

## **Emphasising Entrepreneurial Education in Nigerian Universities: An Agenda for a New Paradigm in Graduate Empowerment**

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### **Abstract**

*The recent growth and development in the academic programmes devoted to entrepreneurship globally have been remarkable. However, most third world countries, especially Nigeria, are still plagued with the socio-economic problem of graduate unemployment and poverty. Because of this trend, there seems to be traces of dissatisfaction among stakeholders as regards the relevance attached to the education system. This scenario has prompted the government, through appropriate bodies in the education system, to introduce entrepreneurial education across tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The point here is that practical entrepreneurial education should be made accessible to all students irrespective of discipline. The essence is to provide undergraduates with entrepreneurial orientation while in the University. We argue that entrepreneurial programs should be designed so that potential entrepreneurs are aware of barriers to initiating their entrepreneurial careers and can devise ways to overcome them. The paper recommends that for entrepreneurship education to deliver its target of graduate employment, the Nigerian Government should consider the provision of instructional facilities, adequate funding, and facilitate the establishment of industrial links with the education system.*

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurship, Nigerian Universities, Graduate Empowerment*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Entrepreneurial Education (ED) has emerged as an important concept at the interface of entrepreneurship and organisational learning. The world is evolving because of the search for convenience. Increasingly, attention is being paid on how to improve life and reduce man's stress in all his commitments and undertakings. In line with this, education has always been viewed as the prime engine that propels the needed change and transformation. At the same time, some developing societies across the globe are experiencing the scourge of the educated unemployed in all disciplines. In the face of this socio-economic challenge of unemployment, the educated unemployed, as well as scholars in most countries, are often tempted to shed tears as they query the relevance of education. However, experts across the globe hold firm to the belief that education is a

powerful instrument. It is, in fact, one of the most powerful instruments so far devised by man either for his perpetual improvement or for eventual destruction. Education can heal or kill; it can become a constructive or destructive weapon, and much depends on what type of education that is provided and who provides it (Williams, 2014).

Although research on entrepreneurial education has gained momentum in the past decade, most of the existing works in this area are focused largely on entrepreneurial education in the advanced economies of North America and Europe. Limited work has been done on the issues and challenges facing entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. This paper aims to address this gap by conducting a systematic analysis of the entrepreneurial education literature in order to take stock of the theoretical and empirical development in this area and make recommendation for policy issues. The paper is structured as follows. First, we provide a review of

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the nature, meaning and relevance of introducing entrepreneurial education across disciplines in Nigerian Universities. Secondly, we discuss the reasons prompting such introduction in the University System. Thirdly, we discuss the current pattern of instruction on entrepreneurial education across Nigerian universities. Finally, we consider the implications of our arguments and call for government's efforts towards graduate entrepreneurial development, as well as make recommendations for strategies for improving graduate entrepreneurial development in Nigeria.

### **The Nature of Entrepreneurship**

The entrepreneurship role as a separate and important factor of production, economic development as well as employment provision has in recent times been receiving increasing attention in our country Nigeria. Entrepreneurship is the process of using available capital in any form for business endeavour in an open and free market economy, for the purpose of generating wealth (Oduma 2012). It is the ability of an individual to set up a business enterprise instead of being employed. Thus, the ability should be acquired and should differ in some respect from the abilities required to enable a person obtain employment. The entrepreneur is often interested in exploring his immediate environment to understudy the varied dimensions of the multiple challenges confronting it. Such challenges may be social, economic or even political in nature. The concern of the entrepreneur is on how to transform those challenges to enterprise opportunities. The entrepreneur is often enterprise driven; interested in the least opportunity to risk his resources through investment in order to generate further wealth in the form of profit (Hannon, 2005).

To be successful in these tasks, the entrepreneur involves himself in series of activities and preparations. Those activities define him as an entrepreneur. In this instance, entrepreneurship itself involves the possession or acquisition of skills, ideas and management abilities necessary for the entrepreneur to mobilise the needed resources to exploit the enterprise opportunities within his reach. Entrepreneurship is the ability to create or build up a new business through personal effort, creativity and innovativeness. Entrepreneurship involves initiating, building,

achieving or prompting an enterprise or organisation. It does not involve watching, criticising and condemning others' efforts without following actions to sale through one's own thoughts and ingenuity. It is the need for sensing and spotting business opportunities where others, not driven by enterprise, perceive nothing (Oduma, 2006). Entrepreneurship involves building a team, to complement one's own skills and talents in order to source, find and control resources. It entails making sure that an enterprise opportunity is exploited. It is all about the willingness and ability to tackle calculated enterprise risks involving the capacity to find out and evaluate business opportunities, gather the needed resources, design actions for investment and implement same to take advantage of the opportunities while guided by high achievement motivation. This idea describes the willingness, innovative and creative abilities of an individual to seek out investment opportunities to establish new enterprise and run it successfully.

### **Entrepreneurship Education in Nigerian Universities**

The United States Colorado Educators, cited in Osuala (2004) defines entrepreneurship as a programme or part of the education programme that prepares an individual to undertake the formation and or operation of a small business enterprise. It is a programme of instruction that will enable the beneficiary be properly equipped to establish and operate a profit oriented business venture. Entrepreneurship education involves a specialised training given out to undergraduates to enable them acquire the skills, ideas and managerial abilities and capabilities for self-employment rather than being employed for payment. Abhimanyu (2007) sees entrepreneurial education in Nigerian Universities as enterprise trends, developing in young people the skills, competencies, understanding and attributes which equip them to be innovative and to identify, create, initiate and successfully manage personal or community business and work opportunities, including working for themselves. Ashmore (2009) upholds that entrepreneurial education in Nigerian Universities will seek to prepare the mindset of the undergraduates to be responsible, by being able to generate paid self-employment for themselves and

contribute to economic development and sustainable community.

Entrepreneurship education is not just about teaching someone how to run a business, but also encouraging creative thinking and promoting a strong sense of self-worth and accountability. There are knowledge gained through entrepreneurship education; they include ability to recognise business opportunities in one's environment, ability to create and operate a new venture, and ability to think in a creative and critical value by pulling together a unique package of economic resources to exploit business opportunity. Azubuike (2006) notes that entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions should focus on educating the recipients to equip them with the necessary skills, knowledge, ability, characteristics, interest and motivation to be effective entrepreneurs. It will assist the beneficiaries in explaining their individual skills, talents, knowledge and competencies and make them become successful entrepreneurs. The aim of entrepreneurship education in the University, therefore, is to encourage and train the recipients to create self-employment opportunities for themselves through inventing new businesses. In this direction, entrepreneurship education is the key agent in the development of human creative and innovative talents in business. It involves the development of managerial skills, human relations and appreciable positive attitudes needed for the establishment and operation of a new business venture on profit basis. Similarly, Ojo and Gbinigie (2006) posit that entrepreneurship education aims at supporting people's business knowledge, skills and attitude. It exposes them to recognise the role of the people, enterprise desires, active and creative effort as the starting point for entrepreneurship. Effective entrepreneurship prepares undergraduates in universities to master competencies related to core entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitudes such as: business opportunity recognition, business idea generation, sourcing and controlling resources in the face of surrounding risks to pursue opportunities, venture creation and operation, creativity and critical thinking.

### **Why Emphasis on Entrepreneurial Education?**

Today, the relevance of education is being questioned. Chigunta (2002) posits that until

recently, in Africa and in fact, Nigeria, education has been widely seen as an important means for social mobility in modern society. To most people in Nigeria, education meant a well-paying job, a big house, a car and other fringe benefits (Chigunta, 2002). The perceived futility of education among youths appears to arise from two main factors thus: first is the high and growing problem of unemployment among Nigerian graduates. Second is the type of education the students receive. It is a widely held view that in Africa, especially Nigeria, the education system does not equip young people with skills to compete in the labour market; neither does it prepare them to go into self-employment enterprise activities (Akanmu, 2011). Many young people in Nigeria who are already affected by unemployment claim that education has no relevance to their livelihood.

The scourge of unemployment is a state of joblessness, or idleness of one with labour requirements, potentials, skills, attitudes, and competencies (Bosah, 1987). In the context of declining growth and global economic meltdown, the employment situation in Africa, especially Nigeria, has become critical (Akanmu, 2011). In particular, what is generally referred to as graduate unemployment has increasingly come to be recognised as one of the more serious socio-economic problems confronting many developing countries of Africa, especially Nigeria? Solarin cited in Bosah (1987) states that among the major causes of graduate unemployment are skill mismatch and lack of employment opportunities.

The possession of adequate entrepreneurial skill competence by graduates is a necessary tool which our modern society needs in order to meet the challenges of employability in both the private and the public sectors. There is need, therefore, for adequate manpower development in entrepreneurial education. Thus, unemployment has been attributed to lack of employability skills and competencies required in the world of work (Akanmu, 2011).

Poverty is another socio-economic problem that further jettisons the education system to the mud. Poverty itself is the inability to secure for oneself the basic necessities of life. Poverty is one of the most serious problems in Nigeria. Today, the simplest and commonest characteristic

of the majority of Nigerians is poverty. Poverty, which could be said to be the inability of an individual or a group in securing the basic necessities of life such as clothing, food, health, portable water and shelter, is a deadly cankerworm which has eaten deep into the fabrics of Africa, especially Nigeria (Oduma, 2012).

Graduates are not safe in the scourge of poverty; in fact, they are one of the most vulnerable groups after much reflection on our education system. The level of poverty among Nigerian graduates leaves them in a state of inadequacy, deprivation, want, deficiency, poor nutrition, poor health status, lack of productive assets and lack of participation in decision-making process either as it affects an individual or national arena (Oladunmi; 2009). In line with the above, Ibigbami (2002) points out that the educated unemployed graduates do not only lack the requisite skills and competencies needed in the labour market in their respect areas, they also do not have the courage to undertake private enterprise option. All hope is on securing paid jobs, which do not really exist to absorb the ever-increasing population of graduates. Thus, situation calls for a collective attention of education stakeholders as well as the government. The focus of the attention should be on how to restructure and redesign subject offering and content, thereby assisting graduates to escape the socio-economic challenge of dissatisfaction with the education system, as well as the unemployment and poverty syndrome that is currently making waves in our society (Oduma, 2012).

### **The Essence of Entrepreneurship in Nigeria Universities**

The essence of the entrepreneur lies in what is called “the spirit of initiative”. The entrepreneur must demonstrate great ingenuity for he is the economic agent who promotes the evolution of the economic process. The entrepreneurs stand on their own because of the business knowledge, skills and creative abilities they have gained. They are often job producers rather than job seekers. Entrepreneurship education holds many promises to youths of the Nigerian society, especially the undergraduates. Thus, the essence of the entrepreneurship education in Nigerian Universities include to:

- a. provide meaningful education for the graduates which could make them self-reliant and subsequently encourage them to derive profit and be self-employed.
- b. provide small and medium size companies with the opportunity to recruit graduates who will receive training and tutoring in the skills relevant to building or managing small businesses.
- c. provide graduates with training and support necessary to help them establish a career in small and medium size businesses.
- d. provide graduates with training in skills that will enable them to meet the manpower needs of the society.
- e. provide the graduates with enough training in business risk management to make uncertainty-bearing possible and easy.
- f. stimulate industrial and economic growth of rural and less developed areas.
- g. provide graduates with the mindset to channel their innovative and creative thoughts into enterprise creation, enterprise resources generation and management (Adeyemi, 2006).

### **Entrepreneurial Practical Skill Training Centres in the University**

The role of University Education as the engine of social and economic change and transformation cannot be overemphasised in any society. University Education is perceived here as a process that seeks to re-socialise individuals to develop behaviours and lifestyle that are consistent with and supports the development goals of the society. Through the University Education, the recipients are fully equipped to contribute meaningfully to the social and economic development of their nation. In a knowledge economy like Nigeria, University Education provides the means to help individuals develop self-worth. It also equips people with skills and attitude to participate in social, political and economic development of the economy.

In this instance, we would like to posit here that Entrepreneurial Skill Training Centres in the University should serve various purposes as follows:

- a. A lab centre for vocational skill training of students in varied vocational and technical choice areas

- b. Fostering entrepreneurial culture among students and faculty with a view to assisting the students establish and maintain sustainable business on graduation
- c. To empower students with new skills to be able to harness business opportunities, be self-reliant and become job creators and not job seekers on graduation
- d. To provide the needed prop to boost private sector investment, to curb the problem of unemployment among graduates
- e. Inculcate new ideas to life through investment, creativity and value-adding innovations
- f. Develop in graduates, the skills, entrepreneurial orientation and mindset to prepare for business, vocational and professional lives after their university education
- g. A total hands-on-deck approach practically oriented to blend with theory and make the students functional
- h. Taking the students to reality by enabling them to gain practical orientation, technical know-how as well as vocational skill update adequate enough to make them viable in their chosen vocation
- i. To tactically nurture the students to develop strong leverage in business risk taking
- j. To be exposed to technocrats or technical experts in various work skill and in various vocations of life
- k. To build up work courage spiritually and physically in the use of work tools and in their maintenance as well
- l. To develop special ability and the desired accuracy in material measurement and in determining material quality and combination
- m. To develop endurance in work skill development especially in fabrication, mixture, construction and in general processing of raw material to finished products

### **Realities about Entrepreneurial Training Programmes for Nigerian Youths**

There are concerns among scholars that entrepreneurial lectures, classes and tutorials do not really expose students to the desired entrepreneurial skills needed for self-employment on graduation. Entrepreneurial teaching in the Universities should be properly planned such that theory classes blend with practical trainings in the

students' desired choice of vocation. Entrepreneurial practical, therefore, is a necessity tailored to blend with the theory in order that each complements the other to promote the development of personal qualities such as creativity, risk-taking and responsibility. The desired blend should provide the technical and vocational skills that are needed by graduates in order to start new business (Nwanosike & Oko, 2014).

All universities need to establish a well equipped Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition Centres to provide the students with the needed work skills on graduation. Unless this is done, the overall teaching objectives in Entrepreneurial Education will remain a distant cry that will not be settled. Entrepreneurial skills can as well be acquired outside the four walls of the university. It could be gained through various avenues such as apprenticeship, attending entrepreneurship workshop/training. Examples of government specific efforts on entrepreneurial training for skill acquisition include:

- a. Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P): The Federal Government of Nigeria under the "SURE-P" launched the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) in October, 2012 to create opportunity for 50,000 graduates to be attached to firms/organisations where they could work for a year and enjoy a monthly stipend of ₦18,000. The GIS is meant to provide the opportunity to unemployed graduate to gain working experience during a period of one year and enhance their employability in the labour market, get retained by their firms of engagement or even develop private business (enterprise) based on experience gained.
- b. The Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (Youwin): This is a collaborative programme of the Federal Ministry of Finance, Communication and Technology and Youth Development. Youwin is organised as an annual business plan competition for aspiring youth entrepreneurs in Nigeria. Successful youths with the best business plan during the competition are often selected across the country. During the Youwin competition, about 1,200 selected aspiring entrepreneurs are

usually sponsored with about ₦1million- ₦10million to start up their new businesses.

- c. **Corpers Entrepreneurial Programme:** The Small and Medium Scale Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) has begun training of graduates (Corp members) under the NYSC investment and enterprise skills. The motive here is to help exploit the opportunities that abound especially among the youth (Corp members) in the establishment and expansion of small-scale cottage industries in Nigeria.
- d. **The NYSC Venture Price Competition:** This programme was introduced by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to sensitise and create awareness in Nigerian youths, awaken their entrepreneurship expertise and orientate serving youth Corps members towards seeking alternative employment options.
- e. **The Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF):** This was established by the Federal Government of Nigeria to promote and upgrade petroleum technology and manpower development through research and training of Nigerians as graduates, professionals, technicians and craftsmen in various fields like: engineering, geology, geophysics, management, education, social sciences and other relevant fields in the Nigerian public sector. The PTDF is target, based on the mission above, to sponsor and train young Nigerians to acquire functional and saleable skills needed for entrepreneurial take-off, operations and management (Nwanosike and Oko, 2014).

Emphasis on Entrepreneurial Education in Nigerian universities is further underscored by the realities implicit in entrepreneurial practical training. These realities have been summed up in this paper to include:

- a. Providing youths (graduates) with skills and information required to secure development
- b. Empowering graduates (youths) to work for themselves or create jobs for others
- c. Protecting youths (graduates) from labour demand and supply shocks through acquisition of functional and saleable work skills

- d. Providing youths with the opportunity to sharpen their skills, and enhance their employability
- e. Providing youths with nascent opportunity to build new networks and professional contacts
- f. Providing graduates with the opportunities to become competitive, enterprising, smart, knowledgeable and portray themselves as indispensable brands to the labour and the business market

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that entrepreneurial education could lead to: stimulation of the nation's economy, creation of self-employment among graduates, reduction of rural-urban migration by graduates, provision of practical training opportunities especially through the apprenticeship system, stimulation of rural resources, income generation and redistributions, better standard of living, as well as fostering large-scale production in the long run. It is in the light of the above, that we suggest that the current emphasis on entrepreneurial education in Nigerian universities should be sustained.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To realise the gains of the emphasis as discussed above, entrepreneurial instruction in universities should be well-designed to involve adequate tutorials and practicals in students' own chosen vocation. Both the theoretical tutorials and hands-on-deck practicals should, of necessity, complement each other, be equally relevant and suitable to blend with each other for students to understand.
2. Government should be committed to encourage enterprise creation especially among graduates during their NYSC period.
3. All undergraduates should be encouraged to undergo intensive special training in their chosen vocational areas to enable them acquire the needed job skills at competitive level.
4. Entrepreneurial practical training centres in universities should be well equipped to facilitate work skill acquisition as in (No. 3) above.
5. Efforts should be well made to ensure adequate industrial linkage with the universities. Successful entrepreneurs in our business environment should be made to be

part of the entrepreneurial programmes, tutorials and practicals as offered in Nigerian Universities.

6. Graduate Enterprise Development Bank should, as a matter of urgency, be created. This bank should be manned and controlled by NUC with branches in all the Nigerian Universities. The essence of this proposal is to

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