

## Poverty Alleviation Among Nigerian Youths via Entrepreneurial Education: Issues and Challenges

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### Abstract

This paper discussed the relevance of entrepreneurship education in alleviating poverty among Nigerian youths. The paper equally discussed the issues and challenges inherent in the implementation of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria Universities. Objectives of entrepreneurship education were highlighted. Theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the study was reviewed. Finally, the study recommended among others that all the three tiers of government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and all other stakeholders in education industry should ensure that entrepreneurship education is properly funded for effective implementation.

**Key words:** poverty, alleviation, youths, stake holders, entrepreneurial education, self-reliance, issues, challenges.

### 1. Introduction

Poverty as one of the prevalent social phenomenon has been conceptualized in many ways. For example, poverty is generally referred to as a situation where one is financially unable to meet up with the individual or family basic needs and lives in substandard houses and environments.

According to Webster (2009), poverty is the state of lacking a socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions. Poverty is also said to exist when people lack the means to satisfy the basic needs necessary for survival or those that reflect the prevailing standard of living in the community. In other words, when people's nutrition, housing and clothing, though adequate to preserve life, do not measure up to those of the population as a whole, there is poverty.

Poverty has negative implications in people's lives and its devastating and humiliating effect on human and national development cannot be underestimated. For instance poverty has been associated with poor health, low level of education or skills and high rates of disruptive or disorderly behavior among others.

Poverty can be collective, cyclical or case; long- or short-term. It can equally be widespread, concentrated or individual (Webster, 2009). Cyclical poverty refers to poverty that may be widespread throughout a population, but of short-term duration. In other words, it is inability to provide for one's basic needs mainly due to temporary food shortages caused by natural phenomena like flood, draught and poor agricultural planning among others.

Collective poverty on the other hand is a relatively permanent insufficiency of means of securing basic need which may be so general as to describe the average level of life in a society or may be concentrated in relatively large groups in an otherwise prosperous society. Collective poverty is usually related to economic underdevelopment as is the case in Nigeria where the total resources is insufficient to support the population adequately. The most important reason is that Nigeria is characterized by a long-standing system of unequal distribution of wealth whereby a large portion of any increase in the Gross national Domestic Product (GNDP) is siphoned off by persons who are already wealthy and in positions of authority.

Case poverty refers to the inability of an individual or family to secure basic needs even in social surroundings of general prosperity. This inability is generally related to the lack of some basic physical attributes that would ensure individual maintenance. Such persons may, be blind, physically or emotionally challenged, or chronically ill. These conditions are beyond the control of the people who suffer from them and efforts to ameliorate poverty due to physical causes focus on education, sheltered employment, and economic maintenance.

The chief economic traits of poverty are unemployment and underemployment, unskilled occupations and job instability. Ebenebe (2000) defined unemployment as a social problem which can be said to exist when an individual's skills, attitudes and cognitive abilities are not gainfully employed by the government and companies or where he cannot by his own initiative employ them to earn a living. The youths have been the most vulnerable of this social menace. Supporting this assertion, Okorie (2000) stated that unemployment is acute among Nigerian youths, especially the school leavers despite the Nigerian government's efforts at various times to reduce unemployment and alleviate poverty.

Poverty alleviation is a process by which people's socio-economic status, especially people regarded as poor, is improved through certain policies or programs. Poverty alleviation policies are those policies which aim at enhancing the standard of living of the poor who are deprived of the material and non-material

wellbeing of the society. In relation to the above, mackinnon and Reinikka (2000) stated that a poverty reduction action plan is essentially a device to make policy more focused and effective in reducing poverty.

Nigeria as a nation has been making conscientious effort to improve the living standard of people through the various policies and programs she has designed at one time or another to eradicate poverty. For instance, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of 1976 was to encourage people to return to farming; National Directorate of Employment of 1986 was established to capture the unemployed and equip them with the necessary skills that will make them employable and self-sustaining. The major objective of the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) of 2000 was to reduce unemployment and raise effective demand in the economy, and National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) of 2001, provided many youths with the “keke NAPEP” mass transit vehicles. Other programs include the National Accelerated Food Production Program (NAFPP), Poverty Eradication Program (PEP), National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), to mention but a few.

Despite the lofty objectives of the aforementioned programs, poverty more especially among the youths (University Graduates) still persists. Onah (2010) lamented on this ugly scenario when he stated that despite numerous schemes and projects of the NAPEP aimed at fighting poverty in the country, and the huge financial allocation to the program by the government, the impact is yet to be felt by the poor. In line with the above Obadan (2011) stated that political and policy instability which have resulted in frequent policy changes and inconsistent policy implementation which in turn have prevented continuous progress, absence of effective collaboration and complementation among the three tiers of government and inappropriate program design reflecting lack of involvement of beneficiaries in the formulation and implementation of programs among others, contributed to the failure of most poverty related programs and efforts. Similarly, Olaitan, Ali, Onyemachi and Nwachukwu (2000) were of the opinion that one of the major national constraints is weak implementation of the policies.

The failure of the government to alleviate poverty in Nigeria seems to indicate that poverty and unemployment among the youths is a very difficult task. This is evident in the report of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), as cited by Chike-Obi (2012) that the country’s unemployment rate raised to 23.9 percent in 2011 from 21.9 percent the previous year; and it is projected to rise above 25 percent by the end of the year, 2012. This situation may have prompted the Nigerian Federal Government to call for the introduction of entrepreneurial education in institutions of higher learning with effect from the 2007/2008 academic session and various vocational subjects in Unity secondary schools few years later, to equip youths with necessary skills to be self-reliant and entrepreneurial.

### **1.1 Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurship Education (EE):**

Entrepreneurship is a state where an individual gainfully employs his/her skills, attitude and cognitive abilities to earn a living as well as helping others around him to earn same. Oviawe, (2010) noted that entrepreneurship is acquisition of skills and ideas for creating employment for oneself and others. It is the act of starting a company, arranging business ideas and taking risks in order to make a profit through the skills one acquired through education (Omolayo, 2006). To Nwangwu (2007), it is the process of bringing together the factors of production, namely: land, labour and capital to provide goods or services for public consumption.

Implicit in the above view point is that entrepreneurship is both the art and the process of planning, organizing and coordinating human and material resources skillfully and optimistically towards achieving the goals of a business set up. An entrepreneur therefore must be one who intuitively, an inventor with an entrepreneurial mindset (Eno-Obong, 2006). Suffice it to say that if Nigerian youths must overcome poverty through entrepreneurial skill acquisition they must have good entrepreneurial background and according to Oviawe (2001), desired attitudes for Nigeria would be entrepreneurs include a respect for democratic principles and the legal processes of our nation and the highest level of integrity and ethics. This is what Chike-Obi (2012) described as a sustainable life-style.

In this wise, entrepreneurship education becomes a process of social training through which the strong innovative skills in business planning and innovative marketing plans that use modern communication technology, finance and accounting as well as right attitudes, values and business ethics are being inculcated into the people through a well-planned school curriculum.

The objectives of entrepreneurship education cannot be overemphasized as it focuses on equipping the individual with creative and innovative skills and information towards creating a sustainable life-style, sustainable future, self-reliance and development. In line with the above, Paul (2005), stated that the objectives of entrepreneurship education among others are to:

1. Offer functional education that will enable the youth to be self-employed and self-reliant.
2. Provide the youth graduates with adequate training that will help them to be creative and innovative in identifying novel business opportunities.

### 3. Reduce high rate of poverty.

The above objectives are in consonance with Akanbi's (2002) view that with a comprehensive entrepreneurship education in Nigeria, Poverty will be eliminated, sustainable growth of the economy will be assured, and the development of many people cannot be contested. This is supported by Osakwe (2011) who stated that the rationale for establishing entrepreneurship education in higher institutions stems from the fact that most of the tertiary institutions' graduates, (graduates of business and management inclusive) are not self-employed due to the fact that, while many are very risk averse, some do not possess the knowledge, skills and experiences to become entrepreneurs and others lack creativity, innovation, ideas and are negative thinkers. In line with this, (Unachukwu, n.d.) noted that entrepreneurship education prepares and equips people to be responsible and enterprising individuals capable of deep entrepreneurial thinking that contribute to economic and sustainable development.

Realizing this fact, Osakwe (2011) advised that, to ensure undergraduate's development of personal skills and qualities which will make them gain knowledge and understanding of the way in which the economy works and reacts to market forces, the provision of entrepreneurship education and training becomes very insignificant. Implicit in this advice is that entrepreneurial education should be accompanied by training which involves collaboration between the Government and the private sector. The Government of course, has a greater role to play to ensure success.

According to Chike-Obi (2012:8) "if a government does not function efficiently and effectively, scarce resources is wasted and if people and businesses are not empowered to take responsibility for their own development within an enabling framework provided by the government, development could not be said to be sustainable". He maintained that unsustainable lifestyles breed lawlessness, frustrates hard work and entrepreneurship, and discourages genuine investments. Furthermore, Chike-Obi (2012) optimistically maintained that the alleviation of poverty and unemployment no doubt calls for sustainable lifestyles which can be maintained when one is equipped with necessary entrepreneurial skills. There are however, some challenges.

Experience shows that Nigerian educational system lacks facilities for inculcating entrepreneurship capabilities. That is why many of her University graduates lack needed skills to be self-reliant and maintain sustainable life-style. This assertion was in conformity with the views of many authors (Akanbi, 2002; Oviawe, 2010 and Osakwe 2011) who were of the opinion that Nigerian University education is at a crossroad, hence its curriculum implementation lacks functionality as to produce graduates who possess entrepreneurship culture. Lack of entrepreneurship culture and skills among Nigerian Youths could be linked to many inhibiting factors which could be human and/or non-human (material).

## 2. Challenges of Effective Implementation of Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria:

The following challenges facing effective implementation of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian Universities can be discussed under the following subheadings:

- Lack of trained entrepreneurship teachers,
- Lack of infrastructural and instructional equipment for entrepreneurship teaching,
- Insufficient fund for effective implementation.
- Poor governments and society's attitude or culture toward entrepreneurial training.
- Inadequate planning and implementation of governments policy

### 2.1 Lack of Trained Entrepreneurship Teachers/Skilled Manpower

There is dearth of entrepreneurship teachers in the institutions of higher learning, in terms of quality and quantity. Most University lecturers are not professional teachers and as such lack requisite skills and methods with which to inculcate the needed knowledge, skills and attitude in a manner that will help learners cultivate practically, entrepreneurial skills. This is why Ebele (2007) posited: entrepreneurship education is not just only about teaching people how to run a business, it involves inculcating in an individual creative thinking and promoting strong sense of self worth and accountability. The above assertion entails that knowledge in the three domains are of great importance if the entrepreneurship education must make meaningful impact in the learners. This is why Obiefuna, Ifegbo and Ike-Obioha (2010) pointed out that because school teacher continues to theorize, leaving the aspect of demonstrating learning, the programs of the curriculum are not adequately and effectively delivered. Entrepreneurship education demands that learners are exposed to the three domains of learning, namely: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. On the contrary, the school system emphasizes much on cognitive with outright neglect of affective and psychomotor domains. Against this background, Ezegebe, (2012) stated that quality in the standard of learning lies on the potency of the teacher in the use of instructional materials for relevant illustration and explanation. Akanbi advised that teachers of entrepreneurship programs should incorporate discussion and demonstration methods as their mode of delivery. Apart from trained entrepreneurship teachers, there is also need to co-opt private enterprises with relevant requisite skills in

various fields.

## **2.2 Lack of Infrastructural/Instructional facilities:**

Infrastructural and instructional facilities refer to physical facilities in this work. The importance of adequate physical facilities in the school system was highlighted by some authors (Aguokagbue, 2000 and Ezegbe, 2012), who were of the view that teaching and learning are very unrealistic in the absence of equipment. The problems in realization of entrepreneurship objective of institutions of higher learning have been compounded by lack of infrastructural/instructional facilities. The importance of infrastructural and instructional facilities cannot be over-emphasized; hence there is a correlation between learning and conducive school and classroom environment. Akanbi (2002:107) referring to entrepreneurship education in tertiary institution rightly pointed out that, "in order to make the program functional, the education planners must be forthcoming in terms of needed instructional materials and manpower.

## **2.3 Insufficient Fund:**

Fund as we know is the life-wire of any organization. Insufficient fund certainly leads to ineffective implementation and achievement of educational goals. In their own view Aliu and Ibe (2008) maintained that provision of adequate infrastructure, support services and facilities for effective delivery will go a long way to guarantee success of entrepreneurship education. This condition stated above can only be true if sufficient fund is provided and effectively managed.

## **2.4 Poor Government and Society's Attitude**

Both government and the society have a very poor attitude towards entrepreneurship training. There is a general belief that education which exposes people to white collar job is superior to education that leads to acquisition of entrepreneurship skills. In this respect, Bukola (2011) expressed shock on society's attitude toward entrepreneurship training and thus stated,

In Nigeria, graduates of vocational and technical institutions are highly skilled entrepreneurs, but the society does not seem to encourage the youths to take this role. Unfortunately, those who influence education policy in the society (legislators, educators and the media, among others) appear to feel that graduates of technical institutions are not equal to University graduates.

This invariably has affected the perceptions of even the students of vocational and technical institutions who, according to Osakwe (2011), have some entrepreneurship background, but lack entrepreneurial spirit even before graduation. He further stated that the students always focus their minds on job search without thinking of how to use the knowledge they have acquired to create a job.

## **2.5 Inadequate planning and Implementation of Government Policies:**

It is quite apparent that the problem of Nigerian Educational system at all levels has been in the planning and implementation stages. For instance, making entrepreneurship education compulsory for all students at tertiary institutions demands the need for sustainable programs for all the lecturers who by all indications are the last implementers of the entrepreneurship education curriculum. Unfortunately, in Nigerian context traditional method of instruction otherwise known as lecture method has become a common pattern to all university lecturers. Participatory learning which the government advocated as a means of involving learner's actively in teaching learning process has been ignored.

Consequently, political instability in Nigeria, has in one way or the other affected meaningful implementation of some educational policies. On this note, Obadan, (2011) notes that political and policy instability have serious consequences in most poverty related programs and efforts in Nigeria.

## **3. Conclusion**

Poverty has been known to be one of the social issues which is so apparent among Nigerian youths. Despite the numerous efforts of the Federal Government to control this situation, poverty still persists among the youths. Poverty issue among the youths is linked with unemployment as so many graduates from various universities roam about the streets searching for jobs. It is therefore believed that what could help solve the existing problems of employment and poverty in Nigeria is a dramatic change in sustainable life style in both individual and Government circle.

In a bid to help youths to be empowered and take responsibility for personal development, the Federal Government introduced entrepreneurial education in both tertiary and Unity secondary school curriculum. This program, though, worthwhile, may not fully actualize its lofty objectives because of certain challenges it is facing. Based on the fore-going this study has therefore made some useful recommendations.

## **4.Recommendations**

In line with the above conclusion, the following recommendations were drawn.

1. Government should ensure that schools are equipped with necessary infrastructural and instructional facilities that will help the teaching and learning of entrepreneurship education very effective. Workshops and laboratories

stocked with diverse kinds of equipment should be established at various schools to help internalize needed skills and values.

2 .The Students should be part and parcel of decision making body of the education policies affecting their interest. This will help to identify their areas of interest that will be incorporated in the curriculum by the curriculum planners.

3.All the three tiers of Government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and all other stakeholders in education industry should endeavor to ensure that entrepreneurship education is properly funded as no effective planning and implementation of any program will take place in the absence of funds

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