

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES AND EMPLOYMENT GENERATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, Nigeria and some other developing economies have been making frantic efforts to grow and develop their economies through several initiatives that include sensitising the populace and providing training for individuals on entrepreneurship. This move became imperative in the face of massive unemployment and excruciating poverty among the citizenry. Not long ago, Nigeria took a step further to include entrepreneurship education in the curricula of tertiary institutes with the purpose of furnishing youths with the prerequisite entrepreneurial skills for job creation through engagement in small and medium enterprises rather than seeking same on passing out from school. It is on these premises that this article seeks to examine entrepreneurship education as a means of ameliorating poverty through the agency of employment generation in Nigeria.

Key Words: *Entrepreneurship, Small and Medium Enterprises, Employment, Nigeria*

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is the practice of seeking and recognising openings within the environment and transforming them by creative and innovative means into marketable products or services thereby creating value and wealth for the individual as well as the society. The success of creating income for a large number of rural and urban dwellers with or without paid employment highly depends on entrepreneurship which constitutes the backbone of economic development of countries world over. This is due to its inherent capacity to generate jobs, create wealth and bring about structural changes in the society particularly in developing countries. Through entrepreneurship, new ideas, processes of combining resources and putting each of them to productive use are discovered and these activities keep unemployment at bay as the process ensures a steady generation of business opportunities (Umemezia, 2018). Nowadays, there has been growing unease over the constantly expanding rates of

unemployment in different parts of the world, predominantly in many developing economies, where youths have been branded as worst hit. Accordingly, different governmental and non-governmental organizations in Nigeria have formulated policies by support agencies such as the Small Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN), the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Raw Materials & Development Council (RMADC), National Directorate for Employment (NDE), National Office for Technology Acquisition & Promotion (NOTAP), et cetera to tackle the negative issues of unemployment amongst Nigerians (Emmanuel, 2012, Akhuemonkhan, Raimi & Sofoluwe, 2013). These small enterprise initiatives and strategies were developed firstly, with the expectation that self-employment would serve as a means of unlocking the economic potentials of the citizenry. Secondly, they were meant to improve the capacity to empower and endow men and women in society towards making them

participate in economic development as well as benefit from their national economy which forms the foundation for national transformation (Ekpoh & Edet, 2011). In an attempt to further consolidate its effort towards eradicating unemployment, particularly among fresh graduates, the Federal government of Nigeria established another means of inculcating self-employment culture through entrepreneurship education in undergraduate students of tertiary institutions. The directive to incorporate entrepreneurial educational studies in the curriculum of Nigerian Universities was therefore, given to the National Universities Commission (Aja-Okorie & Adali, 2013).

Entrepreneurship education as a component of the national educational structure is the kind of training which entails the obtainment of attitude, knowledge, skills as well as the management aptitude needed for job creation. In other words, entrepreneurship education helps to make entrepreneurs out of undergraduates who in turn would provide employment after passing out from school rather than seek one. Consequently, it behoves any well-meaning government to institute an educational system that integrates this type of education into its curriculum while providing every necessary resource required to rendering it purposeful. An efficient entrepreneurship education constitutes a tool for aggressively combating unemployment and poverty. It is on these grounds that this manuscript seeks to examine entrepreneurship education as a means of ameliorating poverty through the agency of employment generation in Nigeria.

Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education is an academic package developed to ingrain students with skills, competencies, knowledge and values, necessary for recognising business openings, starting and organising a new business enterprise

(Omolayo, 2006). It is about discovering ideas and translating them into existence. Drucker (1985), therefore, refers to the concept as practice behaviour.

Entrepreneurship education is an academic intercession geared towards instilling entrepreneurial skills and qualities into the learners to enable them succeed in the business milieu (Ogundele, Akingbade & Akinlabi (2012). According to Garavan and Cinneide, (1995), entrepreneurship education is a sequence of actions aimed at helping individuals understand and develop abilities, skills knowledge, attitudes, and values linked to the definition, analysis and solution of a broad spectrum of problems as they relate to the successful management of businesses from its start off point to maturity stage. It provides students with the inspiration as well as the requisite skills and knowledge that foster entrepreneurial success in an array of settings (Minniti, 2010). And focuses on developing and equipping the youth with entrepreneurial passion and competencies and aimed at reducing the problems connected with entrepreneurship thought and development (Izedonmi & Okafor, 2010).

Osuola (2010) asserts that entrepreneurship education provides education, skills for the Nigerian youth to be creative and innovative to enable him or her build a career in small and medium enterprise, equipping them with risk management skills for self-reliance and self-independence while helping to meet the manpower needs of industries as well as stimulating national industrialization and the economic development of rural and urban areas.

Though there is no existing rule compelling persons to acquire entrepreneurship education as a condition for successful, obtaining an entrepreneurial training constitutes an added advantage for improving an entrepreneur's chances to succeed. This is because the objectives of entrepreneurship education are built

around the social, economic and political advancement and survival of the society and its citizens. If properly implemented, these objectives of producing top-class graduates equipped to generate jobs and eradicate poverty in Nigeria through the establishment of personal businesses or SMEs can substantially be realized (Ekankumo & Kemebaradikumo, 2011).

Entrepreneurial Education and the Growth of SMEs

Entrepreneurship is regarded as the backbone and engine of economic development. It is an established fact that the level of economic growth of a state considerably depends on the extent of entrepreneurial activities in that nation. Some studies confirm the link between entrepreneurship, economic development, job creation, and empowerment of the deprived section of the populace which includes women and the poor” (Adetayo, Oke & Aderonmu, 2015) citing Oluremi and Agboola (2011).

SMEs are pertinent to economic growth and considerably necessary for generating profit, increasing sales and providing returns on investment to owners of SMEs. Developing economies like Nigeria, experiencing slow or hampered economic development suffer more from scarcity of skilled manpower and entrepreneurs that can create the markets and mechanisms needed to enhance economic growth than from scarcity of capital, labour or land (United Nations Development Program, 1999). Therefore, entrepreneurship is believed to be the key to economic growth, development and prosperity in various countries. Entrepreneurship development is the essential ingredient for economic progress (Harper, 2003).

The Asian Productivity Organization (2007) avers that entrepreneurship education is a training which considers knowledge-based human capital investment as a precondition for continuous economic expansion and efficiency of business

ventures. An organisation's competitive advantage derives from its entrepreneurial aptitude amid others, namely management capability, technical expertise and its adaptableness to the internal and external business environment.

Skills are demonstrable knowledge; they are confirmed through actions or performance and obtained through education and training (Perks & Smith, 2006). Entrepreneurial education creates the opportunity for the individual to acquire and appropriate these skills, capacities and circumstances for individuals so as to help him/her achieve the goals of the business. Basic education coupled with a constant investment in on-the-job training for staff or the development of entrepreneurial skills is thus an essential factor for any kind of and any meaningful development. So, while education grooms the individual for the attainment life purpose, training grooms him or her for the performance of specific tasks. Ladzani and Van-Vuuren (2002) therefore, argue that varying circumstances demand that small and medium business managers/owners receive constant training in order to lower failure rates, enhance profits and attain growth.

Entrepreneurial proficiency is vital to the growth and survival of SMEs and entrepreneurial education, as conceived by successive governments, constitutes a veritable means through which it can be sourced and sustained. This is because entrepreneurship education, as a system of activities, is basically programmed for the enhancement of the skill, knowledge, behaviour, and attitudes of individuals and to undertake the roles of entrepreneurs (Tijani-Alawiye, 2004).

Entrepreneurial Education, SMEs and Employment Generation

The Nigerian education machinery, with particular reference to the university system, has been known to turn out graduates who do not meet up with the

requirements of the job market. This situation bespeaks an obvious mismatch, gap, and disconnect between the expectancies of the workplace and actual products of the country's tertiary institutions (Onuoha, 2011). This deficiency, along with other factors, left several Nigerian graduates unemployable and victims of youth restiveness in some cases.

Unemployment and the failure of university graduates to contribute significantly to economic growth through self-employment or the establishment of SMEs constitute the twin-factors that led to the inclusion of entrepreneurship education by the Federal Ministry of Education as an element of the curricula of colleges, polytechnics and universities in Nigeria. This became operative as from the 2007/2008 academic period and was implemented via their regulatory bodies viz. the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Universities Commission (NUC), (ILO, 2010; Gabadeen & Raimi, 2012). Thus, entrepreneurship development has, since then, become a mandatory subject for every student in Nigerian tertiary institutions regardless of their fields of specialization (Yahya, 2011).

Entrepreneurship education is perceived as one of the fundamental factors that could impact undergraduates' occupation choice (Kolvereid & Moen, 1997; Peterman & Kennedy, 2003). Scholars are thus in support of the integration of entrepreneurial education into the curricula. For example, Nwangwu (2007) encourages entrepreneurship education and asserts that its graduates possessing cognate and adequate skills and training will be able to explore noble business opportunities and exploit them. Along similar lines, Fayolle (2004) and Bhandari (2006) note that several tertiary institutions have implemented a broad array of entrepreneurship programmes which seem

to be impacting students in the direction of engendering entrepreneurial interests, leading them into owning businesses of their choice. This renders Soutaris, Zerbinati and Al-Lahan's (2006) assertion that entrepreneurship programmes enhance behaviours and attitudes that can awaken entrepreneurial intent among youths who may have interest in the economic growth of their country, a truism. On the sustainability of the initiative, Daku and Oyekan (2014) advocate the establishment of different education and support programmes for youths that would provide a variety of skills, behaviours, capacities and attitudes required for establishing personal businesses in pursuit of self-employment in Nigeria. They stress the importance of well-trained teachers, conducive learning environment, political will and the need to get parents as well as children informed on the relevance of the designed education system.

The means to the successful establishment of a culture of entrepreneurship in Africa can only be by training that relies on all stakeholders, including teachers and students. Besides the academic influence the educational system wields, much of the profound impact needed to be made on the development of the youth can also be exerted by this same machinery (Njoroge & Gathungu, 2013). Rationalising the need to encourage entrepreneurship culture among students, Schnurr and Newing (1997), note that generally, youths possess such excellent qualities such as passion, energy, resourcefulness, initiation, drive, ambition, enthusiasm, zest, courage, and boldness which are all important attributes of entrepreneurs. These qualities should be explored and exploited along entrepreneurial line since the quintessence of entrepreneurship education is to instill in the youths, entrepreneurship culture and spirit (Adejimola & Olufunmilayo, 2009).

A number of researches have reported that there is a considerable association

between entrepreneurship education and self-employment intention (Emmanuel, Dazala & Daniel, 2012; Ekpoh & Edet, 2013). In a study to evaluate the influence of entrepreneurship education on the employability of graduates of universities in Nigeria, Agu and Chiaha (2013) discovered that entrepreneurship education furnishes students with employability skills.

When entrepreneurship education is well-structured, it becomes an effective instrument for eradicating poverty, generating employment, promoting gender equality and realizing stated educational goals (Akhuemoukhan, Raimi & Sofoluwe, 2013). As Anam, Iba and Aregbe (2014) discovered, there is a meaningful correlation between entrepreneurial education and employment generation and poverty reduction.

Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges

Entrepreneurship education in Nigeria is fraught with a number of challenges. These problems impede the rate at which the initiative's laudable objectives are achieved. Primary among these pitfalls is the problem of finance. Like several other initiatives instituted in Nigeria, the entrepreneurship education programme is not adequately funded. Therefore, the infrastructure, facilities and equipment required to deliver practice-oriented entrepreneurship education cannot be afforded. This is worsened by the largeness of the class, resulting from high admission rate, which exceeds the capacity of departmental staff and overstretch the available facilities beyond limit. On completion of the entrepreneurial programme, young graduates are usually left on their own without any financial assistance from government or financial institutions even in form of loans/credit to start off a business. This situation which has been attributed to poor and inadequate

policy framework has encumbered entrepreneurial development in the nation and hampered the zeal of many school leavers who had anticipated a life of self reliance after their training. Those who by virtue of personal savings or familial assistance dare to start are unprepared for the highly risky business environment that endangers their survival and progression to the next stage (Maina 2014).

Entrepreneurship education in Nigerian tertiary institutions also faces the problem of structurally defective curricula and poor curriculum execution in tertiary institutions. This objectionable condition has made the achievement of the purpose of the entrepreneurship initiative in Nigeria unattainable (Garba, 2004). The objectives of entrepreneurship education can only be met if there is a well articulated and structured curriculum to guide its delivery. The already heavily loaded curricula institutions operated with before the introduction of entrepreneurial education could only accommodate a very limited credit loading for entrepreneurship education. According to Agbonlahor (2016:211), "the NUC benchmark for entrepreneurship education is 6 credits hour, but due to the bloated existing credit loading most of the Universities cannot accommodate the 6 hours and as such entrepreneurship education is taught as a onetime 2 credits hour with a very shallow content". This negates the essence of a good curriculum whose content should be in phases but integrated to ensure a efficient improvement of knowledge over time as well as embrace the notion of problem-solving learning activities.

Entrepreneurship education is practice-based. But what the students at school experience is a system that is essentially theory-oriented, which denies the students the opportunity to witness the difficult realities of the business environment first hand. Onyeachu (2008) notes that the incidence of not having goals of specialised education converted into practical

realities at the policy execution point is a commonplace in the Nigerian education sector.

Entrepreneurship education is better taught through real execution of business projects, professional talks, industrial tours and lectures from successful business owners while still in school. Upholding this view, Agbonlahor, (2016) asserts that this is what obtains in the United States of America where institutions offering entrepreneurship training invite business managers to make presentations, share experiences and even teach full courses. In Nigeria, regrettably, the focus is still a little on mentoring and very much on theoretical instructions (Gabadeen and Raimi, 2012). Therefore, the lack of co-curricular activities for example internships, entrepreneurship clubs, seminars and workshops, lectures and talks by professionals, business plan, venture incubators and competitions are vital weaknesses of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria (Agbonlahor, 2016).

Indeed, the absence of a practice-oriented education in Nigeria has done untold damage to our education system; it has reduced its functionality, viability and applicability and has hampered the nation's industrialization intentions (Egbe & Eze, 2012). Allied to the aforementioned is the dearth of relevant learning materials including standard text-books on entrepreneurship education (Ifedili and Ofoegbu, 2011). Many accessible text-books are obsolete and deficient and failed to deal with the peculiar character of the Nigerian business environment.

Among the significant factors that have hindered economic growth in Nigeria, the delay in starting entrepreneurship education in Nigeria stands out as one. The success of developed economies like the United States of America is attributable to the early introduction of entrepreneurship education which began in 1947 (Kuratko & Hodgetts, 2004). Having begun much later, it would have been advantageous for the

nation to embark on the same entrepreneurship education starting from a much lower level, the primary school level (Agbonlahor, 2016).

Entrepreneurship education in Nigeria also suffers from the dearth of lecturers to impart entrepreneurial knowledge. It is commonplace to find lecturers of business administration and related disciplines anchoring entrepreneurship education in our tertiary institutions. As a specialized discipline, entrepreneurship education, as done in countries where it is yielding expected dividends, should be taught by lecturers who have acquired the requisite training and as full time staff, are wholly devoted to the entrepreneurship education programme (Agbonlahor, 2016 citing Zhuo and Haixia, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Development Theory

Human capital development theory seems to be most suitable for this paper. Human capital theory was put forward by Becker (1964) and has been adjudged the most prominent economic theory of western education, having formed the basis for setting the structure of government policies since its formulation and increasingly perceived as an important determinant of economic performance. The increase in physical capital stock, significantly depends on the availability and buildup of well trained human capital. This comprises the process of improvement skills, knowledge, and the competence of every individual of the nation. Becker (1964) asserts that education and/or training raises the performance of employees by facilitating the impartation of relevant and useful knowledge and skill.

Within the past two centuries, we have had two notable schools of thought: the Classical School of Thought (the first school) that differentiated between the acquired capacities which were categorised as capital and the human

beings themselves who were not and the Neo – Classical School of Thought (the second school) which alleged that human beings were capital. In contemporary human capital theory, every human behaviour is premised on the economic self – interest of individuals functioning freely in competitive markets. Other kinds of behaviours are regarded as misrepresentations of the model.

Kwon, (2009) offered an outstanding account which represents a modern improvement of the Human Capital Theory. It emphasised the significance of education and training as the key to participation in the new global economy. And not too long after this, precisely in 2010, the Organization of Economics Co – operation and Development (OECD) inspired governments of developed economies to adopt policies aimed at increasing knowledge and innovation in products and services as an economical pathway to sustained prosperity. Economists are in agreement that the lack of investment in human capital is responsible for the slow economic growth of less developed countries.

Conclusion

SMEs constitute a major source of employment prospects and capital formation for citizens and revenue generation for government in terms of taxes. They assist in developing the economy through industrial expansion; the production of primary and intermediate products. Therefore, it has become imperative to make the populace imbibe the culture of self employment as early as possible, hence the need to launch entrepreneurship education in the three tiers of education primary, secondary and tertiary schools. Several countries now support entrepreneurship education, and have begun the programme in order to achieve such objectives as educating the populace to exhibit positive attitudes toward self - e m p l o y m e n t ,

recognisefeasible business openings, show a yearning to undertake a business, express skills for managing successful enterprises, and encourage new businesses and other entrepreneurial endeavours. Unfortunately, though Nigeria as one of these nations, also run entrepreneurship education programmes in schools, she is yet to harvest the dividends. As in other facets of economic development, the stage has not been adequately set for such a brilliant programme to produce intended outcomes. Many of the basic requirements for its successful take off and sustenance have not been put in place.

Recommendations

1. Government should reinvigorate the numerous agencies responsible for facilitating entrepreneurial development, especially the funding facilitating vehicles, to ensure the current expectations being raised in the students are not only sustained, but eventually made to materialize
2. The government should engage enough entrepreneurship teachers/researchers in their various training centres
3. Entrepreneurship education should be made to, at least, start from secondary schools. Early introduction to entrepreneurship education will enhance the timely development of an entrepreneurship culture and constitutes be a faster means to industrialization and economic development.

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