and independent. It is on the above premise that it is pertinent to highlight some of the

modalities that can be used to enhance women empowerment through entrepreneurial education.

**1. Stimulating interest in job and empowerment Creation:** There is need to stimulate interest in acquiring entrepreneurial skills by women through different public enlightenment agencies and programmes to increase its legitimacy. Abdulahi and Fainka (2014) posit that creating awareness through the mass media about the role of entrepreneurship education, and the profile of entrepreneurship activities will stimulate discussions to demystify and raise interest on the entrepreneurship process. In the same vein, Okafor (2015) opined that a strong entrepreneurship culture should be built through the Non-government organizations (NGOS), Community Based organizations (CBOs) and other initiations like the family and churches. He stressed that they should openly support the agenda of wealth creation, innovations in entrepreneurship in more sustainable manner. In his own contribution, Ugwu (2017) suggested that there is need for regular conferences, seminars and workshops to help stimulate and arouse interest in entrepreneurial issues. This will provide opportunity of interaction with on topical issues like the use of ICT, improved poultry services, latest sewing styles, improved seedlings, farming methods, amongst others.

**2. Curricular reforms:** there is need for a re-evaluation of the curricular content at all levels of our educational system. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC, National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National University Commission (NUC) should ensure improved curricular content with emphasis on acquiring entrepreneurial skills.

**3. Equality of educational opportunities:** the issue of equal access to education by men and women should be taken seriously. Efforts should be made to counteract and expunge all prevailing beliefs, attitudes and practices that justify the subordinate status of women and perpetuate gender inequality in education. There is need for mobilization and sensitization of the masses on the accruable benefits of women education to the individual, community and the nation in general. It is in view of this that Ugwu (2004) saw the November, 1988, National Awareness Campaign on women education launched in Lagos by Mrs. Maryann Babangida the then First Lady as an action in the right direction.

**4. Access to finance and capital:** measures should be put in place to ensure that women who have exhibited some entrepreneurial skills have access to finance and capital. Ugwu (2017) noted that such measures may include the creation of small business banks, loan guarantee schemes, micro-loan funds, research and start up grants for prospective entrepreneurs. In tandem with the above opinion, Okafor (2015) suggested the establishment of National Empowerment Fund (NEF) for the economic

activities of women entrepreneurs. He stressed further that to help stimulate creativity and innovation, there is need for the creation of women entrepreneurship education innovation fund (WEEIF) to provide small seed grants.

5. **Legislature provisions:** to make woman empowerment through entrepreneurship more pragmatic, there is need for enactment and enforcement of laws. Against this background Ugwu (2004) emphasized that to discourage dropping out of school by girls and enhancing the rate of enrolment, states should enact and enforce laws prohibiting their withdrawal from school for marriage, hawking, street trading or any other reason. Also Okafor (2015) highlighted the need to review laws on the status of women, abolishing and reforming all obnoxious, sexist and barbaric laws and harmful traditional practices, that seek to perpetually oppress and dehumanize the women. He applauded the review of some laws related to family inheritance, widowhood practices, land acquisition, civil service fringe benefits, and maternity leaves for unmarried women, etc. as a positive move to enhance women's social and cultural status.

6. **Government support:** the three tiers of government should put in place policies and programmes aimed at nurturing women entrepreneurs, thereby empowering them. There is need for a supportive educational environment through the award of scholarship to some women who display some level of innovativeness and creativity, in their course of study.

Another dimension to the above is the institution of Women Entrepreneur of the Year Award, proposed by Okafor (2015) to encourage entrepreneurial skills. He emphasized that this will, provide a platform where successful women entrepreneurs are showcased as role models for others to emulate. This could be organized at National, state or local government levels.

Government support can also come in form of industrial protection acts aimed at protecting new women entrepreneurs against multiple taxation, giant industries, shylock landlords and oppressors.

7. **School-industrial link:** this is a symbiotic relationship between the schools and industries where the school supplies the industries with manpower, while the later in turn dictates the nature of the school curricular, in addition to other work experiences to the schools. It also affords the teachers and the women the opportunity of having access to more authentic/accurate information on varieties of industrial work programme, and the labour market.

Enem, (2017) citing Okoro, highlighted three types of industrial work experience programme: (a) work-study plan – an aspect of vocational training programme where a woman is engaged in both classroom study and paid employment in a course-related field. It is aimed at identifying and training talented women for full

time employment on completion of their course of study. (b) Co-operative vocational education: this involves partnership between the school and industry aimed at developing occupational competencies using employment in real job a sources of learning. It alternates school term with a work term, thereby making school to work transition smooth. (c) Internship – this is on the job training, similar to apprenticeship programme taken up by women undergraduates to supplement their formal education and expose them to the world of work. Enem (2017) stressed that this arrangement affords the women the opportunity of putting into practice the knowledge and skills acquired in a practical job setting and environment. It is pertinent to note that it is in line with the school-industry link that the Nigeria government introduced the students' industrial work experience scheme (SIWES) which is organized by Industrial Training Fund (ITF) for Colleges of Education, monotronics, polytechnics and universities.

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria today like many other countries of the world is facing economic, political and social problems which among other things have given rise to unemployment, poverty and hunger. The advent of western education and its social changes coupled with the complex nature of the modern society have rendered useless the old beliefs and practices of exposing only the men to entrepreneurial activities. It is disheartening that despite the fact that the women constitute 49.07% of the total population in Nigeria according to the world bank collection of development indicators cited in Ugwu (2017), a lot of socio-cultural constraints tend to water down their contributions to the economic growth and development of the country due to lack of empowerment.

The need to empower the women makes it imperative that they must take an adequate dose of entrepreneurial education to equip them with the necessary skills, ideas and managerial abilities and capabilities for self-reliance and self-employment, as an economic tool for poverty reduction/ alleviation in Nigeria.

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