

REDUCING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship is the pursuit of lucrative opportunities by enterprising individuals. With the downtrend in the Nigerian economy since mid-1980s entrepreneurship education has become indispensable in imbuing youths with requisite entrepreneurial competencies. The impact of entrepreneurship education as a panacea for solving the massive unemployment problem among the youths has been discussed. It is intended to provide the learners with requisite competencies for self-employment. It is recommended inter alia that government and education stakeholders ensure that educational programmes at all levels be made relevant to providing youths and graduates requisite entrepreneurial competencies.

Introduction

The emphasis on entrepreneurship education started in the mid-1980s. This was because before that period, employment and poverty were not a

national concern as they were currently. However, political instability and inconsistencies in the socio-economic policies of successive governments led to the emergence of high level

unemployment in Nigeria. In the mid-80s and after, the Nigeria economy collapsed while youth and graduate unemployment escalated. There was large scale layoff of workers and early retirements as a result of structural adjustment policies and bad economic trends in the country. In the face of this situation, entrepreneurship, which would have salvaged the situation, was not encouraged.

Entrepreneurship can be described as creative and innovative responses to the environment that can take place in any area of human endeavour such as business, industry agriculture, education, social work and services of all types on the formation of small business units within the informal sector. Entrepreneurship could be viewed as a perceptiveness to change and the entrepreneur as one, who always searches for change, responds to and exploits it as an opportunity.

Entrepreneurship can be seen as a process which involves the effort of an individual (or individuals) in identifying viable business opportunities in an environment and obtaining and managing the resources needed to exploit those opportunities. Similarly, Timmons and Spinelli (2004) remarked that entrepreneurship is the function of being creative and responsive

within and to environment. Aina and Saloko (2008) described entrepreneurship as the willingness and ability of an individual to seek out investment opportunities and taking advantage of scarce resources to exploit the opportunities profitably.

Entrepreneur can be defined as an innovating individual who has developed an ongoing business activity where none existed before. In other words, an entrepreneur is a creative person and risk taker who can recognize a business opportunity, critically analyse such opportunities, take a decision to act upon the analysis, assemble the required human and material resources and execute a programme resulting to a new business enterprise and profit. Scarborough (1992) identified the following characteristics that entrepreneurs tend to exhibit:

- (1) take moderate risks;
- (2) have a desire for responsibility;
- (3) be confident in the ability to succeed;
- (4) want immediate feedback;
- (5) have high amount of energy;
- (6) press onward in spite of setbacks;
- (7) learn from their mistakes;
- (8) set goals and commit themselves to reach them;

- (9) work well with other people;
- (10) have a future orientation;
- (11) be skilled in organization;
- (12) tolerate rejection, frustration and stress;
- (13) make decisions to carry them out and
- (14) be motivated by a sense of achievement not by money.

Entrepreneurship Education and Objectives

Entrepreneurship education is a purposeful intervention by an educator in the life of learner to impact entrepreneurial qualities and skills to enable the learner to survive in the world of business. The skills required by entrepreneur can be classified into three main areas:

- (i) Technical skills;
- (ii) Businesses management skills; and
- (iii) Personal entrepreneurial skills.

Technical skills involve such things as writing, listening, oral presentation, organizing, coaching, being a team player, and technical know-how. Business management skills include those areas involved in starting, developing and managing an enterprise. The personal entrepreneurial skills

differentiate an entrepreneur from a manager. Skills included in this classification are inner control (discipline), risk-taking, being change oriented, being persistent, and being a visionary leader among others.

Entrepreneurship education should not be confused with general business or economic studies, as its goal is to promote creativity, innovation and self-employment. Some of the elements of entrepreneurship education include the following:

- (a) Developing those personal attributes and generally applicable (horizontal) skills that forms the basis for an entrepreneurial mindset and behaviours;
- (b) Raising students' awareness of self-employment and entrepreneurship as possible career options;
- (c) Work on practical enterprise project and activities;
- (d) Providing specific business skills and knowledge of how to start and successfully run a business;

Entrepreneurship programmes offer students the tools to think creatively, and to be effective in problem solving, to analyze a business idea objectively, and to communicate, network, lead and evaluate

any given project. Students feel more confident about setting up their own businesses if they can test their ideas in an educational, supportive environment. Entrepreneurship education is a specialized training given to a student of vocational and technical education to acquire the necessary skills, ideas, managerial abilities, and capabilities for self-employment rather than being employed for pay (Osuala, 2009). Entrepreneurship is the knowledge, skills and mindset needed to create jobs by conceiving and starting up new businesses. The family and home environment provide access to entrepreneurship knowledge mainly for young people. The practice whereby girls were learning their mother's trade and boys learning their father's trades through helping them in the process of producing and marketing the product through street trading is still fresh in our minds. With the promulgation into law of the "Nigerian child Labour Act, 2004" which outlawed child labour, a major source of traditional entrepreneurship knowledge and skills for young people has been lost.

In the same vein, entrepreneurship education according to Ezema, Paul, Anioke, Okwuolise, and Chikwe (2005), is structured to achieve the following

objectives:

- * ·To offer functional education for the youth that will enable them to be self employed and self reliant.
- * ·Provide the youth graduates with adequate training that will enable them to be creative and innovative in identifying novel business opportunities.
- * To serve as a catalyst for economic development and growth.
- * ·Offer tertiary institution graduates with adequate training in risk management to make certain bearing feasible.
- * To reduce high rule of poverty.
- .* Create employment generation.
- .* Reduction in rural-urban migration.
- * ·Provide the young graduates with enough training and support that will enable them to establish a career in small and medium size businesses.
- .* To inculcate the spirit of perseverance in the youths and adults which will enable them to persist in any business ventures they embark on, and
- .* Create smooth transition from traditional to a modern industrial

economy.

Unemployment of the youth has become a serious threat to the Nigerian economy with its attendant social problems of armed robbery, youth restiveness, prostitution and female trafficking. Persistence in youth unemployment is a major contribution to losses in human capital. The greatest challenge on youth unemployment is their use for political and military ends. Deprived of unemployment opportunity and livelihood, youths are actively mobilized by politicians and armed groups alike. Youth unemployment also has security implications for almost every country and Nigeria is not an exception.

Preventing Youth Unemployment through Entrepreneurship Education

A career in entrepreneurship education includes knowledge in technical education, commercial education and occupational/skill development education. The environmental change is the role that entrepreneurs play in promoting innovative technologies. Many people who have developed new technologies were at one time or the other employees of certain organization which gave rise to many others. This is to make the individual involved to be competent and to contribute greatly to national development through the acquisition of foundational business skills, understanding and ideas to enable him identify problems and to proffer lasting solutions to such problem in order to have

a beneficial effect on both himself and the society at large.

Furthermore, entrepreneurship education enables the recipients to stand on their own because of the knowledge, skill and creative ability they have gained which are also needed for self-employment without relying on government for salaried jobs. This will discourage mass movement of people to the urban areas. When such people are exposed to proper entrepreneurship education; they will be able to work for themselves and also employ other to work for them.

Entrepreneurship education contributes to nation building through its ability to provide training that will result in developing individuals who are well adjusted in the sense that they are capable of coping with the world in which they live and providing the understanding and appreciation of the actual functioning of the economic system due to its competency-based nature. Employment is the life line of any economy. Human development will definitely be grossly undermined and impaired without employment (NEEDS document, 2004). How soon Nigeria sets to address the problems of mass unemployment, low productivity, high inflation and poverty to a large extent depends on how speedily it is able to develop the millions of its labour

force into a knowledgeable and skilled people needed for the required change. The world in the 21st century is witnessing a wave of entrepreneurship happening with more and more people looking for self-employment and business ownership. The role of government and big businesses as a provider of jobs is shrinking and people are looking to empower themselves in other ways.

The Entrepreneurship Development Programme, as an urgent mechanism to youth unemployment, is specifically designed for the Nigerian youths, informing them about the world of business and opportunities to create their own businesses.

The EDP provides youths with insights into entrepreneurship and enterprise; it aims to help them realistically consider the options of starting a small business or of self-employment. The following sum up a number of reasons for the importance of promoting youth entrepreneurship:

1. Creating employment opportunities for self-employed youth as well as the other young people they employ.
2. Bringing alienated and marginalized youths back into the economic mainstream and giving them a sense of meaning and belonging.
3. Helping to address some of the socio-psychological problems and delinquency that arise from

joblessness.

4. Helping youths develop new skills and experiences that can then be applied to other challenges in life.
5. Promoting innovation and resilience in youth.
6. Promoting the revitalization of the local communities by providing valuable goods and services.
7. Capitalising on the fact that young entrepreneurs may be particularly responsive to new economic opportunities and trends.

The EDP as a short term approach to the unemployment crisis is to cater for the out-of-school youths and the ever-increasing number of jobless graduates. In the long run it will bring desired result of growth and development. The EDP seeks to move youth entrepreneurship into the mainstream of the economy with growth oriented and sustainable businesses.

As an active learning entrepreneurship institute, the EDP is designed for new entrepreneurs, introducing them to basic elements of starting and managing a new business; the EDP creates training tools focused on the ways to improve performance and productivity of

businesses, to encourage aspiring entrepreneurs to explore more deeply about their business ideas and in particular, the feasibility of turning a business idea into a profitable venture. The EDP believes that not everybody is an entrepreneur, but there is a bit of entrepreneurship in everyone. This just has to be identified, nurtured and developed.

The underlisted are some of the core activities of the Entrepreneurship Development Centre, Lagos, Nigeria. The intensive learning and training schemes of four weeks for graduates, eight weeks for non-graduates and the one week managerial enhanced training are tailored to maximally give practical and demonstrable skills which are productivity targeted. The EDP is an institute guided by curriculum-based learning. The basic teaching and learning method adopted at the EDP are such that could enhance capacity building and develop competencies. The EDP has as part of its goal to assist many of the trained youths have access to start-up loans which would help them start small business across the country. The EDP also has a monitoring unit that constantly checks its impact across the nation. Constant checks are being carried out on

numbers of businesses created and employment generated from time to time.

School-Enterprise Relationship: One of the glaring deficiencies of vocational/entrepreneurship education in Nigeria is the of school enterprise collaboration. This is a very important facility that the entrepreneur would need to provide in order to support school-enterprise relationship. Mkpa (2003) noted that students need exposure to practical work experience situations in order to be proficient in any job they may be working towards; theory alone will not make for the desired level of proficiency, staff from the enterprise need to visit the school from time to time, to suggest ways of improving the teaching and learning environment in order to guarantee the production of qualitative youths and graduates for employment or self-employment. The National Policy on Education (2004) stated that educational activities shall be centred on the learner for maximum self-development and self-fulfilment, no policy or conscious effort has been made to cement a firm relationship between the generators of these knowledge and skills in educational institutions and the users (entrepreneurs). Oke (2003) noted that there are also no initiatives on the part of the training

institutions to strengthen entrepreneurship education.

Conclusion

The philosophy of Nigerian education reveals that the main aim borders around the achievement of an egalitarian, strong and self-reliant nation through the transformation of the individual into an autonomous independent being with decision making powers (FRN, 2004). This statement implies that for a nation to be self-reliant, the inhabitants of such nation have to be self-reliant.

This idea is better initiated while the students are still young through strong entrepreneurship education and development programmes. Entrepreneurship education, therefore, is the answer to the ever-increasing youth unemployment problem in our society.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- (1) Government and other education stakeholders should ensure that educational programmes at all levels are made relevant to provide youths and graduates the needed entrepreneurial skills.
- (2) Government should give

adequate attention to entrepreneurial development in the country through the provision of good economic environment to encourage individual participation in business.

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