

# Transformation of University Education for Graduate Employability in Nigeria: The Intervention of Entrepreneurship Education

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## Abstract

This paper beamed attention on the problem of unemployment among Nigeria University Education graduates. The present education practice churns out products that are heavily dependent on white-collar and blue-collar jobs; products that cannot use the education received to cull-out their innate propensities towards vocation and entrepreneurship. This development is traceable to the fact that the curricula predisposed to their consciousness are not deeply vocational-friendly. The paper articulated how entrepreneurship education could be used to transform university education for the employability of its products and synthesized the philosophy that should inform the thinking and action of university graduates in their entrepreneurial learning. In addition to recognizing the attempts made in this direction by successive governments and associated problems experienced, the paper recommended strategies that could provoke meaningful transformation of university education with entrepreneurial tinge.

**Keywords:** Transformation, Entrepreneurship, University Education, Employment, Nigeria.

## Introduction

A major challenge facing university education in Nigeria today is the gulf between theory and practice. This dangerous and alarming gap makes nonsense the nation's effort at providing for her citizens good education thereby subjecting the system to the throes of failure (Mgbodile, 2003). What we have these days is a situation where those who go to university are lacking in basic vocations needed for a meaningful existence. They are thus known by their certificates which perpetually condemn them to job-seeking and not job-creation. As a result, unemployment has reached an embarrassing level, and the loss of employment opportunity for young graduates has led to frustration, kidnapping practice, insecurity and uncertainty about the future (Arogundade, 2011).

When the National Policy on Education (2004) considers tertiary education as the type of education received in post-secondary institutions with the mandate to produce relevant manpower for the nation's economy, it then stands to reason that at the peak of the tertiary education level is the university established to produce high-level manpower. The university is therefore expected to make optimum contribution to the country's economy based on teaching and learning, research and community development.

Today, however, in the face of such global realities as knowledge-based and information/data industrial economy, a fourth job function has appreciated in assigned weight – engagement in an economic activity which calls for academic professional expertise (Osahogulu and Green-Osahogulu, 2012). Graduate unemployment therefore would constitute according to Abiogu (2011) a double loss to the society in view of the tremendous amount of resources that have been invested in their formal education and the consumption demands which the unemployed graduates make on the economy. To make matter worse, most industries which could have engaged this pool of unemployed graduates have shut down while those still in existence operate well below their capacity is a common knowledge in Nigeria as a result of infrastructural deficit and security challenges.

It is regrettable that students at the university level are still interested in the paper certificates and are thus pushed out by the system unskilled and unemployable. There is therefore, the danger of creating an undesirable split between the experience gained in more direct associations and what is acquired in school. The point of argument of this paper is to bridge the gap between what men consciously know because they are aware of having learned it by a specific job of learning and what they unconsciously know because they have absorbed it in the formation of their character by intercourse with others, is a great task emerging with the constant development of schooling and it is a task that demands deep attention. Little wonder Dewey (1899) had submitted that "one of the weightiest problems with which philosophy of education has to cope is the method of keeping a proper balance between the informal and the formal, the incidental and the intentional modes of education".

## What is Entrepreneurship?

By the submission of Appleby (1996) entrepreneurship is the process of bringing together creative and innovative ideas and coping them with management and organization's skill in order to combine people, money

and resources to meet an identified need and thereby create wealth. Entrepreneurship passes for an activity of venturing into the creation of new enterprises to meet new challenges and opportunities presented by a given situation (Awe and Ayeni, 2008).

One can safely submit that entrepreneurship is an attempt to create value by an individual. An entrepreneur is therefore perceived as a discoverer, explorer of opportunities, a profit taker and profit maximizer, a philosopher as well as a risk taker and risk bearer (Appleby 1996).

### **What is Entrepreneurship Education?**

Akanbi (2010) defined entrepreneurship education as “the process of creating something different with value by devoting the necessary time and effort, assuming the accompanying financial, psychological and social risks and receiving the resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction”. For the purpose of this exercise, entrepreneurship education is taken to mean the inculcation in a learner of entrepreneurial skills, knowledge, attitude, abilities and competences that prepare the recipient to live happily and successfully in the society and contribute meaningfully to the sustainable growth and development of the society. Thus, the learner is assisted to learn job-specific and employable skills that keep him in good stead to possess a broad knowledge about requirements, functions and operations of a particular business which will strengthen him with vocational competence and industrial experience and desirable ethical orientation towards sustainable human development.

### **What is Transformation?**

The New Webster’s Dictionary of the English language has noted that to transform means to change the form or appearance of; to change the character or nature of something. It is further suggested that transformation comes from a Greek word metamorphoo meaning to change into another form. Transformation has become a buzz word in Nigeria as the president Dr. Goodluck Jonathan takes an infectious delight in waving the transformational talisman at every problem. His transformation agenda is hinged on the argument that Nigeria’s development efforts have over the years been characterized by lack of continuity, consistency and commitment to agreed policies, programmes and projects as well as an absence of a long term perspective. The agenda is based on and draws its inspiration from Nigeria’s vision of 20: 2020 and a set of priority policies and programmes which when implemented, it is hoped, will lead to the transformation of the Nigerian economy to meet the future needs of the Nigerian people. The term portends a critical awareness and strategic engagement with the forces and dynamics of knowledge in a society in a state of flux.

On the whole, entrepreneurship can be visualized as a dynamic process of vision, change and creation which requires an application of energy and passion towards the creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions. It’s essential ingredients noted Kuratko and Hodgetts (2004) as cited by Familoni (2012) include the willingness to take calculated risks in terms of time, equity or careers; the ability to formulate an effective venture team; the creative skill to marshal out needed resources; fundamental skill of building solid business plan; and finally, the vision to recognize opportunity where others see chaos, contradictions and confusion.

Accordingly, entrepreneurship education seeks to prepare people especially youth to be responsible enterprising individuals who become entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial thinkers and who contribute to economic development and sustainable communities. It is not based on textbook course. Instead, students are immersed in real life learning experiences where they have an opportunity to take risks, manage the results and learn from the outcomes. It is not just about teaching someone to run a business. It is also about encouraging creative thinking and promoting strong sense of self-worth and accountability. Through entrepreneurship education, students learn how to create a business. The core knowledge created via entrepreneurship education is summarized by Familoni (2012) to include:

- The ability to recognize opportunities in one’s life.
- The ability to pursue such opportunities by generating new ideas and marshalling out needed resources.
- The ability to create and operate a new venture.
- The ability to think in a creative and critical manner. Entrepreneurship education therefore typifies the fact that educational experience is measured by the degree to which it functions in meeting the actual life needs of the individual and of the society at large. A society would have a date with perdition in the absence of such attributes as self-knowledge and critical self-awareness. This is why the Socratic injunction “know thyself” is as relevant to the society as it is to the individual. Hence transformation is necessary, desirable and even inevitable in a society like Nigeria with an army of unemployed graduates.

### **The Philosophy of Entrepreneurship Education**

The objectives from where the philosophy of entrepreneurship education is derived is outlined by Paul (2005) to achieve the following:

- a. To offer functional education to the youth which will enable them to be self-employed and self-reliant.
  - b. To provide young graduates with adequate training to be creative and innovative in identifying business opportunities.
  - c. To serve as a catalyst for economic growth and development.
  - d. To offer university graduates training on risk management.
  - e. To reduce high level of poverty
  - f. To generate employment opportunities.
  - g. To reduce rural-urban migration
  - h. To provide young graduates with enough training and support that will enable them to establish a career in small and medium size business.
  - i. To inculcate in the youth the spirit of perseverance which will enable them survive in a business venture they embark upon.
  - j. To provide smooth transition from traditional to modern industrial economy (Paul 2005:30).
- It is possible to interpret this philosophy as that which provides the social glue that binds together both high-tech and mainstreet activities. It is the base of leadership power and influential in investment innovation and technology laden with global market value.

### **Successful Government efforts at Transforming University Education**

Government, in recognition of the challenge posed by ravaging unemployment had made effort to establish entrepreneurship centres in tertiary institutions with the intention of enabling such institutions meet the demands of industry (Nebo 2007). Equipped with entrepreneurial culture and mindset, the door of self-employment, economic independence and self-actualization shall have been opened for them.

It has to be recognized that there is a directive from the government to the National Universities Commission (NUC) to design the entrepreneurial curriculum that would provoke wealth creation among graduating tertiary education students. The envisaged curriculum will in the word of Abiogu (2011) enable the graduates have orientation towards making a job instead of the current orientation towards taking a job. Abiogu admitted that Ivowi (2010) corroborated the essence of the curriculum which is expected to be an effective and sustainable entrepreneurial type that would enable one address issues involved in production; and by co-operation improve on how techniques for doing things can be devised, tested and exposed to learners who on completion go to industries to contribute to raising productivity, thereby initiating economic growth and development (Abiogu 2011:8).

The question may be asked: can the establishment of entrepreneurship centres and a directive to design entrepreneurial curriculum be enough to achieve a whole some transformation of university education in Nigeria? It is common knowledge that a gulf exists between the knowledge and skills needed in the Nigeria labour market and what Nigerian graduates possess. Adaptation of the curriculum to the existing circumstances and the school environment is the responsibility of the teacher. How possible and practicable can it be that the university teacher who is not internet compliant with regard to modern methods of teaching and learning cope with the challenge. Can such a teacher who is hungry and angry and always on a war path with the government to get what is due him, be expected to accomplish such a task? This is a country where 80% of the population live on less than one dollar a day; commuting within and between cities remain a tedious task considering the state of the roads and sundry criminals; power generation in spite of a recent mark-up trails behind what happened in several African countries while educational and health infrastructure remain in tatters. How can quality teaching result from such frustrating scenario? Can such scenarios warrant constant curriculum review to keep pace with changing times as they rather pave way for a longer retention of curriculum unlike in developed climes. That position corroborates the contention of Ivowi (2010) that delays in constant review and changes in curricula lead to slow adjustment in science and technology.

There is a standard practice of University supervisory body – the national Universities Commission (NUC) to undertake re-accreditation of programmes every five years. Existing curriculum would promptly call for a review in ideal situation. In Nigeria where other things are not equal, it is most likely that necessary changes are hardly reviewed till next accreditation exercise. The implication is that curricular can take as long as ten years to be reviewed thereby impeding innovation in curriculum as well as pedagogy.

That poverty is a disease ravaging the length and breadth of Nigeria is no longer news. That poverty is a virus to collective progress and national peace is incontrovertible. That Nigerian government in recognition of the danger posed by the virus has taken and is taking measures to reduce the intensity in the form of poverty alleviation programmes must be acknowledged. That such programmes are targeted at creating employment, entrepreneurship skills and creative thinking must not escape attention. It therefore behoves Nigerian Universities to undertake the necessary research, adopt acceptable measures and improve on some of such programmes that can create small and medium enterprises.

Undoubtedly, such research and ideological transformation must necessitate enormous fund. The research centres of the universities will need standard warehouse and elaborate modern laboratory. They may be constrained by the high cost of machines, tools and spare parts. Often the ones provided by the government are:

*Purchased through Nigerian contractors whose interest and gain are anchored on buying second-hand or inferior machines, tools and spare parts... are of low quality with complicated system...manufactured and ordered from the second-world countries of Austria, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia: once any of the machines breaks down Nigerian engineers cannot fix them up. It requires only experts from these second world countries to do the repairs (Abiogu 2006:39).*

It is further feared that the transformation of university education through entrepreneurship practice can face sustainability of the entrepreneurship centre problem, technical manpower for repairs availability as well as accountability problem. Just as Nigerians lack respect for the culture of maintenance of public property, they exhibit voracious appetite for corruption, mismanagement and misplacement of values and are adept in consumerism, materialistic opportunism and squandermania. These vices are drain pipe on the pay packet without a corresponding impact thereby amounting to negative entrepreneurship economy. As dishonourable as these crafts are, they constitute a cog in the wheel of progress of transforming university education in the comity of developed nations. There is therefore the challenge of proffering strategies by which university education could be transformed through entrepreneurship education.

### Strategies

1. Government should accelerate the growth rate of sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing which can generate employment or foster the creation of small business by graduates. Steps such as provision of power should be taken to reduce the overhead cost of doing business. Easier way of securing loans for small business by graduates should be promoted by government.
2. Government should also establish a National Entrepreneurial Education Framework. A rallying point for all activities on entrepreneurship education should be the National entrepreneurial education framework (Okebukola in punch Newspaper 2012:45). This framework specifies the national philosophy, objectives and implementation scheme for the programme sector-wide.
3. The presidency, through the federal ministry of Education should expand the frontier of entrepreneurial education delivery beyond higher education. A broad-based national committee on entrepreneurial education is hereby proposed. The National council on Education should set up this Committee with Federal and state actors as members.
4. The translation of entrepreneurship educational goals into planned employment realities is possible through the provision of adequate qualified personnel and facilities in order to check the delays experienced in the review of existing curricular as such delays negatively impact on innovation and widens the gap between policy and implementation.
5. At the level of the university, entrepreneurial studies curriculum should be laden with practical concepts in entrepreneurship. It should focus on the development of enterprises that will rapidly grow the Nigerian economy. It should be about those small and medium scale businesses that are related to areas of top economic priority of Nigeria – power, manufacturing and agriculture. While there should be a General Studies entrepreneurial course as currently obtains in Rivers State University of Education, Port Harcourt every department should sprinkle entrepreneurial topics into relevant courses.
6. There is the need for partnership in the successful implementation of entrepreneurial education. Partnership with the National Directorate of Employment is one of such important links. Neighbouring universities also need to partner to share resources. Linkage with some advanced countries endeavour to broaden the range of their technology to search for, organize and analyse information in order to effectively communicate and collaborate with other graduates of diverse abilities, skills and socio-economic background is important. The demand on each university in the conglomerate lightens with such arrangement as human and material resources are shared.
7. University should set up entrepreneurship observatory for scanning businesses that are worth while in their vicinity and where funds can be sourced to support start-up businesses by students.
8. Re-orientation of the mindset of the youth to consider self-employment as an option before leaving school and be psychologically and emotionally prepared for it should be a constant message in our schools. They will thus be challenged to identify entrepreneurial opportunities both within and outside their area of speciality while in school.

### Conclusion

It has become glaring that the value of Nigerian education and the curricula used in all Nigerian

institutions have become irrelevant to the over all needs of the country. Nigeria's education is gradually becoming alienated from the realities of the society because it has chosen to place a section of education above other important sector. It has chosen to invest only on intellectual skills to the detriment of vocational and affective skills. Ejiofor, Cited in Udiugwomen and Ozumba (2004) proposed a 3-H strategy which could help Nigeria to evolve practical curricula needed to selvage educational system from a cocoon of inefficiency and redundancy. The head, according to him must be taught through massive qualitative and functional education-an education imbued with a high dose of philosophy; the heart must be sensitized to high novel principles and ethical practices; and the hand must be equipped with requisite tools and suitably rationalized incentives for greater performance. A combination of these factors as we have noted earlier in entrepreneurship education will definitely produce the rebranded, functional and qualitative education needed to transform university education in Nigeria in particular and Nigerian society as a social entity in general.

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