ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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The State of Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

By 2012 report of the National Bureau of Statistic, Nigeria’s population reached about 167 million people in 2012. The National Population Commission (NPoC, 2013) report further stated that about half of the population is made up of youth, between 15 and 34 years of age. Unfortunately, as the youth population grows, so does the unemployment rate. For instance the unemployed youth numbered about 11.1 million in 2012.

The paucity of accurate statistics notwithstanding, the rate continues to rise yearly with the army of graduates being turned out of secondary and tertiary institutions. This increase would be higher if we include those who have been sent out of jobs as a result of the downturn in the economy resulting from closure of many manufacturing industries.

Graduates of tertiary institutions seemed to be badly hit by unemployment making up about 20 percent of youth unemployment between 2008-2012 and often remaining unemployed for upward of five years after graduation (NISER, 2013).

Several factors have been blamed for the prevalence of youth unemployment in Nigeria. A major factor that has relevance to this conference is the observed decay and deficiency in school curricula which has resulted to the failure of educational institutions to provide students with appropriate skills to make them employable.

Previous Strategies aimed at curbing unemployment in Nigeria

Various administrations over time have tried to address youth unemployment using different strategies and programmes. During the SAP period the Federal government drafted unemployed youth to public programmes such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and the Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRRI), which provided immediate and direct jobs to participants interested in agriculture. At the training level, the Industrial Training Fund has been saddled with the responsibility of training students in and out of school. Three of the current and most prominent programmes include the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) and the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOU-WIN) among others.

The SURE-P was introduced in February 2012 and focuses on management and investment of federal government savings from the partial removal of the subsidy on
petroleum products. The SURE-P through the Graduate Internship Scheme offers unemployed graduates the opportunity to undergo a one-year internship in firms, banks, ministries, government departments and agencies, as well as in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), relevant to beneficiaries’ disciplines. The purpose of GIS is to help beneficiaries acquire appropriate skills and practical knowledge that will make them more suitable for the job market. About 50,000 graduates were selected for the first phase of the scheme out of some 85,000 applicants. Even though around 2000 firms expressed interest in hosting graduates, only 293 firms were approved.

Using education and training to solve unemployment problems some efforts have been made at encouraging vocational skills acquisition at the technical school level as well as at the polytechnic level. This situation compelled the Federal Ministry of Education to introduce Entrepreneurship education at all levels tertiary of education. At the present time, no statistical backed research has been conducted to undertake a follow-up study to assess the efficacy or otherwise of the attempts. May be some of the papers to be presented at this conference will help us keep track of the successes in these areas. I am optimistic that our papers will not be definitional this time. We have had enough of these story telling papers. At this conference we are expecting solution oriented papers.

The topic of this paper is Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Strategies could not have come at a more auspicious time than now. We are no longer in doubt whether we are in a recession or not. The National Bureau of Statistics confirmed this on 31st August, 2016. The Presidency and Federal Minister of Finance have acceded to this fact.

**Meaning of Entrepreneurship Education**

According to Kuratko, and Hodgetts, (1998) entrepreneurship education is the education that embraces skill building programs, in creative thinking, product development and marketing, negotiation, leadership training and wealth generation. In the opinion of Wikipedia (2006) entrepreneurship education seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skill and motivation for entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings.

UNESCO (2008) stated that entrepreneurship education includes all kinds of experiences that give students the ability and vision of how to access and transform opportunities of different kinds. Entrepreneurship education therefore seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings.

Entrepreneurship education according to Azuka (2016) is a process of teaching learners in a formal setting how to generate business ideas, evaluate alternatives with the aim of converting ideas into opportunities taking into consideration the capabilities of the
entrepreneur, conducting feasibilities studies, writing bankable business plan, organizing and managing the business with passion, creativity and innovation with a vision to making a profit.

Entrepreneurship education is not just about teaching someone to run a business. It is all about encouraging creative thinking and promoting a strong sense of self-work and accountability. Through entrepreneurship education, students learn how to create a business, but they also learn a lot more.

According to Shepherd and Douglas (1997) defined Entrepreneurship education as the essence of entrepreneurship is the ability to envision and chart a course for a new business venture by combing information from the functional discipline and from the external environment in the context of the extra ordinary uncertainty and ambiguity which faces a new business venture.

The above views show that entrepreneurship education is a rebranding education culture meant to guarantee a comprehensive educational system reengineering arising from the obvious deficiencies of the existing education system. It is aimed at equipping the students with requisite skills and capacities needed in the world of work.

Objectives of Entrepreneurship Education

The objectives of entrepreneurship education programmes include:

(a) Developing entrepreneurial drive among students (raising awareness and motivation);
(b) Training students in what is needed to set up a business, and to manage its growth;
(c) Developing the entrepreneurial spirit and abilities needed to identify and exploit business opportunities.

Issues in Entrepreneurship Education

Teaching in and about entrepreneurship education presupposes pedagogical models different from those normally applied in conventional teaching. The questions that need to be addressed are:

- Does teaching in entrepreneurship education require a specific pedagogy or didactics? And does these constitute specific requirements to the organization of the educational community?
- Should entrepreneurship education and teaching take place with special considerations for context?
- Should entrepreneurship teaching be regarded as a pedagogical process encompassing professional as well as personality developing elements?
- Should development of expedient entrepreneurship educational programmes be
based on integrated ideas comprising: objectives, target group and context?

- Should the concept of diversity enter into the planning and implementation of entrepreneurship teaching as a significant pedagogical possibility and challenge?
- Would the high university ratio of specialization and the frequently lacking inter disciplinary and pedagogical competence constitute a barrier for entrepreneurship teaching?
- Should entrepreneurship education be housed in a separate faculty or incubation centre and be taught by a group of teachers employed for that purpose or should we adopt the integrated or multidisciplinary practice where lecturers are drawn from various faculties to teach entrepreneurship education?

These and similar issues, I believe, will be addressed fully by papers to be presented in this conference.

**Challenges or Obstacles to Entrepreneurship Education**

Following the directives of the Federal government various tertiary institutions in Nigeria have incorporated entrepreneurship education into their curriculum offerings. However some major challenges seem to impede the advancement of this programme. While I have taken a snapshot of some of these, other papers to be presented in this conference will definitely discuss these challenges in detail. These challenges include the following:

**Administrative Challenges**

Many administrators in the tertiary education sector are still ignorant of the value and potential of entrepreneurship education in national competitiveness and development. Entrepreneurship education in such institutions has not received the level of support that it deserves to gain acceptance among students and staff. This is evident by the lip service and uncoordinated and weak institutional support for entrepreneurship education.

Government and its agencies, namely the Federal Ministries of Education, Finance and Labour and Productivity, responsible for entrepreneurship development are still paying lip service to the problem of entrepreneurship education at all levels of the educational system.

**Pedagogical Challenges**

*What to teach and to who is another major challenge.* Our discussion in this paper points to the need to study the entrepreneurship educational needs of students, the community and society at large. Such lacuna stems from lack of proper distinction between entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurship education. The two concepts are
related but not the same. While the former has to do with life-long informal training, the latter is formal in nature.

The question of who entrepreneurship education targets is important. While everybody can benefit from entrepreneurship education, the constraints of large class size for teaching effectiveness makes it imperative for this question to be addressed. Should entrepreneurship education be an elective or a compulsory course? Should students be allowed to self-select themselves for entrepreneurship education? Whatever the answer to these questions, the importance of entrepreneurship is an issue to be critically examined.

**Who is to teach entrepreneurship is also a major challenge.** At the moment, teaching entrepreneurship is an all-comers game. As the programme becomes more popular, many more academics that do not have the required preparation are bound to jump into the train. Yet teaching entrepreneurship requires special training and experience.

**Human Development Challenges:**

Human resources play an immense role in the success or failure of any organization or nation in terms of capability and strength of character. In Nigeria, most of the problems facing the economy are a reflection of the poor quality of human development and management. One has to understand the problems facing the educational institutions to really appreciate the magnitude of problems facing the Nigerian economy.

Good quality education is a function of good quality teachers. There are currently too few lecturers of entrepreneurship education. Many of lecturers have not been trained from the start in that field. As a consequence, many of the teachers of entrepreneurship education are unaware of the right approach to entrepreneurship teaching. Teachers should have a better understanding of entrepreneurship education, and of the range of aims, methods and contents. There is a need for more teacher training, seminars and workshops. There is therefore a need to graduate enough PhD students in entrepreneurship, to build up teaching resources.

**Corruption Challenges**

Although corruption is a global scourge, Nigeria appears to suffer the most from it because the leaders are pathologically corrupt. Everyone appears to believe that the nation has a “culture of corruption”. Over the years, Nigeria has earned huge sum of money from crude oil, which has gone down the sinkhole created by corruption. In an article, ‘oil giant that runs on grease of politics’, Nigeria was described as a rich nation floating on oil wealth ‘but almost none of it flows to the people’ (San Francisco Chronicle, March11, 2007). Top public servants are very rich because they harbour the
mentality that public money belongs to no one. National dailies are awash with news of how public officials are acquiring million dollar homes (within and outside Nigeria) and stock piling stolen public money in financial institutions abroad.

**Poor Attitude toward imbibing the entrepreneurial skill and spirit**

Experience from our ivory towers manifest a lot of laissez faire attitude towards entrepreneurship education by students who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of the programme. Entrepreneurship education requires that students should be exposed to theoretical and practical skills component of the course. Entrepreneurship education like vocational and technical education is expensive. Furthermore, there is a minimum standard that is acceptable. Where such standard cannot be maintained it is useless embarking on such project. While some lecturers insist on maintenance of the minimum standard, some students are in the habit of reporting such lecturers to the management of our tertiary institutions thereby frustrating the good intentions of such hard working lecturers. The presenter of this paper may have been a victim of such malicious oppression.

**Infrastructural and Institutional challenges:**

Any person familiar with Nigeria would agree that one of the main challenges facing the economy are broken institutions and dilapidated infrastructure poor social infrastructure and institutions; including class, erratic power supply, business incubation centres, teaching materials

**Funding Challenges**

Funding is major impediment to the demand for entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship education is expensive in nature. A lot of equipment is needed to take care of various productive departments. A lot of money is needed to carry out research and training of trainers. From the perspective of involving entrepreneurs in education, there are also certain obstacles: a) their own business activities are time consuming, so it is almost impossible to count on them on a regular basis; b) often, institutions are not able to pay them their proper “hourly market price”.

Fund is needed to build and equip incubation centres or entrepreneurship development centres as they are called in tertiary institutions. Fund is needed to organize conferences and buy the necessary educational equipment and supplies. Schools or departments within the institutions, often have insufficient resources to train students from the other departments. Therefore, a major priority is to organize specific funding for this type of education, embedded in the institution’s core financial resources. The fact is that the termination of short-term project funding, or the continuous changing of
funding mechanisms, creates fragility and runs counter to sustainable provision.

**Strategy for Entrepreneurship Education to Move Forward**

The challenges of entrepreneurship education as identified in this paper can be addressed if the following action-oriented approaches are adopted.

a) Obligatory introductory activities or modules should be offered for all undergraduate students throughout their course of study, influencing their mindset right from the beginning and creating awareness of the alternative career option as an entrepreneur. In addition, all students should be given the opportunity to attend seminars and lectures on this subject. Optional courses which should be open to students from different faculties and disciplines, and involve these students in team based project work, are a useful means of spreading entrepreneurship across faculties and departments. Students who find the field interesting and attractive and who seek to get involved in voluntary entrepreneurship initiatives should be backed by the institution or facilitating organisations. All students should be exposed to the opportunity of acquiring entrepreneurship-related teaching and experiences.

b) Learning about entrepreneurship should assume a student-centred form of teaching, in which learning outcomes are clearly defined. It should also assume that students will themselves select which road to follow. This will require flexible course structures, a problem-solving approach supported by qualified academic staff, extensive learning resources, and opportunities for work placements, and access to funding.

c) For teachers who are interested in the field, more training, in terms of theory and of innovative pedagogy and didactics, is needed and new teaching tools/methods tailored to the specific field of study will have to be developed. Some options for enhancing educator capability include: staff sabbaticals in enterprises, and for entrepreneurial development; curricula development funds; exposure to role models and examples; incentives, rewards and recognition; international educator exchanges; bursaries and support for personal development through educational programmes.

d) Institutions should have incentive systems for motivating and rewarding faculty staff, researchers and teachers in supporting students interested in exploiting business opportunities. Staff promotions should be also linked to entrepreneurship, among other criteria. Reward mechanisms should be set up, based on achievements in furthering entrepreneurship and innovation, such as: companies started by students, number of patents, number of industrial projects, etc. The rewards might take the form of academic promotion and of pay, based on financial resources.
obtained from projects. In general terms, the academic value of research and activities in the entrepreneurial field should be acknowledged, and the working time that professors devote to support students’ initiatives recognized.

e) From the perspective of educators, the teaching should balance theoretical and practical aspects, making use of: interactive and pragmatic methods; active self-learning; action-oriented pedagogies; group work; learning through projects; student-centred methods; learning by direct experience; methods for self-development and self-assessment.

f) Crossing the boundaries between different fields of study and different faculties/departments is a key to spreading entrepreneurship. One possible way is to create inter-disciplinary “laboratories”, in which students of business help put into practice business ideas of their partner students from faculties of technical and/or natural sciences.

g) Where appropriate examinations could be replaced with work on projects like a start-up project. Some students may be more motivated and better at working on concrete activities rather than writing.

h) Business representatives and entrepreneurs should be involved, and events organized where entrepreneurs present their experience. Ideally, they should come from the faculty/school where the event is organized. To boost awareness and motivation of students, it is fundamental to use the power of examples (alumni, successful entrepreneurs, etc.).

i) Entrepreneurship teaching should be part of a broader entrepreneurial environment within the institution, with services to support students’ business ideas. High visibility is achieved through dedicated spaces, support for student activities and awards/rewards for success. Institutions should set up pre-incubators (“hatcheries”) for undergraduate and graduate students, and provide access to on-campus or external incubators for graduates, post-graduates and researchers. There should be a focal point (‘one-stop shop’) within academic institutions that is well known to everyone (students and staff alike) and which acts as a central source of advice and information on business start-ups.

j) With the help of additional funding from the government or from industry, easy access to financial grants and seed/venture capital should be available for students who want to develop a viable business idea, either within an on-campus incubator or as a follow-up to a business plan competition.

k) A useful measure would be to ensure access to “entrepreneurship tutors” for all students. These would complement the main tutor on a master’s or doctoral thesis, and offer advice as to whether there is a business perspective to the work, and if so, how to capitalise on it.
l) Institutions should encourage the spontaneous initiative of students; encourage and support the foundation of student mini-companies or junior enterprises; award academic credits for activities carried out within student associations and for practical work on enterprise projects.

m) Promoting entrepreneurship education in the community should be part of a common and coordinated effort. Regional development agencies and university associations should provide clear directions about what contribution institutions could make to regional social and economic development strategies. Tertiary institutions should be considered as instruments of regional development.

n) There should be an increasing awareness that cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises can generate a win-win situation for both parties. Teachers and students have something to contribute to enterprises, in terms of theoretical knowledge and also through the involvement of students in innovation ideas.

Policy recommendations
In addition to the strategies enunciated in this paper, government and institutions should as a matter of urgency consider the following as series of policy recommendations for immediate implementation.

1. Encourage high-growth-oriented entrepreneurship: how to build, finance and grow companies. Develop appropriate measurement and evaluation of the impact, not just outputs, of entrepreneurship programmes.

2. Map out strategies for evaluation of entrepreneurship education programmes and almost no statistical evidence, outside of some output indicators that may or may not be the right measures.

3. Measures should focus on the local market needs and context. Integrate entrepreneurship into the curriculum and build towards a multidisciplinary learning environment.


5. Ensure entrepreneurship courses meet an international quality standard.

6. Encourage the development of research-oriented entrepreneurship centres at all tertiary institutions across Nigeria.

7. Focus research and teaching on all of the entrepreneurial growth phases, not just the start-up phase.

8. Develop high-quality local content, case studies and course materials that can also be shared at the international level.

9. Create degree programmes, consistent with those at an international level.
11. Hire more professors and teachers fully dedicated to entrepreneurship.
12. Look to recruit faculties or teachers who also have entrepreneurship experience.
14. Provide training for entrepreneurs and other practitioners to become effective educators.
15. Review regulations on the participation of entrepreneurs in teaching activities.
17. Promote the application of “learning by doing” through project-based learning, internships and consulting.
18. Leverage the uses of case studies for discussion-based learning.
19. Develop the proper incentives, assessment, rewards and recognition to encourage educators to try these approaches. Involve entrepreneurs and local companies in entrepreneurship courses and activities.
20. Ensure a consistent and adequate level of funding for entrepreneurship education programmes:
21. Provide tax incentives to encourage donations to educational institutions to support entrepreneurship programmes.
22. Seek private sector resources to help fund and provide expertise to entrepreneurship teaching and research.
23. Ensure that the initiatives funded are sustainable and provide the necessary funding to reach sustainability.
24. Encourage the development of local angel and venture capital funds.
25. Encourage cross-border entrepreneurship faculty and research collaborations:
26. Facilitate the sharing of good practice across borders, both within Nigeria and internationally.
27. Create opportunities for lecturers and researchers from various countries to work together on projects.
28. Provide support for Nation-wide and international mobility and exchanges of educators and researchers. Facilitate spin-outs from technical and scientific institutions:
29. Advance core research and innovation in Nigerian institutions and research centres.
30. Accelerate the application of science and technology to market through well-developed technology transfer offices.
31. Connect entrepreneurship and innovation programmes.
32. Establish stronger links between academia, business and entrepreneurs.
33. Provide the necessary fiscal incentives to encourage entrepreneurship.
34. Facilitate the provision of direct training and/or support programmes for entrepreneurs in the process of starting companies.
35. Ensure the time (sabbaticals, if necessary) for faculty to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Profile Nigerian role models:
36. Create more public recognition vehicles for high-growth entrepreneurs through the media, awards, etc.
37. Support the development of more case studies profiling successful Nigerian entrepreneurs.

**Conclusion**

The moment is ripe for a significant evolution of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. Nigeria has the unique opportunity to learn from models around the world and focus on integrating the most relevant and high-quality practices into its higher education institutions. Efforts from the Nigerian government are encouraging, but sustainability is a key issue. Entrepreneurship education is the first and arguably the most important step for mitigating the unemployment scourge currently facing Nigeria.

Once more I thank ABEN for organizing this conference and for the opportunity to participate not just as member but also as lead paper presenter. I also thank you all for granting me your listening ears.
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