

Entrepreneurship Education and Challenges to Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

The entrepreneurship education is a relatively new phenomenon in Nigerian Universities. The objective of this paper is to examine the state and challenges of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities. Secondary data, generated through document reading, were used for the analysis. Structural functionalism was adopted as a framework of analysis. It is discovered that though many Nigerian universities have embraced the entrepreneurship education, there is not yet any fundamental change in the teaching and learning process of this important subject. Most of the lecturers have not acquired new and special skills, the teaching methodology has not fundamentally changed from the old system, adequate and appropriate equipment are yet to be procured, the value system which favours certificate acquisition in preference to practical demonstration and ability is still in vogue, the general attitude of the society which favours craze for immediate materialism to functional education is still subsisting. An immediate review of the entrepreneurship curriculum for result oriented skills and functionalism, provision of necessary learning materials and equipment, regular training and retraining of lecturers, orientation for a new and desired value system, improved funding, among other measures, are recommended for a functional entrepreneurial education in Nigerian universities.

Key words: stimulating environment, relevant skills, functional education and creativity

Introduction

In economics, entrepreneurship has been identified as one of the major factors of production. Production is the most important activity of man, as no person can survive without food. Production, which is the process of food processing is a crucial activity of man as he strives to conquer his environment. Although land, capital and labour are also important factors of production, entrepreneurship is the pivot on which they revolve. Entrepreneurship is that critical element for effective mobilization of human and material resources of an organization for the attainment of its set goal.

Entrepreneurship is the term used broadly in connection with the innovative and creative modern industrial and business leaders. It is often being defined by reference to the functions of an entrepreneur as the man who perceives business opportunities and taken advantage of the scarce resources to use them profitably. It is he alone who bears the non-insurable risks in his enterprise, and it is he who directs the human and material resources in his business objective [Akinbode, 2009].

In a similar vein, Wikipedia [2012] defines entrepreneurship as the act of being an entrepreneur or one who undertakes innovations, finance and business acumen in an effort to transform innovations into economic goods. This may result to new organizations or may be part of revitalizing mature organizations in response to a perceived opportunity.

The recent global financial crises, in addition to the prevalent economic woes of Nigeria, compelled the Federal Government to formally adopt Small and Medium Enterprises, SMEs, as the engine of the country's economic recovery and re-engineering for national transformation. The earlier World Bank, IMF, and other global institutions gospel that USA, Britain, Germany, Japan, Taiwan, France, the Asian Tigers, among other advanced countries of the world, have adopted SMEs as their building blocks of industrialization, made it a no choice situation for Nigeria [Nwekeaku, 2010]

Although the Nigeria's Federal Government adopted SMEs as the building block of the country's economy, the right entrepreneurs to realize the objective of setting up small and medium scale enterprises were not available despite the existence of millions army of unemployed youths, including university graduates. The ubiquitous army of unemployed university graduates, regrettably, do not have the requisite skills and experiences for entrepreneurship in the country.

This unsavoury and startling revelation forced the Yaraduah administration, which included wealth creation as the number three item of its Seven-Point Agenda, to embrace entrepreneurship as a panacea. Education was noted as a vehicle for the entrepreneurial skills acquisition in Nigeria. Naturally, the Federal Government turned to the National Universities Commission, NUC, for solution. Consequently, the NUC directed the universities in the country to commence entrepreneurship education.

In an address at a conference on effective implementation of the Yaraduah Administration Seven-Point Agenda, Prof Julius A. Okojie, the Executive Secretary of the NUC, stated that the universities were encouraged to commence entrepreneurial education in order to equip their students with the skills that would make them useful to themselves and the the country generally. In his words:

‘The Commission, through the Department of Student Support Services, is working out strategies of encouraging the universities to establish entrepreneurship studies, career advisory services and reduce crimes like examination malpractices, decadence in moral values, cultism and other social vices within the campus. Other areas of prime importance are of addressing graduate unemployment, poverty reduction and wealth creation through skills acquisition[Okojie, 2009]

Related to the above is the directive of the Federal Government to **all** higher education institutions in the country to run entrepreneurship studies programme as a compulsory course for **all** students irrespective of their disciplines with effect from 2007/2008 academic session, and the Commission to coordinate and ensure compliance[Okojie, 2009]

Pursuant to the above directive, the Federal Government set up a Presidential Committee on the implementation of entrepreneurship education with a broad based membership drawing from NUC, National Board for Technical Education, NBTE, Education Trust Fund, ETF, ILO, UNESCO and the Hamitle Consult, a consulting firm on entrepreneurship education in the country with the NUC as a coordinating agency.

The Nigerian universities are expected to have commenced the implementation of the government directive on entrepreneurship education. This directive, therefore, raises some fundamental questions: Have the country’s universities commenced the directive on entrepreneurship education? Has the entrepreneurship education been properly integrated into the universities curriculum? Do the universities have quality and adequate personnel with the right skills for entrepreneurial education? Do they have the facilities and other requirements for entrepreneurial education? What are the challenges facing Nigerian universities in the implementation of entrepreneurship education? Answers to the above questions, among others, are the objectives of this paper.

Theoretical Framework

Structural functionalism is adopted s a framework of analysis. The thrust of this theory is that in every political system there are structures that perform certain functions for the survival and stability of the system. The structures, regardless of their nature still perform some specific functions. In every society, whether modern or traditional, specific functions are performed.

These functions, according to Almond[1965] are political socialization and orientation, interest articulation and aggregation and political communication, which he calls input functions. Others are rule making, rule application and rule adjudication, which fall under what he calls output functions. Generally, the structures ensure the surveillance, maintenance, stability and security of the system.

Universities perform the functions of education, orientation and socialization of the citizens in the society, but they can only perform these duties well when they have a challenging and stimulating environment.

What is Entrepreneurship?

There is no consensus on exact meaning of entrepreneurship as scholars and practitioners have tried to define it in various forms. Entrepreneurship is the term used broadly in connection with innovative and creative modern industrial business leaders. It is often defined in respect to the functions of an entrepreneur as the man who perceives business opportunities and take advantage of the scarce resources to use them profitably[Akinbode, 2009].

Stevenson [1983] defines entrepreneurship as the pursuit of opportunity without regard to resources currently controlled while Owoseni [2009] sees it as a source of innovation and change, and as such spurs improvements in productivity and economic competitiveness. It is an active process of recognizing the demand in an economy and supplying the factors of production to meet such demands in order to generate profit.

Generally, entrepreneurship should be seen as the special qualities or attributes of the entrepreneur which spur and sustain creative and innovative ideas and intellects for efficient harnessing and managing of business

ventures into profitability. It is a catalyst that facilitates efficient and effective utilization of resources for improved business profitability.

Entrepreneurship embodies special knowledge and skills that spur an entrepreneur into innovative, and creative ideas that are crystallized into quick and risky business decisions that result to sustainable profitability.

These innovative, creative, independent and self-reliant qualities are lacking in most of our university graduates, who have become mere white collar job seekers rather than job makers. Entrepreneurship is the engine of small and medium enterprises in America, Europe, Asian Tigers, among other advanced countries where private sector compliments the efforts of government in provision of employment opportunities, social securities and welfare services to the citizenry.

Entrepreneurship Education

Education is the process of acquiring knowledge, special skills and experiences by an individual for effective conquering and adaptation to his environment. Entrepreneurship education seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings. Variations of entrepreneurial education are offered at all levels of schooling from primary or secondary schools through graduate university programs . The entrepreneurship can provide new division and it can make good students for world[Wikipedia, 2012].

Entrepreneurship education consists of three ingredients: creativity- creating all kinds of ideas; Innovation- find value in selected ideas; and entrepreneurship- develop a business from the innovative idea [Thomsen Business Information, 2012].

In a similar vein, Fayolle[2011] has explained that ultimately, entrepreneurship training is designed to teach you the skills and knowledge you need to know before embarking on a new business venture. While the programme may not guarantee success, you should be able to avoid many of the pitfalls awaiting your less well trained and vigilant contemporaries.

Entrepreneurship education is a lifelong learning process, starting as early as elementary school and progressing through all levels of education, including adult education. The standards and their supporting performance indicators are a framework for teachers to use in building appropriate objective learning activities, and assessment for their target audience. Using this framework, students will have more progressive challenging educational activities; experiences that will enable them the insight needed to discover and create entrepreneurial activities, and the expertise to successfully start and manage their own businesses to take advantage of these opportunities[Wikipedia, 2010]

Arvanites et al[2009] share the above views when they state that innovative educational methods are needed to develop the entrepreneurial spirit and talents that are necessary to function effectively in an environment of strong market forces and complex people issues. They added that for entrepreneurship education to be most useful, it must address and develop in students, the skills necessary as an entrepreneur.

Basically, entrepreneurship education is oriented towards four methods for practical results. These methods may include:

Regular entrepreneurship, which is most popular and suitable for opening of a new organization or starting a new business;

Corporate entrepreneurship, which is suitable for promoting innovation or introducing new products or services or markets in existing firms;

Social entrepreneurship or social venturing, which involves creating charitable organizations that are expected to be self -financing in addition to doing their usual activities; and

Public sector entrepreneurship, designs to improve innovation and customer service delivery

For entrepreneurship education to be most useful, it must address and develop in students, the skills necessary as an entrepreneur. [Arvanite,2009] It must stimulate and challenge the students into creative and innovative ideas and concepts that result into setting-up and sustaining business ventures and other investment opportunities.

Traditional models of education fall short in their ability to link the knowledge and concepts covered in the classrooms to the skills and practice of entrepreneurship. Traditional learning methods most commonly employed in management education provide learning experiences that are inadequate in several respects[Nevins and Stumpf, 1999: 6]

Entrepreneurship education is very crucial for entrepreneurship development because it is the engine that propels creativity and innovations into practical manifestations in form of business ventures and other investment opportunities. Without a functional education the manifestation of entrepreneurship skills in individuals may be difficult.

Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria

The Nigerian educational system, which is a colonial heritage, does not have much consideration for entrepreneurship education. The colonial education was designed to assist colonial masters administer Nigeria better by breaking the communication gap between the colonialists and the colonized Nigerians. Emphasis was placed on producing clerical and administrative officers, teachers, clergy and other liberal arts graduates who would facilitate the westernization process.

At independence, the post independence governments did not do much to restructure our education curricular, right from the primary, secondary through the tertiary stage. Liberal arts, through rote learning, dominated our educational system. Although our educational institutions have been expanding with geometric proportion, curriculum restructuring has been with arithmetic progression.

Akinyemi [1987] notes that our educational institutions, few as they were, remained factories for producing white collar jobbers with no special profession nor was entrepreneurial skills envisaged in the educational system.

Stahli [1992] shares the above view when he argues that in many ways the education currently offered to business students does not suit itself well to the active and experimental learning styles and needs of adult learners and future entrepreneurs.

Apparently worried by the soaring unemployment rate, declining per capita income, youths restiveness in various parts of the country, the Federal government directed 'all higher education institutions in the country to run entrepreneurship studies programme as a compulsory course for all students irrespective of their disciplines with effect from 2007/2008 academic session' (Akojie,2009]

Although the Federal Government made entrepreneurship education compulsory, some universities are yet to commence it with a modicum of seriousness. By making entrepreneurship studies compulsory, government is aiming at producing opportunity or knowledge-based entrepreneurs who are expected to be critical growth drivers of our economy [Akojie,2009]

It is heart-warming that government has made entrepreneurship studies compulsory in our tertiary institutions, it is bad news that most of our universities are not yet ready for full implementation. Akinbami [2011] study on entrepreneurship studies in the country's tertiary institutions notes that:

Different meanings are ascribed to entrepreneurship education in different tertiary institutions in the country. Some of these programmes commonly present EE programmes in the context of vocational training rather than developing the spirit of entrepreneurship, which is the stimulation of entrepreneurship activities and performance in various disciplines. This creates challenge for entrepreneurship education definition.

The country's universities were not prepared for entrepreneurship education when they were compelled to commence it. It is not clear whether any special fund has been made available to the universities for the prosecution of entrepreneurship education. The same conventional facilities for conventional education are being used in the universities. The same personnel for conventional courses are being used for the teaching of entrepreneurial studies in our universities.

Challenges of Nigerian Universities on Entrepreneurship Education

The Federal Government directive for immediate introduction of entrepreneurship education in all tertiary institutions in the country, including the universities has not only aggravated numerous problems confronting the country's ivory towers, but has also created new challenges. These challenges include, but not limited to the following:

1] Lack of Sufficient and Skilled Manpower- Nigerian Universities do not have adequate and high level manpower for effective teaching and learning of entrepreneurship education in the country. The available teachers were drafted from the existing faculties and have not got additional skills to cope with the challenges of the new curriculum. Since one cannot give what one does not have, the expected products of the new entrepreneurship education may not perform any miracles if they are lectured by the same old lecturers. Stumpf

[1999] has noted that ‘traditional models of education fall short in their ability to link the knowledge and concepts covered in the classroom to the skills and practice of entrepreneurship.’

2] Hasty Preparations- The government directive for immediate commencement of the programme is appreciated as it underscores the importance attaches to it, yet preparations before the commencement were hasty. There should have been provisions for a pilot scheme in some selected faculties of selected universities before full scale implementation country wide. The introduction was similar to that of the Universal Primary Education, UPE, by the Obasanjo regime with the obvious consequent problems .

3] Poor State of Infrastructure- The poor state of infrastructure in Nigerian universities is worrisome as the new entrepreneurship education will only worsen the situation. Obeleagu-Nzelibe and Moruku[2010] have noted that the state of infrastructure in Nigerian university system is , to say the least, embarrassing. Apart from those specific to universities as Academic Staff Union of Universities, ASSU, has argued in several negotiations with the Federal Government, infrastructures, such as, electricity, roads and telecommunications network, generally, ‘enable entrepreneurs to access resources and markets unencumbered by spatial-temporal limitations.’

4] Faulty Foundation- Education is a continuous process, but the introduction of entrepreneurship education in the universities without first doing so at the secondary and primary levels, tend to suggest that the new curriculum lacks the necessary foundation. Entrepreneurship education should have commenced at the lower levels before moving to the tertiary level, so that their products, skills and experiences should form the fulcrum of the university entrepreneurship education.

5] Inadequate or outright lack of funding- Though the government directed for immediate commencement of entrepreneurship studies in all tertiary institutions, no special funds have been made to the universities in lieu of the new responsibilities. New classroom blocks, workshops, laboratories, books, academic journals, lecturers, computers, among other materials are required for successful prosecution of the new programme.

Recommendations

For effective prosecution of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian Universities, the following measures should be taken:

Revisiting and restructuring of the entrepreneurship curriculum with a view for effective adaptation to our environment. The current curriculum has heavy influence of UNESCO and ILO[International Labour Organization, which were part of the Presidential Committee that enunciated what is being implemented now.

The introduction of entrepreneurship education at both primary and secondary schools so that a solid foundation would be laid at a lower level before university education. This will make it embracing , procedural and comprehensive for the desired solid foundation at the university level.

When products of primary and secondary education come to the university they are better prepared for a functional entrepreneurship university education.

Training and retraining of personnel involved in the teaching and learning of entrepreneurship education. Most of the emergency and ad-hoc lecturers for entrepreneurship education in our universities are not adequately prepared for the job they dabbled into.

Provision of modern, relevant and adequate facilities for entrepreneurship training so that the products will not be the same dysfunctional job seekers as has been hitherto the case. If relevant training facilities with the right personnel are provided, the products of the system will be the envisaged creative and innovative job makers. But, for now, we are still very far from the mark.

Adequate funding will save the programme from catching the virus of the conventional system, which is grossly underfunded. Underfunding has been one of the major issues that dominated the Federal Government negotiations over the years.

Conclusion

Entrepreneurship education is a welcome development in Nigerian universities. However, the government directive for its introduction in all the tertiary institutions in the country in a one fell swoop without adequate preparation has aggravated the old-age problems of underfunding, dysfunctionality and ant-intellectualism. The curriculum was externally influenced by both the UNESCO and ILO, and needs immediate restructuring for effective adaptation in our environment.

The necessary learning materials, including modern facilities and equipment should be provided for a stimulating and challenging learning environment so that the products of the system will be job makers rather than job seekers as is the case now. The lecturers should be specifically trained and regularly retrained for efficiency and optimum performance.

The Federal and state governments should invest massively in the universities so that the current entrepreneurship education will not end up being a replica of the current conventional dysfunctional programme. If there is a will on the part of the government to implement entrepreneurship education in this country it is a possible, welcome and laudable development.

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