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Impactful Tertiary Education: A Panacea for Youth Unemployment in Nigeria

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Abstract: Nigerian is currently under unemployment crisis and according to NBS unemployment rate of 2020 is around 33.3%. Nigerian GDP growth is slow and poverty rate is high. Youth unemployment is high and it's because of methods of education. Our graduates should have the capacity to think critically, ask questions, continuously seek new knowledge, confidently take initiatives, identify gaps in how things are done, proffer solutions, and seek to increase the value chain in various economic activities. Entrepreneurial learning should be a culture that students must inculcate in them throughout their stay in the university.

Keywords: Education, Unemployment, Entrepreneurship, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian socio-economic environment continues to be characterised by high levels of poverty and income inequality coupled with a serious gap between economic growth indices and the level of poverty. In 2016, the World Bank estimated that for every 1% growth in the GDP of Nigeria, the poverty rate declined by only 0.6% (World Bank, 2016) which clearly shows lack of economic empowerment within a very large section of the Nigerian society. Though the issue of unemployment has continued to occupy the minds and discuss among various stakeholders in our country, but we are yet to see a tipping point towards more economic inclusiveness and prosperity for our people. According to figures published by the Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on their website, unemployment in Nigeria as at Q4 2020 was 33.3% (NBS, n.d.) while youth unemployment/underemployment stood at 42.5% (NBS, n.d.) in the same period. It is imperative that the education we give at our tertiary institutions must prove its value and relevance as a panacea for dealing with today's unemployment challenges in our society.

Under our current unemployment crisis, it is questionable if the traditional methods of education involving reading-understanding-remembering-writing, all targeted at passing conventional exams in academic programs will lead us to safety. Our graduates should have the capacity to think critically, ask questions, continuously seek new knowledge, confidently take initiatives, identify gaps in how things are done, proffer solutions, and seek to increase the value chain in

various economic activities. In the past, the Federal Government of Nigeria came up with several intervention programmes aimed at alleviating youth unemployment. Some of the notable interventions include the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Industrial Attachment or Student Industrial Working Experience Scheme (SIWES), vocational and technical training, agricultural training, and of recent, training in Information and Communication Technology Training (ICT). Entrepreneurship education was also introduced as a mandatory learning at the secondary schools and universities. Notwithstanding the good intentions of successive governments in Nigeria that created these interventions, the problems of youth unemployment have persisted because the interventions failed to achieve the desired results either due to policy inadequacies or poor implementation. Most beneficiaries of the schemes still end up in the job market searching for employment opportunities that sparsely exist.

Entrepreneurship is critically important for job creation (Klapper, 2006), and is seen to be the most potent tool for combating unemployment in an environment of steadily shrinking job supply (Looi & Khoo-Lattimore, 2015), but research show that the owner-managers of small businesses in Nigeria have limited knowledge on the factors that might contribute to business sustainability (Okeke *et al.*, 2021; & Uchehara, 2017); While small firms constitute the highest number of business enterprises in Nigeria, but unfortunately, most of them go into extinction within five years of existence (Ajike *et al.*, 2015). To achieve

the desired goal of sustaining small businesses in Nigeria, we must consciously and systematically develop entrepreneurial leaders through productive educational curricula that will ensure that our graduates are well equipped to establish, grow, and sustain business enterprises

CONCEPT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The term entrepreneurship is quite pliable and could have different meanings depending on the context that it is used. The term came up back in the 18th Century then denoting someone who undertakes a project. The origin of the term entrepreneur is said to emanate from the French word 'entreprendre' which means 'to undertake'. Since then, scholars and practitioners have defined entrepreneurship in different ways which most times reflect the relevance that authors attach to entrepreneurial factors like trait, style, size of opportunity, and quantum of value that is created. Below are some definitions of entrepreneurship from a diversity of authors across business, academia, media, and the industry.

In the words of Peter F. Drucker as, "What all the successful entrepreneurs have in common is not a certain personality but a commitment to the systematic practice of innovation." (HBS, 2006). Birley & Mzyka (2011) in Financial Times Mastering Series defined entrepreneurship as "A process of identifying opportunity and realizing value from it." Brian Tracy, Chairman CEO of Brian Tracy International; a training and development organizations that has consulted for over 1000 organizations in over 70 countries defined the entrepreneur as "a person who sees an opportunity to serve people in some way with a product or service that they want and need." (Tracey, 2019). In the Harvard Business Review on Succeeding as an Entrepreneur, Bhide (2011) described entrepreneurs from the perspective of making decisions regarding the nature of business they want to do and what capabilities they need to develop. The author said, "Entrepreneurs must make a bewildering number of decisions, and they must make the decisions that are right for them." Hindle (2008) in 'The Economist' described entrepreneurship as the "special collection of skills which include a propensity to take risks over and above the normal, and a desire to create wealth."

The most important point in these concepts and definitions is the emphasis placed on the processes that the entrepreneur uses to achieve business objectives rather than the specific trade skills that are required in each circumstance. Drucker's use of the word 'commitment' is a figurative expression that describes the 'soul' of entrepreneurship. Commitment is required to light up an entrepreneurial passion, get motivated, acquire the skills, seek the opportunities, take calculated risks, and withstand the challenges. The entrepreneur is

therefore an opportunity seeker who knows how to plan and mobilise resources to actualize the economic values intrinsic in these opportunities whilst withstanding all sorts of challenges that are associated with entrepreneurship endeavours. In the wisdom of economists, they postulated that there are four factors of production namely land, labour, capital, and entrepreneurship. In the same vein, they assigned rewards for each of the factors of production which are rent, wage, interest, and profit respectively. While the rewards for land, labour, and capital can be determinable, we cannot say the same thing for the reward for the entrepreneur. Even though profit has been ascribed as reward for entrepreneurship, but it can also be a loss, which explains why entrepreneurship is often associated with risk-taking.

It is important to note that the application of entrepreneurship skills go beyond the scope of private enterprise. One can take entrepreneurial initiatives while working for others whether in a corporation, partnership, or a sole enterprise. This type of entrepreneurial behaviour within organizations have been described in the literature as 'entrepreneurship', a word coined from the phrase 'intra-corporate entrepreneurship' by an American Entrepreneur Gifford Pinchot III in 1978. It is described as a system that allows employees to undertake entrepreneurial responsibilities within a company or any other form of organization (Pinchot, 2020). Just like the traditional Entrepreneur, the Intrapreneurs are equally self-motivated, proactive, and action-oriented people who take the initiative to pursue creativity and innovation, albeit within organizations either in an individual capacity or as a team effort. So even graduates that are not strong enough to pursue private enterprise can still make creative and innovative contributions to any organization they find employment by applying the substantive entrepreneurial skills that they acquired from the university.

Determinants of Entrepreneurship Behaviours

Evidence in literature suggests that socio-cultural factors like family history, social environment, ethnicity, and economic circumstances may stimulate entrepreneurial behaviour in young people (Looi & Khoo-Lattimore, 2015). Some of these factors may be universal, while some may be culture specific. For example, in Nigeria, certain ethnic groups are known to be more entrepreneurial oriented than others and such disparity also exists across different communities and families from the same ethnic grouping. Naffziger *et al.* (1994) identified several factors that determine someone's predisposition to entrepreneurial behaviour. Some of these factors include personal traits, personal environment (family status, sex, entrepreneurial family background and education) business environment (societal attitudes, economic climate, availability of accessible funds, and entrepreneurship-supportive

network), ideas, personal goals, and perception of future entrepreneurial outcomes.

There are also arguments on whether entrepreneurs are born or made (Looi & Khoo-Lattimore, 2015). These arguments are supported by several examples of families where entrepreneurship runs in their lineage. Companies like General Motors (founded by William C. Durrant in 1908), Ford (founded by Henry Ford in 1903), Toyota (founded by Kiichiro Toyoda in 1937) etc, all began with the entrepreneurial efforts on one man while successive generations have maintained the same entrepreneurial drives which have resulted in very large global corporations today. There is no doubt that people with exceptional skills exist: people that are self-starters with strong drive towards personal enterprise, sometimes even without education. But these specially gifted people are insignificant to make the required economic impact in the larger society that is suffocated by unemployment. One must not be naturally endowed with entrepreneurial skills or be a child of an entrepreneur to develop the drive to take advantage of the opportunities that prevail in the current generation. Indeed, entrepreneurs can be made through effective coaching, mentoring, or self-development.

It is already established in literature that entrepreneurship education can positively impact entrepreneurial outcomes from learners (Ndfirepi, 2020; & Patricia & Silangen, 2016) irrespective of their socio-cultural backgrounds. Entrepreneurial education should focus on increasing students' awareness towards entrepreneurship and proactively supporting them to develop critical entrepreneurial skills (not just nuts and bolts), as well as highlighting entrepreneurship as an option for earning a living irrespective of the student's underlying academic discipline. Students of all academic disciplines should be taught how to think outside the box, how to transform ideas into practice, how to acquire and utilise resources, networking, social intelligence, and how to collaborate or partner with others. The key objective being to prepare them to be useful to themselves and the society upon graduation.

The World Bank has identified comprehensive skills set that are required to enhance employability and labor productivity which will make countries to become more economically competitive in the 21st Century. These skills set include cognitive skills, socio-emotional skills, technical skills, and digital skills (World Bank, n.d.). Cognitive skills imply understanding complex ideas, adapting effectively to the environment, learning from experience. Cognitive skills induce creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving capabilities. Socio-emotional skills helps one to effectively deal with interpersonal and social situations including leadership, teamwork, self-control, and perseverance. Technical skills are task-specific, while digital skills impact the ability to appropriately access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, and evaluate information. It means that even when young people are disadvantaged

due to personal, social environment, or cultural circumstances, our universities can use skills-based education curriculum to address any such shortcomings, fill the gaps, and produce confident and competent graduates that can make a difference in the society.

Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria

In the Nigerian educational systems, acquisition of trade skills and entrepreneurship learning are most times used interchangeably. Though these two concepts are somehow related, but they are not the same. While trade skills prepare students for specific tasks, entrepreneurial learning is supposed to build foundational skills that will enable graduates to identify, evaluate, and exploit economic opportunities that are abound in the society. Before we discuss entrepreneurship education in the universities, it is important to understand what happens at the secondary level.

Entrepreneurship Education at Secondary School Level

The curriculum introduced in Senior Secondary Education system for Trade and Entrepreneurship studies by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) focused on 37 trade subjects that teach specific technical skills but referenced in the curriculum as entrepreneurship courses. This curriculum makes it mandatory for students in Senior Secondary Schools to enrol in one entrepreneurship subject. The NERDC prides itself as the think tank of the Nigerian educational system providing the guide for curriculum development and its implementation for basic and secondary education in Nigeria. However, their approach to entrepreneurship learning have not provided the foundation for young people to acquire personal qualities such as the ability to take initiatives, innovation, creativity, and collaborative culture which are critical skills for identifying, evaluating and exploiting entrepreneurship opportunities in those trades that the curriculum is supposed to train them.

In contrast, the United Nations Development Organization (UNIDO) introduced an Entrepreneurship Curriculum Program (ECP) in several African countries including Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, and Uganda, etc. (UNIDO, n.d.) which focused more on personal development than trade skills. Under the nationwide programme, entrepreneurship was introduced as a compulsory subject in secondary schools (general, technical, or vocational) aimed at developing entrepreneurship culture and skills among young people towards building the foundation for a sustainable and dynamic private sector. By implementing the ECP, young people acquire personal qualities such as the ability to take initiatives, innovation and creativity, willingness to take calculated risks, self-confidence, and ability to collaborate with others. They learn to save, invest, and grow their

investments. They enhance their technical thinking and learning capability. These competencies help them to select and shape their career path, as employees or entrepreneurs. The curriculum is action-oriented; with a very significant part of the programme dedicated to practical research into identifying business opportunities in communities, assessing resources for setting up and steering a business, and learning from successful entrepreneurs both in the classroom and within their companies.

A comparison of the entrepreneurial strategy of NERDC in Nigeria and the ECP implemented by UNIDO in some African countries shows very clear differences in teaching of entrepreneurship education at the secondary school level. While the ECP emphasises entrepreneurial skills, the Nigerian curriculum emphasises trade skills. There is a difference between acquiring a skill and understanding how to turn these skills into economic benefits. Entrepreneurial learning is much broader than acquiring skills on specific trades. Research shows that some non-trade skills such as behavioural traits, social networking, business skills, independence, and motivation can predict entrepreneurial success (Lucaa *et al.*, 2012).

Entrepreneurship Education at University Level

Entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities is regulated by the National University Commission (NUC). The Entrepreneurship Development Division of the NUC has a mandate which includes the following (<https://www.nuc.edu.ng/>)

- To encourage strong collaborative ties between academia and Industry in the area of skilling and entrepreneurship towards creating sustainable opportunities for creativity and innovation in Nigerian Universities.
- To promote the entrepreneurial university concept and foster student internship programmes that guarantee the acquisition of specific sectorial skills for employability.
- To facilitate University – Industry partnerships in the areas of curriculum development and review to embed entrepreneurship training and skills developments.
- To engage with corporate bodies; Banks, Telecommunication, etc. to sponsor and brand incubation centres as part of the entrepreneurship study centres in Nigerian Universities.
- To facilitate the engagement with CBN, BOI, DBN, BOA, TET fund etc. towards aligning the various graduate SME loan schemes with the university entrepreneurship programmes.

Based on this mandate, and in compliance with the directives of the Federal Government of Nigeria regarding compulsory entrepreneurship education in Universities, the NUC rolled out a policy directing Universities to establish Entrepreneurial Study Centres (ESCs), with a degree programme in entrepreneurship, and general studies (GST) programmes for all academic disciplines. The GST was intended as a benchmark for minimum academic standards in entrepreneurship studies for all undergraduate academic programmes in Nigerian Universities. The objectives were to help address the increasing rate of youth and graduate unemployment, over dependence on white collar jobs, dwindling economic growth and improvement in the overall national development. Whilst there is multiplicity of opinions on the adequacy and relevance of this policy and the associated GST curriculum for a university-wide entrepreneurial education, the learning outcomes remains a yardstick to measure the extent of achievement of the intended objectives. It is difficult to contemplate how a narrative-based learning of these topics will provide an imp active entrepreneurship education that can equip students with the creative and critical thinking skills to identify, evaluate, and exploit business opportunities in their different fields. The glaring reality is that the implementation of this policy has failed to yield the desired results. To bring more perspectives into this discussion, it is imperative to look at a typical curriculum issued by the NUC under the compulsory GST programme, using the course content issued by NUC for entrepreneurship studies in the Nigeria university system referred to as GST 301 (NUC, n.d.). The course content was structured in three modules, each module consisting of two or more sessions. In tables 1-3, I have summarised the topics for each session, its learning objectives, and self-assessment questions at the end of each session.

From tables 1-3, it can be argued that the learning objectives of the GST curriculum is not adequate to impact critical entrepreneurial skills on students. A good way to evaluate learning outcomes is to look at the nature and relevance of the questions that are used to assess the learning experience achieved by students at the end of the course. In this case, the assessment questions are mostly multiple choice with a few essay questions adopting the usual words like discuss, describe, list, explain, etc that can be associated with narrative learning. Thus, I do not see how the learning experience from the GST curriculum can produce successful entrepreneurs in its real sense which could explain why the entrepreneurship policy has failed to achieve the intended economic outcomes.

Table 1

Sessions	Topic	Learning outcomes	Self-Assessment Questions
Session 1	Origin and Concepts of Entrepreneur and Entrepreneurship	1.1 Define and use correctly all the key words, Discuss the origin of entrepreneurship, Discuss an overview of the various definitions of Entrepreneur and Entrepreneurship, differentiate between Entrepreneur and Entrepreneurship, State types of entrepreneurs, List the characteristics of a successful entrepreneur, Roles of Entrepreneurs.	Based on 10 multiple choice questions; e.g. An entrepreneur who starts a business with a fresh idea is simply performing a role. (a) leadership (b) resource allocator (c) directing and controlling (d) visionary
Session 2	Entrepreneurial Motivations, variables, creativity and innovation	Define and use correctly all the key words, Discuss the motivational and non-motivational influences on entrepreneurship, Identify entrepreneurship variables, Define Creativity and innovation, Explain creativity process, Discuss various forms, classifications. And phases of innovation.	Multiple choice plus essay E.g. essay question Identify three nonmanagerial roles of an entrepreneur. Write short notes on two of them.
Session 3	Concept of Business and Business Environment	Define and correctly use all the key words, Give various definitions of the concept 'business', identify and discuss the components of the business environment; Identify the internal and external environment factors, Describe the process of scanning and analyzing business environment using SWOT, Identify the factors to consider under SWOT	Assessed with 10 multiple choice questions; E.g. The business environment can be broadly classified into..... (a) two (b) three (c) four (d) five
Session 4	Forms of Business Ownership and Legal Implications	Define and use correctly all the key words printed in bold; Define sole proprietorship; discuss its advantages and disadvantages; Explain partnership, types, formation, dissolution of partnership; Explain limited liability companies.	10 multiple choice questions. E.g. The Minimum number required to start a sole proprietorship (a) One (b) two (c) seven (d) twelve.
Session 5	Teamwork, Group Dynamic and Entrepreneurship	Define and correctly use all the key words; Define team building and identify the characteristics of teams; Define a group and theories of group formation; List types of group; explain advantages and disadvantages of group.	Multiple choice: E.g. A team with different levels of hierarchy can be regarded as: (a) Horizontal team (b) Vertical team (c) Special Purpose team (d) Football team

Table 2

Sessions	Topic	Learning outcomes	Self-Assessment Questions
Session 1	The Roles of Vision, Mission and Objectives In Entrepreneurship Development	Define and correctly use all the key words; Define vision, components of vision and importance of vision; Define mission statement and characteristics; State the meaning of organizational goals and objectives	Multiple choice E.g. Which of the following is not a feature of vision? (a) short (b) succinct (c) inspiring (d) ambiguous
Session 2	The Roles of Government and Business Regulatory Agencies In Nigeria	Explain Business Regulatory/Legal role of Government in Nigeria; Define Promotional/Supportive Roles; Explain the reasons for Government regulation/promotion/supportive roles; List and explain the benefits of government roles; Identify and discuss functions of five regulatory bodies in Nigeria; List other regulatory agencies	Multiple choice plus essay E.g. The organisation that is concerned with the registration of Business in Nigeria is... (a) EFCC (b) Standard Organisation of Nigeria (c) Corporate Affairs

			Commission (d) ICPC
Session 3	Writing Business Plan and Feasibility Studies	Define and correctly use all the key words; Discuss feasibility studies and its importance; Explain the components of feasibility studies; Discuss business plan; Explain the need for and benefits of business plan.	Multiple choice plus essay: E.g. The type of business you are planning should be stated under - (a) Description of the business (b) Marketing (c) Organisation (d) All of the above
Session 4	Sources of Business Finance	Define and explain correctly all the key words; Explain the criteria for acquisition and allocation of funds; List and explain the personal and family sources of funds; Define internal sources of fund; Identify the different classifications of external sources of funds; Explain the basic requirements for seeking a loan facility; Recognize how small and medium enterprises are funded in Nigeria; Identify the challenges of SMEs.	10 multiple choice questions. E.g. Factors affecting the sources of business finance include all except. (a) Cost of finance (b) Government policy (c) Risk involved (d) Economic condition
Session 5	Ethics in Entrepreneurship	Discuss the philosophical background of business ethics; identify concepts in business ethics; discuss corporate ethics policies; explain international business ethics; state the importance of business ethics; Explain the role of ethics in resolving conflicting interests in business.	Multiple choice; E.g. Conflicting cultural standards can occur with regard to: (a) child labour (b) discrimination (c) paying bribes (d) all.

Table 3

Sessions	Topic	Learning outcomes	Self-Assessment Questions
Session 1	Some Successful Nigerian Entrepreneurs	Define and correctly use all the key words; Explain the origin of contemporary Nigeria; Describe the development of entrepreneurship in Nigeria; Differentiate between the ordinary entrepreneur and social entrepreneur; Identify and discuss notable Nigerian entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs; Describe the peculiarities of Nigerian business environment as it affects the Nigerian entrepreneur.	Multiple choice plus theory questions Briefly describe evolutionary processes in Nigeria; List the major functions of a social entrepreneur; What are the peculiar challenges confronting the Nigerian Entrepreneur; List at least Nigerian Social Entrepreneur and describe the area of business of any of them.
Session 2	Economic Development through Entrepreneurship	Discuss the importance of entrepreneurship to economic development; List the roles of entrepreneurship in nation building; Discuss the roles of entrepreneurship in economic development; Discuss Vision 20-20-20	Multiple choice plus theory questions Why is importance of entrepreneurship in the economic development of a nation; What are the different roles perform by the entrepreneur in the economic development in any society; What is the linkage between entrepreneurship and functional education; In what ways is vision 2020-20 relevant to entrepreneurship in Nig.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no doubt about the good intentions of government in advancing this university-wide policy. Unfortunately, the only prominent outcome of this initiative is the inclusion of a degree program in entrepreneurship in the universities, with few students receiving education to acquire this degree, most of

whom may not be able to evaluate a business opportunity or to prepare a basic business plan upon graduation. The so-called entrepreneurship centres that arose from this policy are in most cases empty buildings with limited equipment, which in some cases are already in a terrible state of dilapidation.

The NUC needs to revisit the existing policy and audit its implementation and outcomes focusing on the following.

- Suitability and Sufficiency of the policy.
- Relevant experience of policy makers
- Any inputs from industry and practicing entrepreneurs
- Audit the extent of implementation of the policy
- Did government provided the intended and required resources?
- Have the outcomes been measured against the objectives?
- What went wrong and how do we fix it.

Nigerian universities should focus on impacting entrepreneurial skills and not trade/vocational skills. We should aim to produce ‘officers’ and not ‘soldiers.’ Sometimes we tend to confuse entrepreneurship skills with trade skills, but both are fundamentally different. While entrepreneurial skills equip one to identify, evaluate and exploit business opportunities of diverse backgrounds, trade skills are most times related to job-specific training that results in the ability to perform specific tasks or group of tasks for oneself or for others. In Nigeria, there are technical and vocational schools at both secondary and tertiary levels that provide training leading to various levels of trade tests and certifications. Unfortunately, we are duplicating these efforts at the universities such that these trade skills have become synonymous with the general understanding of what entrepreneurship education represents.

The Universities should emphasise impactful entrepreneurial education that will produce opportunity-seeking instead accidental entrepreneurs. The consequences of our current curriculum which ignores the development of basic entrepreneurial skills across all disciplines of learning is that fresh graduates become accidental entrepreneurs for lack of available white collar jobs which would have been their preference. The opportunity-seeking entrepreneur is trained and equipped to seek and exploit new opportunities or expand under-exploited opportunities whereas the accidental entrepreneur dabbles into any accessible business for self-sustenance or in some cases as a stopgap while searching for paid employment.

CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship education in Nigeria has faced a lot of challenges. Some of the obstacles to effective entrepreneurship education especially at the university level include inadequate trainers or little knowledge of entrepreneurship by the university lecturers, funding issues, negative attitudes towards entrepreneurship education, as well as challenges in curriculum development and implementation (Adenike, 2016; & Olorundare & Kayode, 2014). Dealing with these challenges require concerted efforts from all

stakeholders including the NUC, the University administration, the students, and the industry.

Finally, it is not enough for students to take introductory courses from the department of entrepreneurship just like the NUC’s developed GST 301. Entrepreneurial learning should be a culture that students must inculcate in themselves throughout their stay in the university. Students should be made to acquire a diversity of skills that encourage entrepreneurial behaviour including but not limited to self-confidence, comportsment, discipline, habit of continual learning, good listener, savings culture, interpersonal relationships, team working, managing emotions, and how to seek and find information. These behavioural attributes when combined with the skills of critical thinking, creativity, and innovation will increase the chances of our graduates turning into successful entrepreneurs either working for themselves or working for others.

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