

# Entrepreneurship Education for Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria

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## Abstract

This paper stressed the importance of entrepreneurship education towards enhancing an independent and productive living for persons with disabilities in Nigeria. Persons with disabilities are not insulated from the problems facing the country particularly the high rate of poverty, youth and graduate unemployment. The paper noted that although entrepreneurship education is not alien, it has not gained prominence in the curriculum for children with special needs in the school system. Accordingly, the lack of specially trained personnel, absence of an all encompassing curriculum, difficulty raising capital, strategic disadvantages in competing with 'normal' entrepreneurs among others were identified as responsible factors. This paper argued that these challenges are surmountable with efforts and collaboration by the government, the target group, curriculum planners, the school, family and society at large. The paper also discussed the prospect of entrepreneurship education for persons with disabilities. The paper concluded that educational programmes for persons with disabilities at all levels of education should be tailored towards providing them with needed entrepreneurial skills.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, education, persons, disabilities, Nigeria.

## Introduction

The relevance of entrepreneurship education to humanity and economic growth cannot be overemphasized considering its developmental incentives in the well being of an individual and promotion of economic activities. The acquisition of skills through entrepreneurship education to a large extent creates self employment and job opportunities for members of a society. Entrepreneurship education could take the form of technical education, business education, computer application, fine and applied arts amongst others. Entrepreneurship is not just skill acquisition for acquisition sake; it is an acquisition of skills and ideas for the sake of creating employment for one's –self and also for others (Garba, 2010). It also includes the development based on creativity. According to Okoro in Tiamiyu (2010), the primary aim of entrepreneurial skill is to prepare individuals for employment in recognized occupations namely Agriculture, Home Economics, Business and Technical Education.

The society is a conglomerate of persons with different challenges. One of such is disability. They are persons living with disability in various communities that need to be educated and taught different skills for self reliance and economic survival. Special education caters for this particular set of persons equipping them to be at par with their non-handicapped counterparts within the economic realm. In Nigeria today, the increasing rate of poverty, unemployment, corruption and so many other social problems have become worrisome to the government and the citizenry and the former appears to be clueless on the way forward, employment, either part-time or full-time, or even underemployment can be said to have eluded Nigerian youths with Nigeria said to have one of the highest unemployment rates in the industrialized world (Negedu, 2011). In a recent meeting with vice-Chancellors of Universities, the minister of Education, Prof. Ruqqayatu Rufai vividly describes the place of entrepreneurship studies in national development thus:

*There is no gain saying the fact that entrepreneurship is the engine of growth of all economies. while small and medium scale enterprises alone account for more than half of net job creation in most European and other developed countries, small businesses contribute up to about 90% of all new jobs and 70% of all new products and services in the US' (Negedu, 2001).*

Therefore the need for entrepreneurial education to be incorporated into special needs education curriculum for this category of persons becomes a salient issue. This is because entrepreneurship education will help unlock their potentials and pave way for their financial independence and sustainability in the face of the large scale unemployment in Nigeria. According to Bukola (2011), the need for entrepreneurship education started emerging in the mid 1980s. This is because before this period, unemployment and poverty were not a national concern as it is currently. However, political instability and inconsistencies in the social-economic policies of successive governments led to the emergence of high level unemployment in Nigeria. A factual indicator of the poverty and unemployment level is reflected in the results of the Harmonized Nigeria. living Standards Survey (HNLSS) conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) which puts the Nigerian poverty profile at 69% - this indicates that poverty and income inequality in the country has increased since 2003/2004 (NBS, 2012).

Accordingly, the NBS estimated that this trend may rise further if the potential positive impacts of several anti-poverty and employment generation intervention programmes of government do not fall through, the online investment community developer analyzed the report thus:

*Since poverty and unemployment in Africa strongly correlate, it will not be surprising to assume that the unemployment rate is in excess of 40%. The official figure is nevertheless about 20% which analyst considers a gross under estimation. (Proshare Directory, 2012).*

The jobless tide in the country, unfortunately, has no respect for persons with disabilities. In spite of the much venerated government policy of automatic employment for this category of persons, in fact, they remain the worst hit. This is not unrelated to the public perception of persons with disability as an unproductive class regardless of their education by employers of labour and the society at large. The assertion that entrepreneurship education provides a leeway for persons with disabilities out of the unemployment conundrum therefore draws support from the above.

Plausible as entrepreneurship education might be, it has been underemphasized in our education curriculum and appears to enjoy little priority from our educational planners. Several attempts have been made through researchers, mounting of entrepreneurship courses, programmes in both institutions of learning and entrepreneurship research centres for the purpose of developing both entrepreneurship spirit and culture (Dickson, Solomon and Weaver, 2008, Urbano, Aponte and Toledano, 2008; Poikkijoki and Heinonen, 2006). Where entrepreneurship education is considered in the curriculum it is often treated as a mere course work rather than apprenticeship. This has in no small way downplayed the entrepreneurial potentials of persons with disability making them more susceptible to unemployment, poverty and a life bereft of fulfillment.

This paper therefore focuses attention on entrepreneurship education, persons with disabilities, state of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria, and the prospect of entrepreneurship education for persons with disabilities.

### **What Is Entrepreneurship Education?**

Entrepreneurship has been defined by various professions to mean many things since the middle age (Igbo, 2006). The entrepreneur has been seen as an actor, innovator or a developer of technology (Oviawe, 2010). However, a vast majority of the definitions as proffered by different writers find common ground in the claim that entrepreneurship education is ultimately geared towards inculcating job creation skills in learners.

Entrepreneurship, according to Omolayo (2006) is the act of starting a company, arranging business deals and taking risks in order to make a profit through the education skills acquired. He stresses further that it is “the process of bringing together creative and innovative ideas and coupling these with management and organizational skills in order to combine people, money and resources to meet an identified need and create wealth. In the same vein, Nwangwu (2007) opined that entrepreneurship is a process of bringing together the factors of production, which include land, labour and capital so as to provide a product or service for public consumption. National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in Oviawe (2010) defined entrepreneurship as the art which involves recognizing a business opportunity, mobilizing resources and persisting to exploit that opportunity. Ayanuga (2008) asserts that entrepreneurship education arms the individuals with knowledge, information and training that will enable him or her to function adequately in a dynamic economic environment like Nigeria. It trains and individual (irrespective of status) how to carefully assess available opportunity, develop new innovations and eventually become creative. Entrepreneurship education is the training that one engages in for self employment, self esteem and independent living. Through entrepreneurship education, persons with disability can in one way or the other contribute to national development.

Anao (1986), posits that entrepreneurship education is the sum total of the knowledge, skills and attitude that are required for the successful promotion and administering of a business enterprise. Entrepreneurship has been recognized as an important aspect and functioning of organization and economies (Dickson, Solomon, and Weaver, 2008). According to Garba (2010) it contributes in immeasurable ways toward creating new jobs, wealth creation, poverty reduction, and income generating for both government and individuals.

Entrepreneurship education could be seen as a skill-oriented education, education for self reliance, training for managing reasonable risk in business world, and training for economic and social integration (Opaim, Olayi and Ewa 2009). Kuratko (2003) adds further that entrepreneurship education embraced skill building programmes in creative thing, product development and marketing, negotiation, leadership training and wealth generation. It is in the realization of this that the National Policy on Education (NPE 2004) highlighted the following objectives of entrepreneurship education for persons with disabilities:

1. Prepare them for useful living in the society;
2. To provide them with saleable entrepreneurship skills relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond;
3. To enable them compete with their peers in developed world, technology development and application;
4. To make them partners in small scale industries;
5. To make them contribute to Nigerian information communication technological needs; and
6. To provide them with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in varied

setting;

To actualize this to the fullest, special educators and vocational rehabilitation specialist have to collaborate for appropriate placement for persons with disability. Rehabilitation involves bringing a handicapped person into occupational, social and cultural life of the community (Iheanacho, 2010). According to Oyeyinka (2000), this kind of education is designed for those who are interested and can benefit from learning specific type of skills in a specific occupational cluster. Practical skills acquisitions in various areas of entrepreneurship lead to economic stimulation in a dynamic society where individuals with entrepreneurial skills embark on production of saleable items (Tiamiyu, 2010). In the words of Omede (2010), vocational and technical oriented education for persons with disability will further strengthen their chances of independent living and stimulate the entrepreneurial potential embedded in these persons. According to Okeke (2009), entrepreneurship education prepares a potential entrepreneur and is characterized by emphasis on flexibility, reactivity, problem solving and opportunities to anticipate and respond to change.

### **Persons with Disabilities**

Persons with disabilities are exceptional individuals such as the visually impaired, hearing impaired, speech disordered, multiple handicapped, special mobility impaired and a host of others who require adaptable curriculum to suit their peculiar learning needs resulting from their special circumstances (Omede 2011). The National policy on Education (2004) refers to the handicapped (people with special needs) as an individual who is unable to cope with normal school class organization and method in the sense that such individual have learning difficulties. The policy statement on education further attempts to identify various handicapping conditions such as blindness, partial sightedness, deafness or hearing impairment and mental retardation among others. people with special needs can also be described as persons that have one or more disabilities like blindness, partial blindness, partial hearing, physical handicapped, speech disorder, learning disabilities, social maladjustment, mental retardation and gifted and talented (Yusuf, 2010).

Mba (1995) asserted that disability is a gross impairment of body function. It may be physical, sensory, emotional or mental. If a man has been crippled to the extent that he no longer walks upright because he had a motor accident, then he is disabled. If he is still able to get around performing his normal duties without assistance, he is not necessarily handicapped by accident. Ajobiewe (2002) averred that disability is any restriction or lack from an impairment of ability to perform an activity normal for a human being. By implication there is need to educate them on skills that can make them self reliant securing their place amongst the working class. This is why entrepreneurship education is essential because, it helps them to be independent and at the same time make them to contribute to economic growth.

### **State of Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria**

Although entrepreneurship education is not alien, it has not gained prominence in the curriculum for children with special needs in the school system. This is traceable to non-diversification and individualization of their education. According to Omede (2010) entrepreneurship education for persons with disabilities in Nigeria faced the following problems:

1. Lack of specially trained personnel
2. Absence of an all-encompassing curriculum: The National Policy on Education (2004) provides that in pursuance of the goals of vocational and technical education:
  - a. The main features of the curricular activities for technical colleges shall be structured in foundation and trade modules.
  - b. The curriculum for each trade shall consist of four components;
    - i. General education
    - ii. Theory and related course
    - iii. Workshop practices
    - iv. Industrial training/production work
    - v. Small business management and entrepreneurial training

In contrast, the curriculum of special education in Nigeria does not emphasize small business management and entrepreneurial training in for persons with disability. In fact, it is not structured in foundation and the modules but rather dwells more on general education theory and related courses and to a lesser extent workshop practices, industrial training and production work. In practical schools without incorporating vocational and technical education as an integral aspect to upgrade the technical and vocational skills of persons with disability.

3. **Poor funding:** the importance of funding to any establishment cannot be over emphasized. This is because without it, an establishment cannot boast of its existence (Omede, 2009). Entrepreneurship education for persons with disabilities cannot thrive without funds.
4. **Inadequate resources:** entrepreneurship education obviously involves, to a large extent, practical experience and activity than mere theoretical exercise. As such, there is an indispensable requirement for certain basic

resources, human and material, in order to realize its objectives.

There are several other factors that hinder entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. They include poor knowledge-based economy and low spirit of competition, poor enterprising culture.

Ayodele (2006) identified inadequate capital to be one of the principal factors hindering entrepreneurship in the country. Other problems identified by Ayodele include irrelevant education that is bookish, theoretic and “white-collar job” oriented. Stakeholders in the entrepreneurship education should be alert to some issue that may incapacitate the realization of the main thrust of the education (Orim, Olayi, and Ewa, 2009). The authors highlighted the following problems militating against entrepreneurs with disabilities and the inclusion of entrepreneurship education in special education curriculum:

- Raising Capital: Banks and other financial houses do not accept to provide facilities such as loans and grants to this group of persons for fear of not being able to refund. This situation does not provide a conducive environment for the successful implementation of entrepreneurship education in special education curriculum.
- The fear of the unknown associated with risk bearing and self employment could be equally hindering the target population from engaging in such ventures.
- Inadequacy and inaccessibility of materials/equipment.
- Poor infrastructures
- Competitive disadvantage: “normal” person may take advantages of their disability to cheat on them resulting in frustration, poor feasibility plan. Poor public relation of some hearing impaired persons could hinder their success in this regard. Public discrimination against the product and services provided by individuals with disabilities even if the product or services are of high quality. This will result in high patronage and eventual fold-up of the business or venture.

These challenges are not insurmountable with effort and collaboration by the government, the target group, curriculum planners, the school, family and society at large.

### **Prospects of Entrepreneurship Education to Persons with Disability**

In spite of the problems of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria, still it has saleable prospect as the key driver of our economy and self reliance. In view of this, Inoegbu and Ezeanochie (2010), anticipate some prospect of entrepreneurship education these includes:

1. Opportunity for work based experience;
2. Opportunity to exercise leadership and develop inter personal skills.
3. Opportunity to develop planning, financial literacy, and money management skills.
4. Improved academics performance; school attendance; and educational attainment.
5. Increased problem-solving and decision-making abilities; job readiness; and social psychological development.
6. Improved interpersonal relationships; teamwork; money management and public speaking skills as well as health status.

### **Conclusion**

In the light of the above discussion, sustaining entrepreneurship education for persons with disabilities is a productive venture. This is because it gives ample opportunity to this category of persons to train and acquire skills for self development which in turn promotes the nation’s economy. To this end, it is the position of this paper that educational programs for persons with disabilities at all levels of education should be tailored toward providing them with the needed entrepreneurial skills.

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