

**ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION: A VITAL INSTRUMENT FOR YOUTH
EMPOWERMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH HIGHER
EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The rate of Nigerian youth unemployment is becoming alarming and calls for serious intervention. Majority of current employers look for youths who are intellectually and skillfully equipped. Unfortunately, most of the contemporary graduates from various institutions of higher learning are generally found wanting in terms of functional skills. This paper addresses the necessity for entrepreneurship education in higher institutions as precursor of youth empowerment and sustainable development in Nigeria. Education is described as a process of empowering an individual to be resourceful and independent. With the present situation of economic recession in Nigeria, the paper calls for re-direction of the youths to strive to become initiators of wealth and job creators rather than job seekers, innovators and risk-takers in terms of employment and self-sustenance. Specifically, the paper canvasses the concepts of education and youth empowerment, entrepreneur and entrepreneurship, objectives and roles of entrepreneurship education, techniques for acquiring entrepreneurship education, challenges of entrepreneurship education, and suggestions for strategies for effective entrepreneurship education and youth empowerment and sustainable development. Conclusions and recommendations are made based on realities on ground.

Keywords: Education, youth empowerment, entrepreneur, entrepreneurship education, sustainable development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education and skills acquisition are inseparable in our present day economic recession situation in Nigeria. A nation can be recognized and valued according to the evidences of the standard of effective, functional and qualitative education profusely manifested through entrepreneurship skills acquired by its citizens, especially the youth. The future of Nigeria lies in the hands of our youths. Empowering the youth for sustainability is paramount to building a nation economically, socially, physically, educationally and otherwise. On the contrary, negligence of youth empowerment through effective, functional and qualitative education could be the beginning of the nation's stagnation in sustainable development. There is need for sound higher education as a best instrument for empowering the youth for sustainable development in Nigeria. Higher education should go beyond accumulation of knowledge for certification; rather emphasis should be placed on both acquisition of knowledge and meaningful skills that would lead graduates to become self-reliant and employers of labour for sustainable development. Majority of contemporary youths who passed through higher education in Nigeria find it difficult to fit into the labour market due to lack of required skills needed for employment. Youths should be empowered and encouraged to be innovative, creative, enterprising, and independent and risk-takers in order to meet up with the present unemployment challenges in Nigeria.

Youth empowerment can be viewed as a way of encouraging and giving opportunity to youths to exercise their potentials, talents, freedom and initiatives in achieving their goals. When youths are empowered, they become responsible and self-reliant. On the contrary, as posited by Okpeh (2005), if youths are not empowered and given responsibilities in the society, they are likely to constitute a threat to national survival and stability, especially if they are allowed to drift into urban centres as unemployable, ill-disciplined and morally bankrupt youths. To forestall youth restiveness therefore, it is very pertinent to empower the youths while in tertiary institutions through such measures and strategies like entrepreneurship training, skills acquisition, access to credit facilities and qualitative education with unlimited life-enhancing opportunities. This would ultimately transform the youths from unenviable polite economic entity to a level of high productivity and sustainable development. Entrepreneurship education is thus a basic tool for the youth to achieve a balanced education for sustainable development in Nigeria. In essence, the ability of the youth to turn ideas into active-action through creativity,

innovation and risk-taking, as well as the capability and ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve stated goals and objectives could be referred to as entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship is a process of being capable, willing and ready to seek out and make use of available opportunity to create, initiate and take a decision to invest and manage resources. Gana (2008) stated that, entrepreneurship is the willingness and the ability of an individual to seek out investment opportunities in an environment and be able to establish and run an enterprise successfully based on the identified opportunities. Watson (2009) added that entrepreneurship is more than simply 'starting a business' because it is a process through which individuals identify opportunities, allocate resources, and create value, more often than not through the identification of either unmet needs or of opportunities for change.

Entrepreneurship education is that type of teaching and learning that empowers the youth to be equipped economically, socially, financially and psychologically through appropriate and proper skills acquisition in higher education for sustainable development. A well acquired entrepreneurship education makes the youths to be responsible, creative, innovative, risk takers, self-reliant and prospective employers of labour in Nigeria society. In the same perspective, Ayeduse (2011) supports that entrepreneurship education will provide meaningful education for undergraduates which could make them to be self-reliant and provide them with creative and innovative skills necessary for identifying new business opportunities. Youths should be creative, innovative and ready to explore every possible opportunity in their environment to start up some projects that can generate wealth instead of waiting for government jobs that are often difficult to get. One of the reasons for introducing entrepreneurship education especially in tertiary institutions is to provide students with the knowledge, skills and motivation for entrepreneurial studies in a variety of settings.

2.1 YOUTH AND EDUCATION

Youth can be considered as a state of being young at heart and has the strength to meet up with the challenges of coping with labour. It is a transition stage from childhood to adulthood. Youth is defined by Webster's New Oxford Dictionary in Adebayo (2002) as "the time of life when one is young especially the period between childhood and maturity of the early period of existence, growth or development" (page45). According to Jega (2012), Youth can be defined as a special group of people with strong stamina and passion for realizing certain set goals and objectives'.

For the purpose of execution of Nigeria's National Youth Development Policy, the youth comprises all young persons of age 18-35 years who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The word education is derived from the Latin word, 'educare' meaning 'to lead out'. Thus, education can be defined as a process of leading out an individual out of ignorance of unknown to the enlightenment of the known. To be educated can be referred to as possessing the capability and ability to put into practice the already acquired knowledge, skills and training at any required moment anywhere. Different professionals have viewed the concept of education from different perspectives. Mallum and Haggai (2000) considered education as the process by which an individual acquires knowledge, attitude, skills and values. Education can be referred to as an all-round development of the individual physically, psychologically and socially for the benefit of self and the society. Education according to Farrant (1980) is the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, faculties trained and skills developed. Aluwong (2010) argued that education is the key to national development because it unlocks the economic potentials of the people; empowers and equips individuals in society to participate in, and benefit from, their national economy; facilitates economic development and provides the basis for transformation. Education is the essential tool for sustainability. The present global economic crises suggest that the entire world is in a war between financial /qualitative education and catastrophe.

EMPOWERMENT AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment connotes giving power, authority, strength, freedom and courage to an individual for a particular task or responsibility. Oxford dictionary (2010) defines empowerment as "granting of political, social or economic power to an individual or group". Mills and Friesen (2011) explain empowerment as the authority of subordinates to decide and act. It is something people do for themselves which involves solidarity and participation in the struggle for greater control over their lives.

Youth empowerment can be termed as the process whereby young people are assisted to become independent, self-reliant, employable and responsible. According to Kar, Pascual and Chickering (1999), 'Youth empowerment is often addressed as a gateway to inter-generational equity, civil engagement and democracy building'. Youths can be empowered and sustained for life by

creating a conducive and enabling environment for them to express their views, and participate in taking decisions that affect their lives in the society they found themselves and readiness for the acceptance of the consequences of those decisions taken. This enabling environment will give them sense of self-fulfillment in advancing socially, economically and culturally in their country. Youth can be empowered to gain occupational skills through vocational and technical education for sustainability. Okorie (2001) asserts that involving the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. Abdullahi (1994) maintains that vocational and technical education involve the acquisition of techniques and the application of the knowledge of the science for the improvement of man's surrounding. This includes dealing with manpower training in professional areas as engineering, agriculture, business, home economics, etc. The skills involve practical works and application that lead to particular occupation. Nuru (2007) opined that changes in any nation's economy is required to prepare young people for the jobs of the future of which technical and vocational education have crucial roles to play. Asogwa and Diogu (2007) maintained that there is an urgent need for the Nigeria's attention to be redirected towards self reliant and sustainable means of livelihood which technical education provides.

Youth empowerment is an altitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people, including youths and adults (Sasaki, 2006). Empowering youth in this way leads to 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.

ENTREPRENEUR AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The entrepreneur is an individual who possesses certain qualities for innovation, risk bearing, organizing and creativity. A youth who possesses the knowledge to organize, operate and assume the risk of venturing into business is an entrepreneur. An individual who is sensitive to every opportunity of creating something new out of his environment that will be beneficial to himself and to the society in terms of economic and financial breakthrough can be called an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur is someone who possesses certain characteristics to initiate and create reasonable projects and has ability to successfully execute and manage the projects. Entrepreneur is someone who is zealous for lucrative opportunities to use his inherently innovative power in

creating a new venture where one wasn't in existence before (Bateman & Snell, 2011). Nwangwu (2007) defined an entrepreneur as a person who possesses the ability to recognize and evaluate business opportunities, assemble the necessary resources to take advantage of them and take appropriate action to ensure success. He further stressed that an entrepreneur is a creative person and risk taker who can:

- Recognize a business opportunity
 - Critically analyze such opportunity
 - Take a decision to act upon the analysis
 - Assemble the required human and material resources.
- Execute a programme resulting to a new business enterprise and profits

The Nigerian educational system is expected to produce youths with the foregoing characteristics so that on graduation, they will be employers of labour and not job seekers. Entrepreneurship is that process of bringing in those activities performed by an entrepreneur. In other words, entrepreneurship is an art of being creative, innovative, risk-bearing and resourceful. In line with this, Ugiagbe (2007) as cited in Owenbiugie and Iyamu (2011) stressed that entrepreneurship is the process of bringing together creative and innovative ideas and coping with management and organizational skills in order to combine people, money and resources to meet an identified need, thereby creating wealth.

The term entrepreneurship had different definitions as perceived by different scholars in different fields as follows:

- It is the willingness and the ability of an individual to seek out investment opportunities in an environment and be able to establish and run an enterprise successfully based on the identified opportunities (Gana, 2008).
- It becomes what occurs when an individual develops a new venture or a new approach to an old business or idea or a unique way of giving the market place a product or service by using resources in a new way under conditions or risk (Ihekwoba, 2007).
- It is a clear manifestation of effective manipulation of human intelligence as demonstrated in creative performance (Iheonunekwu, 2003). It seeks to find out how best graduates can convert their education to intellectually productive ventures in order to bring out the best in an individual.

- It involves risking financial, material and human resources in a new way in the course of creating a new business concept or opportunity within an existing firm (Steinhoff and Burges, 2003)
- It involves creating and building something of value from practically nothing or creation and distribution of something of value and of benefits to individuals, groups, organizations and society (Timmons, 2007).
- It is a dynamic process of creating incremental wealth (Hisrich and Peters, 2007). The wealth created by individuals who assume the major risks in terms of equity, time and/or career commitment and provide value for some product or service is evidence of realistic entrepreneurship. The product or service may or may not be new or unique but value must somehow be infused by the entrepreneur. This is usually coupled with financial, psychic and social risks with resultant rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction and independence.

Entrepreneurship has been referred to as the willingness and ability of an individual to seek out investment opportunities in an environment and be able to establish and run an enterprise successfully based on the identified opportunities (Igbo, 2004)

Furthermore, the concept is seen as the dynamic process of creating wealth by individuals who assume the risks involved in providing value for some products and /or services (Kuratko, 2009); “the process of performing the roles of planning, operating and assuming the risk of a business venture,”(page69) (Inegbenebor & Igbinomwanhia, 2010); the process of creating value through the provision of some products or services for the benefit of the society, while learning the skills needed to assume the risk of establishing a business (Ahiazu, 2009; Inegbenebor, 2006)

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Entrepreneurship Education (EE) can be termed as a process whereby youths are given training to be skillful, enterprising, self-reliant, innovative and creative in order to be useful to themselves and the society. The application of entrepreneur’s qualities through the process of teaching and learning can also be referred to as entrepreneurship education. EE is that type of education inculcated into the learners enabling them to be self-reliant, independent, innovative, creative and capable of making use of the opportunities to become employers of labour.

Different people however, have different conceptions of the term entrepreneurship education. Nwabuama (2004) viewed entrepreneurship education as the identification of the general characteristics of entrepreneurs and how potential entrepreneurs can be trained management techniques needed for effective performance of persons for long time survival of an organization after the acquisition of occupational skills. Olawolu and Kaegon (2012) confirm that entrepreneurship education prepares youths to be responsible and enterprising individuals who become entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial thinkers by exposing them in real life learning experiences where they will be required to think, take risks, manage circumstances and incidentally learn from the outcome. Ememe (2010) observed that entrepreneurship education enables youths to seek for success in ventures through one's effort. To Ebele (2008) entrepreneurship education is the teaching of knowledge and a skill that enables the students to plan, start and run their own business. In the view of Swartkabd (2009), entrepreneurship education aims to stimulate creativity in students; enables them to identify opportunities for innovation and motivates them to transform their ideas into practical and targeted activities whether in a social, cultural or economic context. Amusan (2004) agrees that entrepreneurship education will provide opportunities for students to access their attitude, aptitude and skills relating to those necessary for developing and running business.

Entrepreneurship education entails teaching students, learners and would be businessmen, the essential skills required to build viable enterprises, equipping the trainees with skills needed for taking responsibility and developing initiatives of prospective trainees (Ezeani, 2012). According to Abefe-Balogun (2012), entrepreneurship education involves a dynamic process of creating wealth through the process of creating something new and in the process assumes both attendant risks and rewards. Izedonmi (2006) states categorically that it is a process of preparing trainees for self-employment. Okereke and Okorofor (2011) assert that entrepreneurship education has been acknowledged world wide as a potent and viable tool for self-empowerment, job and wealth creation. To Atakpa (2011), entrepreneurship education is an aspect of education which equips an individual and creates in the person the mindset to undertake the risk of venturing into something new by applying the knowledge and skills acquired in school. Prior to Atakpa's declaration, Fashua (2006) had posited that entrepreneurship education creates the willingness and ability in a person to seek out investment opportunities in the society and be able to establish and run an enterprise successfully based on

the identified opportunities. Hence, the overall purpose of entrepreneurship education is to develop expertise as an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship education entails philosophy of self-reliance such as creating a new cultural and productive environment, promoting new sets of attitudes and a culture for the attainment of future challenges (Ogundele, Akingbade and Akinlabi, 2012)

OBJECTIVES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Entrepreneurship education was introduced into the curriculum with the aim of achieving certain objectives which according to Paul (2005) in Ossai and Nwalado (2012) include as follows:

- 1) **Functional education:** EE was introduced in institutions in order to offer effective and qualitative functional education to the youths to enable them to be well employed and self-reliant.
- 2) **Creative and innovative:** EE will provide adequate training for the young graduates to enable them to be creative and innovative in identifying novel business opportunities.
- 3) **Catalyst for growth:** EE will serve as a catalyst for economic growth and development in the country
- 4) **Risk Management:** Offer tertiary institution graduates with adequate training in risk management, to make certain learning feasible.
- 5) **Poverty reduction:** EE helps to reduce high rate of poverty in the country
- 6) **Employment opportunities:** EE will help in creating employment opportunities for the youths
- 7) **Migration reduction:** EE gives room to reduction in rural-urban migration
- 8) **Training and Support:** EE provides the young graduates with enough training and support that will enable them to establish a career in small and medium sized businesses.
- 9) **Business Venture:** To incubate the spirit of perseverance in the youths and adults which will enable them to persist in any business venture they embark upon.
- 10) **Economy:** Create smooth transition from traditional to modern industrial economy.

CHALLENGES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Some of the challenges have been pointed out by eminent scholars such as Gana (2000), Osuala (2010) and they include:

- **Funding:** Poor funding by government and Non-governmental organizations.
- **Programme:** Poor or ineffective planning, supervision, information and evaluation of the programme across board.
- **Materials:** Inadequate teaching materials, equipment and infrastructural facilities.
- **Information and Communication Technology (ICT):** The challenges posed by globalization, information and communication technologies (ICT) have effects on curriculum, methodology, facilities, staff and equipment.
- **Teachers/Instructors:** Inadequate qualified teachers and instructors as well as supporting staff at all level.
- **Motivation:** Inadequate motivation for available teaching and non-teaching staff which affects staff efficiency, retention, creativity and initiative.
- **Knowledge:** Emphasis on theoretical Knowledge rather than practical knowledge due to lack of entrepreneurship education centre.
- **Maintenance:** High level of corruption and very poor maintenance culture in the system.
- **Business:** Poor enabling business environment, access to credit/loan, infrastructural decay, mass poverty, inflation, technological infraction, political instability and insecurity of lives and properties which hamper economic and business activities.

TECHNIQUES FOR ACQUISITION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Entrepreneurship Education (EE) can be acquired by the youths following these techniques:

1) Co-operative or Group Learning Technique

Youth should be encouraged and organized to work in small groups whereby they can work together to share each other acquired skills and thereby discover their strengths and weaknesses

2) Industrial Training Exercise

Skills must be developed through training, practice and experience. Hence, in order to equip individuals with entrepreneurial skills, which are applicable directly to work, then the best

technique is industrial training exercise which would provide education and training that enable individuals to involve directly in the entrepreneurial process.

3) Excursion Technique

Excursion technique will expose the youth to first hand information on a particular field of study. This will enable young entrepreneurs' opportunity to acquaint themselves with the various skills needed in accomplishment of their dreams and aspirations as future entrepreneurs.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Sustainable development is a level of continuous progress in maturation without degenerating at any time. On the other hand, education for sustainable development (ESD) can be defined as a training process for approach to teaching, to provide quality education and foster youth empowerment/sustainable human development, concerned with all levels and types of learning: learning to know, learning to be, learning to live together, learning to do and learning to transform oneself and society. Oxford Dictionary (2010) defines sustainable development as continuous process that keeps from falling or sinking. It also means continuous process in maintenance. Sustainable development can be viewed as empowering youth in entrepreneurship education continuously, for life-long learning and career. Sustainable development is defined as the process of growing or developing, increasing, expanding, progressing and explicating.

Lucas, Alaka and Odozi (2014) enumerated the roles of entrepreneurship education as follows:

- Entrepreneurship education can positively impact a learner at all levels on a wide number of contexts. This many explain why there are such wide entrepreneurship education programmes, all of which can provide important outcomes at various stages of a learner's life.
- Entrepreneurship education is a key driver to economy, wealth and a high majority of jobs are created by small businesses started by entrepreneurially-minded individuals. Thus, EE would make learners to be relevant in today's economy.
- Entrepreneurship education enables employees to be more successful as a result of understanding the operations of a small business and the problems of their boss.
- Entrepreneurship education inculcates in learners the mentality of hard work, one of the keys to unlock poverty doors in developing areas. Entrepreneurs are trained to work hard to be able to run businesses profitably and successfully.

- The youth can build confidence in their abilities to become entrepreneurs in their future as a result of a variety of entrepreneurial activities provided throughout education.
- Entrepreneurship education provides a guide to empower the youth based on the belief that young people are themselves the best resources for promoting their own development in meeting the challenges and solving the problems faced in today's world and in the new millennium.
- Entrepreneurship education developed good support skills including commenting, decision making, interpersonal abilities, economic understanding, digital skills, marketing, managerial, and financial skills.
- Entrepreneurship education also provides individual with adequate training that will enable creativity and innovative relevance to skill acquisition which encourages self employment and self-reliant.

SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

Young people are the future leaders of the nation; hence, this fact should be at the core of pro-youth policies and programs, both in the public and private sectors. Ayodele (2006) suggested the following strategies that will help to solve the problem of entrepreneurship education and youth empowerment in Nigeria;

Government should establish small business schools where interested students and community members can participate. This will make students to be self-reliant.

Government should develop entrepreneur internship programme by matching students with locally successful entrepreneurs with clearly stated education programmes.

The government should establish an enterprise college aimed at fostering the specific skills required for entrepreneurship. This will serve as skill-acquisition centre for the youths.

Government should create an economic friendly environment. This centres on reduction of taxes on small scale businesses.

There should be enough incentives for students of vocational and technical schools. This will motivate them to establish their businesses after school.

There should be some form of genuine school-work- based learning incorporated in some studies as part of the national economic development strategies. This implies enriching the curriculum to incorporate more vocational and technical training. The development of apprenticeship scheme would give new graduates some work skills and experiences.

There should be school-based enterprises where students identify potential business plans, create and operate small business by using the school as mini-incubators. (page 34)

CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship Education has been viewed as a vital instrument for addressing the prevalent problem of youth employment. When youths are effectively and efficiently empowered through skills acquisition, they are capable of exploring opportunities for job and wealth creation for themselves and the society, instead of looking for white collar jobs that are often difficult to come-by. In other words, emphasis on the development of entrepreneurship education will help in creating employment; provide the young people with real opportunity to develop their enterprising skills, empowering the young graduates to be job creators and not job seekers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The successful development of any nation depends on the qualitative education given to its youths through entrepreneurship education. If the youths are empowered they can effectively and efficiently help themselves and others. In line with this paper, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) Government should take the funding of entrepreneurship education seriously by increasing the budgetary allocation to the educational sector.

- 2) Firms should see the need for the encouragement and involvement of private partners and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to participate in entrepreneurship education through funding or contributions in kind.
- 3) Availability of qualified man-power to teach entrepreneurship education is very essentials in tertiary institutions.
- 4) To ensure effective empowerment of the youth, the federal government should provide enabling environment and all the necessary equipment and materials for easy teaching and learning of entrepreneurship education needed for economic enhancement and youth empowerment in Nigeria.
- 5) Seminars, workshops and symposium should be organized for youths on value reorientation in order to discourage them from involvement in criminal acts inspired by get -rich- quick syndrome.

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