ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION: A PANACEA FOR YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined entrepreneurship education as a panacea for youth empowerment in Nigeria. As the nation is presently experiencing challenges of insecurity and high rate of poverty, the researchers observed that unemployment of young people especially graduates has reached an alarming height. This is due to the fact that the education system is expanding much faster than the economy. Graduates/youths scuttle for the a few available jobs leaving so many unemployed to be exposed to societal vices. Youth self-employment seems not to be impressive because very few individuals venture into it. It is for this reason that the paper examined the role of entrepreneurship education as a way of exposing students to the knowledge of various skills that will enable them to become self employed after graduation rather than job seekers. The paper identified the problems militating against entrepreneurship education, such as lack of fund, corruption, poor enterprising culture, lack of trained teachers, among others. The paper also discussed the strategies for effective entrepreneurship education for youth empowerment which include carrying out innovation, researches, advocacy. We conclude that entrepreneurship education is a veritable tool for endemic problem of poverty, hunger and youth employment. The paper recommended that self-employment should be promoted by government through financing and granting of loans, all higher institutions should make provision for entrepreneurship education in their school curriculum, among others.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship Education, Youth Empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Youths all over the world constitute a vital segment of the society in which they live. Youths as a social group is usually defined in terms of their chronological age and the spectrum of youths has been defined differently by different authors. The National Youth Development Policy (FGN, 2001) defines youths as people aged 18-35 and that they make up about 40
percent of the more than 140 million people in Nigeria. Anasi (2011) asserts that the youths occupy a prominent place in any society and outnumber the middle aged and the aged. Besides, adolescence is an age period when young people have the potential to develop powerful new skills for action: skills to plan a community event, create a multi-level work of art or business plan, or formulate strategy for a lobbying campaign. During this period, new cognitive capacities come on-line that permits youths to obtain higher-order executive abilities: skills for means-ends thinking, for organizing actions over time to achieve a goal (Keating, 2004).

Nigeria, like most developing countries of the world, has a teeming population of youths who are faced with myriad of problems realities which include poverty, conflicts, disease, and particularly unemployment. Dabalan, et al., (2000) noted that the problem of unemployment in the country is said to be traceable to the disequilibrium between labour market requirements and lack of essential employable skills of the graduates. In the same vein Nwafor (2006) succinctly asserts that most youths who are not gainfully employed become agents of social destabilization and disunity, economic sabotage, and thuggery.

Musari (2009) concurred that about 4.5 million enter the labour market every year without any hope of getting employment for life sustenance. The economic implication of this unhealthy climate has left the youths in a vicious cycle of poverty that daily erodes their self-confidence and bright future. This critical age, however, is the right time to teach them the concept, principles, and theories of entrepreneurship to help them learn wealth and employment creation. This is because the youth of today automatically becomes the leader of tomorrow and for tomorrow to be more fruitful, we must give today’s youth proper education and training.

Entrepreneurship is a dynamic process of vision. Nwokolo (2003) defined entrepreneurship as the ability to set up and effectively manage an enterprise as different from being employed in paid employment. It involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills, ideas and managerial abilities necessary for personal self-sufficiency and self-reliance. In other words, entrepreneurship is the willingness and ability of an individual usually called an entrepreneur to seek out an investment opportunity, establish an enterprise based on this and run it successfully. An entrepreneur is an innovator or a developer who recognizes and seizes opportunities, converts these opportunities into workable/marketable ideas, adds value through time, effort, money or skills; assures the risks of the competitive market place to implement these ideas and realizes the reward from these efforts (Kuratko and Hodgetts, 2001).

Creating opportunities to meet the needs of the individual can be achieved through entrepreneurship education. Wikipedia (2009) defined entrepreneurship education as the education that seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and innovation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings. It focuses on the realization of opportunities which can be realized in several ways. In other words, entrepreneurship education can be seen as education that provides students with skills and knowledge that will enable them start off business after graduation, create wealth, and manage the risks accruing therefrom. Entrepreneurship education is a strong tool for youth empowerment. Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement changes in their own lives and the lives of other people (Vavrus and Fletcher, 2006). In other words empowering the youths mean creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own term, rather than at the discretion of others. Empowerment means reducing vulnerability and dependency.

According to the World Bank (1999), education is fundamental to the construction of knowledge economy and society in all nations. It is through education that knowledge and skills are transferred to individuals, and their competencies and abilities developed. Thus, youth entrepreneurship education has been given prominence all over the world. Through
entrepreneurship education, youth are provided with knowledge, skills and innovation so as to encourage them to develop entrepreneurial acumen in a variety of settings.

Developing entrepreneurial skills and initiative becomes a major concern of tertiary institution in order to facilitate employability of graduates who will increasingly be called upon to become job creators. However, a look at the policy document reveals that the issue of self-employment or self-reliance at the end of higher education was not given adequate attention (Aladekomo, 2008). Equally, it was quite evident from the policy that Nigerian educational system was hitherto designed to produce a pool of graduates who depend on the government for employment. This is in contrast to a system that could equip beneficiaries with entrepreneurial skills, make them self-reliant, self-confident and employers of labour. Emphasis was also in preparing undergraduates for leadership styles, managerial thinking and decision making procedures suitable for larger organizations. It was, therefore, not surprising that the methodologies for identifying opportunities and the spanning of entrepreneurial talent were hitherto ignored (Visser, 1997).

In view of this situation, the Nigeria education policy makers have made frantic efforts to review and revise the policy on education in terms of its relevance to the needs of the individuals and those of the society in consonance with the realities of our environment and the modern world. Consequently, the National Policy on Education revised in 2004, section 8(d) states clearly that tertiary education shall help undergraduates “acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society”. The critical issue underlies the directive of the Federal government to all tertiary education, regulatory agencies to establish a necessary mechanism for the introduction, development and sustenance of entrepreneurial culture among Nigerian youths (Akpomi, 2009). There is the need, therefore, for a well planned entrepreneurship education programme in Nigeria tertiary education to be mounted to empower the teeming youths on graduation, hence the need for this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptualizing Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a dynamic process of vision, change, and creation. It requires an application of energy and passion towards the creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions. Essential ingredients of entrepreneurship include the willingness to take calculated risks in terms of time, equity or career, the ability to formulate an effective venture team, the creative skills to marshal needed resources, fundamental skills of building solid business plan, and the vision to recognize opportunity where others see chaos, contradiction, and confusion (Kuratko and Hadgetts, 2004). Entrepreneurship can also be seen as the process where an individual or group of individuals use organized efforts to pursue opportunities, create value and grow by fulfilling wants and needs through innovation and uniqueness, no matter, what resources are seen available (Coulter, 2006). In other words, entrepreneurship is the process of creating a business and taking risks therein.

2.2 Entrepreneur

Meredith, Nelson and Neck (1996) see entrepreneurs as people who have the ability to see and evaluate business opportunities, to gather the necessary resources to take advantage of them and initiate appropriate action to ensure success. According to Anyakoha (2006), the entrepreneur is one who chooses or assumes risks, identifies business opportunity, gather 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 a profit and owns his/her own business. In the same vein, Osuala (2004) noted that an entrepreneur is a person who makes a profit out of self established trade or business, who coordinates factors of production and bears the risk of uncertainty by investing scarce resources on trade and business ventures.

2.3 Entrepreneurship Education

Wikipedia (2009) defined entrepreneurship education as the education that seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills and innovation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings. It focuses on the realization of opportunities which can be realized in several ways. Weaver, et al (2006) noted that entrepreneurship education 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 schools. The Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education (2003) sees entrepreneurship education as one that seeks to prepare people, especially youths to be responsible and enterprising individuals who become entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial thinkers and who contribute to economic development and sustainable development. It focuses on developing an understanding and capacity for pursuit of entrepreneurial behaviours, skills and attributes in widely different contexts.

In a similar vein, Ekankumo and Kemebaradikumo (2011) stressed that entrepreneurship education seeks to provide students (especially those in tertiary schools) with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial studies in a variety of settings. From these assertions, it is obvious that a well implemented entrepreneurship education will climax in economic empowerment and development. The essence of entrepreneurship education is to build on the students entrepreneurship spirit and culture (Adejimola and Olufunmilayo, 2009).Moreso, the Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education (2004) maintained that it is a lifelong learning process, starting from elementary level to other levels of education and spanning to adult education. Akpomi (2009) also holds the view that entrepreneurship education focuses on developing understanding, and capacity for the pursuit of entrepreneurial behaviours, skills and attitudes in widely different contexts.

Moreso, Alain (2009) sees entrepreneurship education as all activities aimed at fostering entrepreneurial mindsets, attitudes and skills as well as covering a range of aspects such as idea generation, start-up, growth and innovation. Akudolu (2010) sees entrepreneurship education as the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitude to enable the learner apprehend life challenges in whatever form and take decisive steps to realize new trends and opportunities for meeting those challenges in all aspects of human life. Finally, entrepreneurship education, according to Adenipekun (2004) is an integrated and structured learning opportunities on how students can become successful entrepreneurs or businessmen and women if they choose to do so. It can also be seen as learning directed towards developing young people (the undergraduates), those skills, competencies, understanding and attributes which equip them to be innovative, and to identify, create, initiate and successfully manage personal, community, business and work opportunities, including working for themselves.

2.4 Youths Empowerment

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desirable actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which both builds individual and collective assets, and improve the
efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets (World Bank, 2011). According to Fletcher (2005), youth empowerment means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others. It simply means assisting the youth to overcome the difficulties which might prevent them from achieving. Olakulehin and Ojo (2006) noted that empowerment means assisting people to overcome obstacles which might prevent them from achieving their potential. The need for empowerment arises from the inability of an individual or a group of people to actualize their dreams and reach their greatest potential due to artificial barriers created by individuals and other groups with the same society.

2.5 Objectives of Entrepreneurship Education

Ediagbonya (2013) stated that the overall objective of Entrepreneurship education is to continuously foster entrepreneurship, culture amongst students and faculty with a view to, not only educating them, but to also, supporting graduates of the system towards establishing them and also maintaining sustainable business ventures, including but not limited to those arising from research.

According to Obiorah (2006) the objectives of entrepreneurship education are to provide meaningful education for the youths, which could make them self-reliant and subsequently encourage them to desire profit and be self-dependent, provides small and medium sized companies with the opportunities to receive qualified graduates who will receive training and tutoring in the skills relevant to the management of the small business centres and provide graduates with training in skills that will make them meet the manpower needs of the society. The author further noted that entrepreneurship education, provides graduates with the training and support necessary to help them establish a career in small and medium size businesses and innovative in identifying new business opportunities and to stimulate industrial and economic growth of rural and less developed areas. In addition, Paul (2005) noted that entrepreneurship education offers functional literacy for the youths to enable them be self-employed and self-reliant, be creative and innovative in identifying novel business opportunities, make certainty bearing feasible and meet manpower needs of the society.

3. ROLE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN YOUTHS’ EMPOWERMENT

A number of roles are significantly played by entrepreneurship education to empower the teeming population of Nigerian youths. Entrepreneurship education helps to decrease the chances of business failures by stressing a consistent and proven set of principles. It prepares, motivates, and equips young people to be entrepreneurs who can turn the challenges of difficulty or hard times of life into opportunities through self-employment or being employed by others.

Entrepreneurship education seeks to prepare people, particularly youths, to be responsible and enterprising individuals who become entrepreneurs or entrepreneur thinkers by immersing them in real life learning experiences where they can take risks, manage the results, and learn from the outcomes.

Through entrepreneurship education, young people especially in higher education institutions, including those with disabilities learn organizational skills, including time management, leadership development, and interpersonal skills, and of which are highly transferable skills sought by employers. According to Ewubara (2010), entrepreneurship education programmes can equip students with entrepreneurial skills that will enable them to create and develop enterprises in various areas. The emphasis here is that the programmes have a way of shifting the focus of students from paid employment to self-employment.
Another role of entrepreneurship education is that it has the tendency of equipping and making students experts in the production of certain items. The curriculum framework of this programme has been designed such that individuals will be able to channel their creative abilities and skills to an area or areas of interest. The interest area may be barbing, soap making, farming and so on (Agoha, 2011). Entrepreneurship education builds the spirit of being entrepreneurs in the minds of the students. Thus, entrepreneurship has a way of discouraging laziness and idleness among our teeming population. Most people that are idle today or probably lazy are those that seem to know little or nothing about entrepreneurship. That is, what it takes to develop business plans, start and manage a business.

Entrepreneurship education can greatly help in addressing the level of poverty in the country. The issue of poverty eradication has been a top priority of many governments and institutions, especially in developing countries where extreme poverty is conspicuous and has become pandemic (Kalirajan, 2009). The incidence of poverty in Nigeria is on the high side, where about 70% of the total population has been classified as poor (Ewhrudjakpor, 2008). This state may be seen as a direct consequence of the absence of entrepreneurship spirit and culture which entrepreneurship education is supposed to foster. In other words, the relevance of entrepreneurship education is feeling more in the area of checking or reducing poverty. Entrepreneurship education can equally help in checking high dependency ratio (That is, the ratio of dependent population to working population) in the country. Once the dependent populations are adequately equipped with these entrepreneurial skills leading to self employment, the burden of the working population will be reduced. Hill, and Latch (2005) noted that the role of entrepreneurship education is to increase the awareness and understanding of the process involved in initiating and managing a new venture as well as to enhance learners of small business ownership as a serious career option.

4. THE PROBLEMS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Inspite of the attempts at encouraging entrepreneurship development, the following problems persist and hinder progress in Nigeria.

Most of the rural entrepreneurs face financial crunch in setting up business because of the non-supportive attitude of financial institutions and banks which work more on papers. The procedures and conditions to avail a loan is time consuming that its delay often disappoints the entrepreneur. Due to this, the entrepreneurs are forced to take credit from village money lenders who charge exorbitant interest rate.

The fear to take risks and the stigma of failure are the key factors why young people don’t engage in entrepreneurship. Some who engage in small scale business usually discontinue after a little while if it does not prosper as they wish. Many are highly impatient to see their business grow at a snail speed. The entrepreneurship, culture of taking risk is not built into them and to develop it over night had been a great challenge. The influx of foreign goods into the local market and corresponding unfortunate development of the uncontrollable local demand for foreign goods are disincentives that militate against the growth of start-up business by youths.

The desire for quick riches and material gains by young Nigerians has made the initiation of their enterprises unattractive and delaying. Youths of nowadays are too ambitious to get rich quick. They look for money by all means either through robbery, prostitution or kidnapping. Instead of investing what they have, they buy expensive cars, live flamboyant life and build houses at the expense of expanding their business. This could pose a big challenge to entrepreneurship development (Olajire and Akomolafe, 2013).

Poor saving culture among the youths serves as a major setback for accessing credit for startups. Young people hoping to be entrepreneurs must be made to understand that banks are there primarily to protect and add value to share holder’s investment. To access fund,
therefore, they must prove to such banks that they own equities in their enterprises than expecting full scale financing of their enterprises. The ideas of taking loans with the mindset of not willing to pay back possibly because it is government money is also very common among Nigerians. Some banks had been indebted and failed because those who took such loans failed to pay back. The loan which is supposed to revolve is no longer revolving because of indebtedness. As such, necessary financial assistance could not be given to deserving entrepreneurs.

Due to inadequacy of facilities like good roads, electricity, access to information, water supply, etc, there is increased problem confronting the development of entrepreneurship education. There is the difficulty of communicating ideas and wares with other areas. Without sales, entrepreneurship cannot be fully developed. The supply of electricity is epileptic if not non-existence and the roads are full of potholes that lead to loss of lives and properties.

Since the entrepreneurs have to deal with government officials from the Local government to State government and the Federal government, the demand for gratification in the form of bribes, double taxation has brought frustration for many entrepreneurs (Olagunju, 2004). For example, it is difficult to do business in many poor countries because governments are so corrupt. In such countries, it is difficult to get permission to build a factory or open a store without a government permit, which is obtained largely through bribery of public affairs, unguided and unrestricted importation of food into the country. The advent of globalization with its attendant liberalization and deregulation has forced the Nigerian government to remove restrictions on the importation of goods, even when there is a logical substitute or competition brand. The unguided implementation of globalization has strangled most businesses. This is because the businesses use obsolete methods of production and primitive sources of power, and in the end, their products are inferior and cost higher than the imported ones (Olagunju, 2004). This infact kills the moral of the local entrepreneurs in producing more goods since very few consumers buy from them.

This results from inability to apply appropriate management concepts and principles in running the affairs of the business. This is usually manifested in poor financial control, weak marketing effort, failure to develop a strategic plan, uncontrolled growth and improper inventory control. Once this sets in, the entrepreneurship development urge is killed and the entrepreneur fails as the business collapse.

5. STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

One of the strategies for promoting entrepreneurship education in Nigeria is to get involved in research and technical assistance programmes. A high quality research on a variety of issues relating to the performance of entrepreneurs, small and large business is a pressing need. This is especially true if entrepreneurship is to achieve an equal status with other disciplines within the University. School management should endeavor to provide recent textbooks for teachers of this programme. This will go a long way in updating their knowledge and improving their competencies.

Another strategy that will achieve functional entrepreneurship education is to adopt innovative methods to train teachers in entrepreneurship. Innovation is change that creates a new dimension of performance. This would include case studies and other interactive methods such as involving teachers in real work on entrepreneurship projects or even in running a mini company. By acquiring direct experience, teachers will be more effective when using these methods with the students. This corroborates with Alain (2009) who classified the teaching methods into the following: case study, group discussion, individual presentation, individual written report, group project, formal lectures, guest speakers, action learning, seminars, web-based learning and video recorded.
Moreso, entrepreneurship education can be promoted through in-service training. Skills do not depend solely upon a person’s fundamental innate capacities, but must be developed through training, practice and experience. If the objective of entrepreneurship education is to equip individuals with entrepreneurial skills, then the best strategy is in-service training for entrepreneurship education teachers which would provide them with education training that would enable them involve directly in the entrepreneurial process.

In addition, training in creativity can help an entrepreneur to view problems from different perspectives and generate unique solutions. The need for training in creativity can be explained based on recent technological advances, short production cycles, global trade possibilities and fluctuating labour force. Creativity will ensure that the individual is involved in initiating new products and create opportunities while solving problems. Knowledge of creativity will also ensure that the individual learns to produce practical solutions to newly defined initiatives. Problem solving cannot be divulged from creativity as the process of thinking, finding fact, seeking ideas and solution are involved in creativity.

Furthermore, developing entrepreneurship culture is another strategy for promoting youth empowerment. This is essentially the culture that is needed to nurture and develop an entrepreneur. An entrepreneurial culture is also an environment where someone is motivated to innovate, create and take risks in business. Developing entrepreneurship culture means that employees are encouraged to brainstorm new ideas or products. For example, parents who encourage their children to take risks and teach them the value of self-employment may raise kids who become future entrepreneurs. This should also be done through non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and institutions like family, churches and other groups.

Advocacy is another strategy that can help promote entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. Advocacy here means sensitizing the government on the roles of entrepreneurship education in equipping students for self-employment and self-reliance. Such sensitization could gear up the government to release funds for the provision of facilities, equipment, and textbooks that would enhance the effective teaching of entrepreneurship education. In other words, advocacy means creating of awareness among the leading class on the general public issues and the need for aligning public policy to address the issue. It means pleading or recommending in favour of a groups voice to be heard.

Entrepreneurship education should be made compulsory in schools at all levels. This will inculcate in students from an early age, the qualities required of them to take up positions of responsibility. School curriculum should be updated and restructured to meet the demand of the labour markets. This is to avoid the mismatch between teaching in our educational institutions and the need of the labour market which usually creates unemployment among the youths. To achieve this, qualified teachers should be recruited to teach vocational, innovative entrepreneurship and job skills.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Entrepreneurship education has been viewed in this paper as a strong tool for poverty eradication, hunger and youth employment. When youths are trained, they explore opportunities in their immediate rural environment instead of migrating to the urban areas in search of job they are not sure about. The development of entrepreneurship education will go a long way in creating employment, give young people the opportunity to develop their enterprising skills, empowering the youths to be job creators and not seekers and by providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge to raise their output, income and wealth. For entrepreneurship education to achieve its goals, there must be quality teachers who can develop in the youths critical and creative thinking in the context of its responsiveness to local demands. This will
help to address the challenges of entrepreneurs in a right direction that will engender economic development in Nigeria. Entrepreneurship education makes education functional, enhances numerous skills acquisition and application, and makes the average Nigerian youth discover the entrepreneurial talents in him/her and therefore be guided to take the risk of starting a business. It also assists in career choice and job placement of youths who have the required skills. Thus, we recommend that:

- Self employment should be promoted by government through financing and granting of loans.
- All higher institutions should make provision for entrepreneurship education in their school curriculum. This is to catch the students, young in acquiring entrepreneurial skills as they grow.
- The spirit of entrepreneurship among Nigeria youths should be promoted by organizing seminars and workshops for entrepreneurship teachers who will in turn impact the desired knowledge and skills onto the students.

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