
**REPOSITIONING OF NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS FOR
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF YOUTHS THROUGH
ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION**

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Abstract

This paper examined the role of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Some variables were identified as possible obstacles to entrepreneurship education, they include among others: poor knowledge-based economy and poor enterprising culture. Also discussed were ways of avoiding the obstacles and how the teaching of creativity and problem-solving skills can reposition Nigerian institutions for the youths in Nigeria to be empowered economically.

Key words: Entrepreneurship Education, Economic Empowerment, Nigerian Tertiary Education.

Nigeria like most developing nations of the world is faced with myriad of problems and realities which include poverty, unemployment, conflicts and diseases. These situations pose great challenges to the very existence of individuals in most developing nations thereby calling for the training of educated men and women who can function effectively in the society in which they live. Available information by National Universities Commission (NUC) (2004) reiterates the massive unemployment of Nigerian universities' graduates in the country. This problem is said to be traceable to the disequilibrium between labour market requirements and lack of essential employable skills by the graduates (Diejonah and Orimolade, 1991; Dabalén, Oni and Adekola, 2000). This obvious critical skill gap inhibits the development of youths and the entire

development of the nation. More than half of the Nigerian populations are under the age of 30 according to the National Population Commission (2001). It can therefore be asserted that the economy of Nigeria is a youth economy. Expectedly, today's youths will become in a short decade tomorrow's parents, leaders, labour force, armies. However, the Nigerian youths are said to be confronted with poverty, unemployment, urbanization, lack of capacity and skills needed to move the economy forward.

Poverty is very common, this is because the youth faces unemployment and lack of necessary productive skills to keep body and soul together. This reality leaves them without any meaningful means of sustainable livelihood. To make ends meet, they simply indulge in prostitution (both male and female). The youthful period which is a very critical one that has been noted as an essential time for training in entrepreneurship, provides a positive distractive alternative from the self-destructive and aggressive behaviours that are frequently associated with adolescents and growing up (Woolflk, 1998). In a study of American adolescents in 1998, it was reported that a good number of the youths had little information about life and life expectations. If this is true about youths in a developed nation; what can be said of Nigerian youths? This critical age however is the right time to teach them the concept of entrepreneurship to help them learn wealth creation. The question then is what is entrepreneurship? Entrepreneurship has been defined by various professions to mean many things since the middle age (Igbo, 2006). The entrepreneur has been seen as an actor, innovator or a developer of technology. However, the summary of what entrepreneurship means will reflect what the individual definer's point of view is. Entrepreneurship is the willingness and ability of an individual to seek out investment opportunities, establish and run an enterprise successfully (Inegbebor, 1987).

The entrepreneur is essentially a person who owns or controls a business through which income is gained. National Directorate of Employment (NDE) (1989) in Onyebueke and Ochonogo (2002) defined entrepreneurship as the art which involves recognizing a business opportunity, mobilizing resources and persisting to exploit that opportunity. According to Gana (2001), entrepreneurship is the ability to seek investment opportunities and establish an enterprise based on identified opportunities. The entrepreneur takes risks, is focused and energized by an inner drive. The ability to develop a new venture or apply a new approach to an old business is sole idea of entrepreneurship (Steinfioff and Durges, 1993). In other words, the individual gives the market place a product or service by using resources in a new way. Esomonu (1998) defined entrepreneurship as the effective manipulation of human intelligence as demonstrated in a creative performance. This singular risk taking act leads an individual to create something of value from practically nothing. According to Anayakoha (2006), the entrepreneur is one who chooses or assumes risks, identifies business opportunity, gathers resources, initiates actions and establishes an organization or enterprise to meet such demand or market opportunity. From this definition, the entrepreneur is seen as an independent, self-sufficient individual who is willing to sink or swim with his/her idea.

It can thus be asserted that an entrepreneur is a person who in the bid to survive makes profit and owns his/her own business. He/she effectively utilizes his/her abilities and potentials confidently. He/she takes risks, is focused and is energized by an inner drive. He/she equally seeks and exploits employment opportunities, applies creativity aggressively, takes initiative as he/she seeks market opportunities. The entrepreneurs further awakens his/her ability to maximize his/her potentials through the discovery of new and existing business ideas as he/she uses proven principles in managing small and medium scale businesses until they grow. He/she also creates the platform for the exchange of ideas and training in skill acquisitions. Through the process involved in entrepreneurship, success habits are imparted as the person develops entrepreneurial integrity. Entrepreneurship skills are equally learnt in the process.

The question thus is what are the possible challenges that will arise in getting Nigerian youths empowered to acquire skills and ideas for the sake of creating employment for themselves and others? To what extent can Nigeria face the critical challenge for the development of small, medium and large scale businesses that will later metamorphose into national development among Nigerian youths? In answering these questions this paper examines the following: the role of entrepreneurship education in national development; constraints that could hinder entrepreneurship in Nigeria; and strategies for promoting effective entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. Also x-rayed are creativity, problem-solving and entrepreneurship; and strategies for promoting entrepreneurship among Nigerian youths.

The Role of Entrepreneurship in National Development

Entrepreneurship is not just skill acquisition for acquisition sake. It is an acquisition of skills and ideas for the sake of creating employment for one's-self and also for others. It also includes the development based on creativity. Entrepreneurship leads to the development of small, medium and sometimes large scale businesses based on creativity and innovation. The success of these businesses in turn helps in developing the nation. It also reduces poverty rate with visible increment of employment rate among the youths.

However, entrepreneurship requires training. Practically entrepreneurship does the following:

1. **Provides practical applications for students:** Training in entrepreneurship has been used by nations like Germany to set up unique engineering-oriented business programmes in the university where their potential engineers are encouraged to seek out ideas and subsequently develop the promising ones from invention phase to commercialization. Similarly, entrepreneurship programmes developed in some universities have graduated into business schools. For example, a nation like Norway has used entrepreneurship to inculcate innovation spirit, deliberately targeted at the youths. These examples are in line with the assertion of Dana (1992) which states that “entrepreneurship education will enable potential entrepreneurs

create avenues for people to: manage innovations; manage entrepreneurial process; and develop their potentials as managers of creativity in given fields.

2. **Job creation and crime reduction:** Entrepreneurial programmes if properly planned and executed will ensure that the issue of self-employment and job creation will increase. Also, menaces usually visible and which are due to youth unemployment and restiveness will be highly reduced. This reality is one of the greatest challenges facing leaders in Nigerian. Nigerian education is presently at a crossroad as far as producing individuals who will work to deserve and justify their pay and who can work independently both in Nigeria and globally and bring creativity into their work place. The current mismatch between what Nigerian economy needs and what Nigerian youths are made to study in schools is becoming very appalling.

The result of a three week large scale, rapid national survey in 2004 jointly sponsored by NUC and Education Trust Fund (ETF) to determine the needs of the labour market which Nigerian university graduates are failing to meet revealed that of the 100 individuals and 20 organizations visited, 44 per cent rated Nigerian science graduates as average in competence, 56 per cent rated them as average in innovation, 50 per cent rated them average in rational judgment, 63 per cent as average in leadership skills, 44 per cent as average in creativity. On needed skills like literacy, oral communication, information technology knowledge, entrepreneurial, analytical, problem-solving and decision-making 60 per cent rated them as poor. This data can be said to explain why there has been very obvious increase in the unemployment rate. One of the reasons given was that these graduates were simply unemployable.

Constraint of Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions

There are several factors that hinder entrepreneurship education in Nigeria higher institutions. They include:

1. **Unavailability of Funds from the Government (both Federal and State):** Government (both federal and state) are not making funds available to institutions to help them provide the necessary material they need and this has made entrepreneurship education not to be developing in Nigerian tertiary institutions.
2. **Poor Enterprising Culture:** The zeal to be an entrepreneur by graduates has worsen due to the lack of funding and proper economic organization by the government. This has made Nigerian students not to pay attention to entrepreneurship education serious.
3. **Lack of Entrepreneurship Teachers, Materials and Equipment:** The lack of manpower that have the capacity to add value to the Nigerian graduates are lacking in abundance and the government are not helping matters by not providing equipment and useful materials to institutions.

4. **Poor knowledge based economy and low spirit of competition:** Majority of the people lack proper understanding of the economic trend of the nation and the fear of it has brought low the spirit of competition.
5. **Non-inclusion of entrepreneurship programme in the school curricula:** This is one of the major setbacks caused by the management of various institution by not including entrepreneurship programmes into the school curricula either due to lack of funds to sustain it or lack of manpower.
6. **Poor societal attitude to Technical and Vocational Education development:** The society see it that students in tertiary institutions are only meant to read books and not get themselves involved in technical and vocational skill acquisition which they feel is for non-students.
7. **Inadequate facilities and equipment for teaching and learning:** This is a problem that emanates from lack of funds from the government to the institution to misappropriation from management of the institutions and the end result is that there is no equipment for teaching and learning
8. **Insensitivity of government to enterprise creation and expansion strategy:** The insensitivity on the part of government to make entrepreneurship education thrive in the tertiary institution by not providing funds to establish the programme and setting up adequate manpower to strategies has contributed immensely to under development of entrepreneurship education in the tertiary institutions
9. **Poor plan and execution of processes of action:** The plan and execution to implement the entrepreneurship education has failed due to the fact that they were not properly planed for and the right people were not used to plan and execute the process.
10. **Isolated pockets of ineffective programmes and management incompetence (Oviawe and Ekhovbiye, 2008).** This is due to the fact that the wrong people were used to plan and execute the process and so the programmes were not richly prepared

Strategies for Tackling these Constraints

The world of business is fast moving and perfectionist-oriented. The masses are sharp and quick to judge, hence an entrepreneur must be calculating and deliberate. The market place where the entrepreneur operates has little tolerance for miscalculations, lack of commitment or incompetence. The for-going make the education of a youth who is a would-be entrepreneur an essential ingredient for success. Entrepreneurship education is a carefully planned process that eventuates into the acquisition of

entrepreneurial competencies. The education is a set of very valuable skills needed by the entrepreneur to avoid future trial and errors (Osuala, 2004). By implication, the stage for learning is the stage to make most of the mistakes and learn from them. Entrepreneurship education equips the learner with skills on decision making, acquisition of new ideas, methods of raising and maintaining conversations and establishing business relationships.

Through entrepreneurship education, qualitative ability that facilitates computation and record keeping are further learnt. It starts with developing programmes in entrepreneurship centers where people are trained to develop and acquire skills. The youths should equally be given opportunities to gain experiences as they are linked with mentors, get access to information and are given opportunity for growth. This implies that they are provided with information, knowledge, skills, and attitudes that would enable them perform well as business men and women. They will turn out to be business men and women who have developed business capacities and are learning to make money. These competences will in turn help them deploy their zeal for nation building in a very efficient manner. Anything short of these realities will be handling Nigerian problems of repositioning the youths with kid gloves.

Strategies by Nigerian Tertiary institutions in Promoting Creativity, Problem-Solving and Entrepreneurship among Nigerian Youths

The world of business is facing increasing pressure on a variety of ways. They are faced with the challenges to release new-products, find market, while distributing and servicing their customers efficiently. These challenges have equally prompted the need for them to examine how they function. The bureaucratic approach to business currently employed by the developing world have been found not to be effective, instead creative ways of responding that will move the entrepreneurs towards the ideal age that has characterized the world of business is the in-thing. This challenge therefore of utilizing ideas has made many companies to turn to creativity training. Creativity is defined as the ability to develop ideas that are unique, useful and worthy of elaboration. It involves the use of ideas (working on ideas) until something comes out of it. Creativity is the ability to solve problems, fashion products, and define new questions in a particular cultural setting. This implies that what is considered creative in one setting may be a regular occurrence in another. The key word to creativity therefore is insight which emphasizes the might or ability to see a new thing (Woolfolk, 1998). The question then is, will people with insight automatically become creative? The answer is that the possession of creative ability ensures that an individual might exhibit creative behaviour to a noteworthy degree.

However, the individual's motivation, temperamental traits and willingness to learn will also count. It also includes the urge to engage in new things, tendency to favour or not to favour objects, self-confidence and willingness to take risks. These are all contributing factors that determine who will exhibit creativity (Onu, 2006). Training

in creativity can help the individual view problems from different perspective. It is also useful in generating unique solution (Vangundy, 1992). The need for training in creativity can be explained based on recent technological advances, short production cycles, global trade possibilities and fluctuating labour force. The link between creativity and problem-solving skills are therefore strong. Creativity will ensure that the individual is involved in initiating new projects, creating opportunities while solving problems. Knowledge of creativity will also ensure that the individual learns to produce practical solutions to newly defined initiatives. These and other things are what creative problem-solving in the realm of creativity encourages. In getting creative people to work together, heterogeneous mix of preferred creative process style will outperform teams with homogeneous mix in innovative work (Vangundy, 1992). This means that in entrepreneurship, getting people who are implementers, generators, optimizers and conceptualizers work with like minds will give a better result than mixing all forms of creative individuals in a group. This obvious mis-match of creativity traits may be contributory to the obvious failures witnessed by many establishments in Nigeria. In a creative and competitive world of entrepreneurship, the drive is to deliver creative and innovative wares.

These innovations that add values to human welfare, results in a better resource utilization. The creative process, a complicated process, involves the ability to generalize, evaluate, design, trouble shoot, make decisions, create, modify, simplify, synthesize, hypothesize, learn new skills and memorize while utilizing various forms of higher order cognitive processes. The individual's ability to solve problems creatively therefore is dependent on his/her ability to utilize knowledge required to solve specific problems (Onu, 2006). These abilities can be classified by the type of problems to be solved and the strategies (that must be structured) to be utilized in solving the problems. Problem-solving cannot be divorced from creativity. The process of thinking, finding fact, seeking ideas and solution are processes involved in creativity. In creative problem-solving, ideas are generated; solutions found and evaluated so as to select best ideas. The sum total must be for the purposes of doing business. Linking entrepreneurship with creative problem-solving thereby making the entrepreneur a "system thinker", one who intuitively, an inventor, with an entrepreneurial mindset (Eno-Obong, 2006). The entrepreneurial mindset sees needs, problems and challenges as opportunities. He/she comes up with innovative ways to deal with the challenges, utilizes and consolidates opportunities. He/she is equally an optimist, a strategist, one who is confident and hardworking. He/she is never afraid of failure.

Conclusion

The importance of teaching young people the difference between vision, mission and principles of getting things done have been emphasized. This paper has emphasized the need to get Nigerian youths trained on various skills including: entrepreneurship skills, managerial experience, record keeping, creativity and innovation. Getting trained also in such areas like generating and operating statements,

balance sheets are also seen as essential. The youths through training are said to learn to develop inner qualities for self and organizational improvement. They also learn the need to develop common sense, creativity and wisdom. They learn from compiling and working for the collective good of the team with which they relate. They use the creative process to converse for organizational priorities and personal development as they learn to dialogue, deliberate and discern future business opportunities. Finally, the young entrepreneurs must learn to overcome innovative barriers. Entrepreneurship flourishes best when the climate is conducive. In fact, creative programs are fostered when peace is in place. However, things may never always work out as planned, hence the need for psychological, sociological, economic and technological training to prepare the young entrepreneurs for the rainy day.

Through well planned and executed entrepreneurship education therefore, the Nigerian youths will learn to be happy and fulfilled persons. They will be productive and committed as employees or employers of labour. They will allow their unique abilities to be used for the development of the national and global goals rather than abandon their country for greener pastures. Entrepreneurship will teach the youths the essence of business, which is finding a human need and filling it. A healthy society then can be created as the entrepreneurs go to work. The individual Nigerian youth will then learn to have status that is legitimate and functional. This is the secret of learning to float while all boats capsize.

Recommendation

There are ways to promote entrepreneurship among Nigerian youths to tackle daily, series of problems – poverty, unemployment, conflicts and diseases. These problems therefore will demand that the youths be empowered with creative problem-solving skills. The training of educated individuals who can function effectively in the society for the betterment of self and the society will require special attention as the system will be deliberately set to concern itself with the development of sound human capital required for national development (Ocho, 2005). Practically speaking therefore, the government and all concerned must do the following:

1. Ensure that schools deliberately provide sector specific skills needed for the development of human capital, use professional and entrepreneurs as instructors and mentors.
2. Teach entrepreneurship and creativity at an early age.
3. Organize for curricular integration of education, entrepreneurship and community development
4. Plan programme to transform Nigerians.

Finally, in repositioning Nigerian youths for the eradication of unemployment, there would be need to transform them into confident, aggressive and purposeful individuals. The ideal profile for emerging professionals (products of our ivory towers)

with respect to entrepreneurial education, would include a strong scientific, technical and factual base with good background information and research skills. The individuals who will opt for non-degree training in skill acquisition with entrepreneurial background are also not left out. All must have a high level of creativity and innovation and the ability to think about the future and relate these ideas to his/her business. The “dream-youths” should have strong skills in business planning, finance and accounting, as well as ability to create new and innovative marketing plans that utilize modern communication technology. Desired attitudes for Nigeria would-be entrepreneurs include a respect for democratic principles and the legal processes of the nation and the highest level of integrity and ethics. The Nigerian youth therefore needs to learn that life is a partnership in which the individual strives to fulfill himself/herself with the active support of others, that is, he/she needs to realize the fact that he/she needs to develop his/her potentials and to contribute his/her talents to the common good of all (Etuk, 2000). With the spirit of collaborating, inter-existence and the desire for collective survival of all, there will be a steady growth of development, mutual support and networking.

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