

ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: A TOOL FOR GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT IN BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

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Abstract

This paper emphasizes that there is a dire need for beneficiaries of vocational and technical education to be entrepreneurs so as to achieve gainful employment after graduation from their various institutions. In this regard, it has become very necessary to empower Nigeria's teeming youths with entrepreneurial skill as a result of the soaring problem of unemployment. Therefore, it is the view of this paper that there should be a responsible way of inculcating in our youths and adults the dream for self-employment as a very good alternative to wage employment. The paper also adds that the present-day educational system in our institutions of higher learning must emphasize entrepreneurship skills development in order to arrest the soaring unemployment rate in the country.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship plays a significant part in employment generation in any country. It is very popular in advanced countries especially in the United States of America (USA), Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Italy, Canada, just to mention a few of them. This is why such countries do not play with it, hence, they are still spending huge sums of money to encourage it.

USA is a typical example of a nation that encourages entrepreneurship. It is on record that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the only president who had ruled America for three consecutive times, from 1933 to 1945, was a great leader and disciple who used the instrument of government to set the pace of employment generation through small-scale businesses and management for the American people. Authors like: Peter Drucker (1976), Nwachukwu (1990), Davies (2000), Saraydarian (2000), Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert (2003), Weihrich and Koontz (2003), et cetera, have provided the relevant insights into the importance of employment generation in the modern world as justified by the following facts:

- 1. More than 36 million Americans work for organizations with fewer than 100 employees.
2. Of the two million businesses formed in 1991, 20% were one-person or two-person entrepreneurs, and the increase has been very significant.

With the enabling environment set by the American government, the present "giant" companies once started with a small store like the origins of Wal-Mart, AT & T and General Motors (GM). Wal-Mart was started as a single store which Sam Walton opened in 1962 in Rogers, Arkansas. AT & T, a telephone business, was also started in 1876 by Alexander Graham Bell, who was a teacher. While General Motors (GM) was founded by Alfred Sloan in Newark, New Jersey, after graduating from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston.

On the other hand, Nigeria's environment has not been favourable to encourage an unprecedented growth and development of small-scale businesses.

Oyebola (1976) and Davies (2000), opined that, entrepreneurial and leadership skills have been the major problems that are confronting the black race in the world, hence; the problems are not peculiar to Nigeria alone. They further asserted that African leaders (in whatever capacities) are very selfish, self-centred, individualistic, and they busy themselves looking for scape-goats from among their neighbours because they do not want constructive criticisms. And the black people generally hardly form business partnerships which can last for about twenty years.

In this regard, youths and adults should endeavour to learn the virtues of entrepreneurial and leadership skills in order to aid employment generation and self-reliance after graduation, Entrepreneurship skills are very useful to beneficiaries of technical and vocational education programmes. These qualities stimulate the beneficiaries to have self-confidence, be bold, courageous, honest and display some responsible roles in order to enable them establish and sustain their businesses and become self-employed and even employ others in their specialized areas.

In this vein, vocational and technical education has a role to play in training potential entrepreneurs. This is very vital because entrepreneurship enhances self-reliance or self-employment as justified by the examples given above in USA. This skill will eventually culminate in operating a business successfully in any discipline in technical and vocational education. Self-employment is very important to the teeming Nigerian youths and adults because government jobs are no longer easily available. This is the reason why all forms of vocational education have a duty in modern Nigeria to prepare graduates or other individuals for self-employment, hence, entrepreneurship skills are very important:

Business Education Self-Employment Opportunities: This is another major area for self-employment opportunities. They include:

(i) ***Accounting Skills:*** The skills concern preparing accounting information such as: ledgers, accounts from the vouchers, cash books, wages and salaries administration, skills for collecting and recording various pieces of accounting information, and that of making monthly statement of accounts. Therefore, the skills provide occupations in consultancy services to customers who are interested in their business enterprises to be either audited or to produce financial status by calculating the trading, profits and loss accounts, and the balance sheets. This would give way to advising the customers on the true financial position of whether they are making profit or loss. Examples are: petrol stations, departmental stores, motor transport

enterprises, private schools, business centres, churches, non-governmental agencies, cooperative societies, and so on.

(ii) ***Business Management Skills:*** The vocational education beneficiary, who is managing his/her business, is able to use management functions like: planning, organizing, staffing, controlling, directing and decision-making as tools for achieving some economic growth. It also includes self-management skills like: personality traits such as: patience, endurance, discrimination, honesty, hard work, competence, punctuality, dependability, accountability, responsibility, risk-taking, initiative, perseverance, resourcefulness, and motivation.

(in)Marketing: This entails the buying and selling of goods and services including advertising and sales promotion. Many graduates find good occupations in this segment of vocational education. They buy goods from production areas and sell in other areas of demand. What are needed in buying and selling include: good transportation systems, production or service areas, ability to raise an initial capital and the possession of entrepreneurial and business management skills, etc.

Examples are: Motor-spare parts ventures, trading in food stuff (including palm oil and vegetable oil), importer and exporter, being engaged in petroleum products distribution, bookshop management, furniture business, decoration management/services, hotels/eating centres or large-scale bukateria management, etc.

(iv) **Secretarial/Office Documentary Services:** Many trained secretaries can be self-employed by setting up their own documentary services popularly known as “business centres” in Nigeria. This occupation is both capital- based and equipment-based, and so, the entrepreneur should be able to raise some initial capital to purchase some equipment, tools, machines and other facilities.

Equipment and Facilities Required: The following equipment and facilities are required in a business centre or documentary office:

1. Manual typewriters.
2. Electric/electronic typewriters.
3. Dictating machines.
4. Calculating machines or Electronic desk calculating machines.
5. Ink duplicating machines.
6. Photocopying machines.
7. Shredding machines.
8. Billing/Adding machines.
9. Telex machines.

10. Computer systems.
11. Dietaphones
12. Telephone facilities.
13. Franking machine.
14. Radio transmitter.
15. Scanning machines.
16. Word processors.
17. Tables and chairs.
- IX. Filing cabinets.
19. Stand-by energy generating machines.
20. Giant and small stapling machines.
21. Perforators, correcting fluids (for papers and stencils).
22. Ink pads, sellotapes, gums, biros, pencils, erasers, etc.
23. Office pins, clips, stapling pins, file tags, twines, etc.
24. File jackets.
25. Stabilizers for both computer systems and photocopying machines.
26. Computers with e-mailing and Internet browsing facilities.
27. Different brands/sizes of computer printers.

28. Counting machines.
29. Tape recorders.
30. Stopwatches.
31. File trays.
32. English dictionaries.
33. Audio-typing machines.
34. Shorthand laboratory unit.
35. Foreign language translation facilities.
36. Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) facilities.
37. Air-conditioning facilities.
38. Bicycles for dispatching letters and parcels.
39. Motor-cycles (Okada) for dispatching large parcels to remote or long distant places.

Personnel Required: A self-employed office secretary may also employ some supporting staff as follows:

- 1) Messengers.
- 2) Cleaners.
- 3) Technicians.
- 4) Book-binders.
- 5) Computer operators.
- 6) Dispatch riders.
- 7) Telephone operators.
- 8) Office assistants or clerks.
- 9) Fax machine operators.
- 10) Suppliers of various stationery items, equipment and spare-parts.

It is worthy of note here that the equipment or machines that are most modern today may become obsolete within a few years. Hence, the advent of technology has added new dimensions to the available equipment and facilities which are currently in vogue for secretarial and office documentary services in Nigeria. This is the reason why we now have Internet, fax, e-mail, voice message, GSM and many others.

On the other hand, the use of manual and electric typewriters is diminishing in computerized offices/environments. Hence, computer systems have continued to dominate this segment. The use of manual typewriter is still preferred in the training and mastery of keyboarding techniques which have been acclaimed all over the world to possess very high positive transfer of learning to the mastery of computer keyboards.

Tools for Entrepreneurship: In this vein, Ugiagbe and Umunna (2002), opined that, entrepreneurship provides the following tools which are necessary for self-reliance:

- a. **Leadership:** Leadership is a means to directing, and an entrepreneur should be able to exercise this quality. A leader's actions are used to help a group to attain its objectives. Leadership, therefore, is the ability of an entrepreneur to induce subordinates to work towards the goal with confidence and keenness. Also, leadership implies that the leader or entrepreneur accepts responsibility for the achievement of the business objectives, and it is essential for trust and

cooperation from both the entrepreneur and workers. There are three types of leadership; authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire.

Coordination: Coordination and leadership are intimately bound, as each affects the other. One cannot achieve coordination without effective leadership. Together, they ensure that all efforts are channeled effectively towards the right goal. Coordination is the process whereby the effort of a group is synchronized so that the desired goal is achieved. Coordination problems are essentially those of communication. Difficulties lie in horizontal and vertical communication, and when it involves human beings, problems could be numerous.

Morale and Discipline: These are tools that are also provided by entrepreneurship skills which encourage self-reliance or self-employment. .Morale concerns the state of a person's feelings and attitudes. It is the collective attitude of workers towards each other including their work and management. When morale is high, work is done willingly, and with less supervision; where it is low, work is done with poor quality, and problems arise, e.g., when there is a high labour and absenteeism. Also, morale will be high when individual interests are sacrificed to the interest of the business. If morale is good, team spirit will be good, and this is achieved where all members or staff know that every staff is working to achieve the goal of the business, thereby, obey internal authority. On the other hand, if some staff are aware that other members are only interested in personal success rather than that of the business, morale will be low and team spirit will be low.

Discipline is based on cooperation and high morale, which ensures that rules and regulations are obeyed willingly. Discipline can also be obtained by rewards as well as by punishment, but usually, punishment is expected if accepted behaviour is not upheld. Disciplinary action should contribute towards improved behaviour. More importantly, an entrepreneur should not break rules himself. A good example is essential.

Communication: This is another tool necessary for entrepreneurship and self-reliance. Communication is where people in an organization exchange information regarding the operations of the enterprise. It is the inter-change of ideas, facts, and emotions by two or more persons by the use of words, letters, memos, and symbols. Communication is vital because it entails the right use of words in expressions intended ideas.

Enthusiasm and Common Sense: An entrepreneur is full of enthusiasm and common sense after establishing a business of his won and now looking forward to increasing his earnings and enjoying the freedom of self-employment. Enthusiasm and common sense, therefore, enhance the pleasures of new lie which self-employment has now bestowed. This would make him to organize his time at work in order to make him perform his job according to plan.

(f) **Competence and Skill-Based Hard iVork:** Competence and skill-based hard work are the pivots on which the success of an entrepreneur rests. They make the business to flourish and grow by leaps and bounds. An entrepreneur that is not skillful and competent at work cannot stand the test of time. In Nigeria today, youths should endeavour to do their work with competence, and this

will greatly enhance national development.

Problems Militating Against Entrepreneurship in Nigerian Schools: In spite of the positive gains of entrepreneurship as the providers of necessary tools for self-employment in vocational and technical education in Nigeria, there are numerous problems which militate against it. Some of them are as follows:

(a) **Epileptic Supply of Electricity Power:** This is a very big problem in Nigeria. There is a wide-scale power black out in basically all sectors of the economy. Industries, medium-scale, small-scale and retail trade ventures and the like, can hardly boast of constant electricity power supply to be able to produce goods and services. It is also affecting artisans, electricians, iron benders, saloon workers, poultry owners, business centre ventures, etc. which are known to employ a large number of young school leavers. There is still no hope yet in sight for the government to summon the right political will to install constant electricity supply.

On the other hand, poor electricity supply is also one of the major problems hindering effective teaching and learning of vocational and technical education skills in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Due to the fact that the course is an equipment-based one, irregular power supply has greatly inhibited their proper functioning.

(b) **Inadequate/Under-Funding of Vocational and Technical Education in Tertiary Institutions:** The issue of inadequate/under-funding is the greatest problem militating against vocational and technical education in Nigeria. It requires huge resources because skills, knowledge and provision of equipment have to be maintained. Vocational and technical education require expensive equipment and machines for the recipients to benefit from it but government, over the years, have not provided enough funds to prosecute the programmes effectively. This has greatly delayed technical “know-how” in the country.

(c) **Shortage of Equipment/Facilities:** As a result of inadequate funding, there is an outright shortage of equipment and facilities in schools because huge capital outlay is needed to procure them.

(d) **Population Upsurge:** Nowadays, there is an enormous increase in students’ enrolment in our institutions and there is no corresponding increase in facilities to cater for the population.

(e) **Students’ Moral Laxity:** In these days, there is a growing incidence in students’ moral laxity in schools. Vices, such as: cultism, examination malpractices, gansterism, hooliganism and students lackadaisical interests in skills acquisition, make it near impossible for proper acquisition of entrepreneurship skills in vocational and technical education in Nigerian institutions.

(f) **Wide-Scale Corruption:** As Nigerians have imbibed the culture of corruption including money laundry, over-invoicing, looting of treasury and others over the years, there is a corresponding abandonment of projects, epileptic approval

of sub-standard work, and supply of inferior equipment and machines.

- (g) ***Differences between Theory and Practical Work:*** As a result of inadequate funding, there is a great difference between theory and practical work in vocational and technical education.

In order to beef up the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills education in sustainable vocational and technical education, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Entrepreneurial skills development should be studied from the secondary school level. The skills should be studied alongside with vocational and technical education schemes. In this vein, the skills will gear up the youths and adults to imbibe the culture of hard work, dedication to duty including the “technical know-how” so that unemployment will gradually be eliminated from the economy through self-employment.
2. All stakeholders in education should evolve a responsible regular funding of vocational and technical education right from the secondary school education to the tertiary institutions, because it is capital-equipment-based. Funding should also include research and production of learning materials in order to encourage mastery and competence in entrepreneurial skills in vocational and technical education.
3. The attainment of balance between theory and practical work will be achieved as a result of adequate funding of vocational and technical education programmes in the respective institutions of learning. The much-talked about entrepreneurial skills in vocational and technical education schemes will naturally be achieved by the respective graduates (Ugiagbe and Umunna, 2002).
4. Government should take the lead and initiative in fighting unemployment by providing loans to graduates of vocational and technical education in order to enable them set up their own business centres because of its equipment-capital nature. This should be done by setting up a loan scheme to finance it.
5. All tertiary institutions should be massively equipped with the relevant tools, equipment or machines in order to facilitate competencies of graduates.
6. There should be a linkage between institutions offering vocational and technical education and industries in order to enforce a smooth transition from school to the industry.

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