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ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND STUDENTS SKILLS ACQUISITION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship education enhances the acquisition of necessary skills for gainful and self-employment. As a specialized training given to students to acquire skills, ideas and managerial abilities and capabilities for self-employment stands as a panacea to unemployment saga in Nigeria. Embedding entrepreneurship into the formal educational system at all levels requires a strong commitment from the government in terms of policy and resources, since most schools, universities and training programmes are overseen by the government. In primary education, the adoption of school books, interactive games and online tools has proved to be particularly useful. For example, the award-winning Disney-Kauffman online game teaches young people (aged 9-14) about the excitement and opportunity of entrepreneurship. At the secondary and vocational school level, the implementation of awareness campaigns and extracurricular activities designed to help students to understand the world of work, including visits to businesses is suggested. For example, initiatives such as Global Entrepreneurship Week help improve attitudes about entrepreneurship, and encourage young people to consider entrepreneurship as a potential career path. At higher education level, attending elective and/or compulsory courses on entrepreneurship, and participating in more focused activities and projects, has proven particularly effective. Example of this is Enterprise Development Services (EDS), established in January 2003, a center within the Pan-African University in Lagos, Nigeria.

Keyword: Entrepreneurship Education, Sustainable Development, Skills Acquisition

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship in Nigeria is necessary for the country to become a developed nation. Nigeria has human resources who should be capable of retrieving, processing and utilizing her natural resources for the general well-being of her citizens and sustainable development of her economy, given that they have appropriate skills. For these needed skills to be acquired, emphases should be directed towards entrepreneurship education which serves as a strategy for transforming the Nigeria economy into one of the twenty largest economics in the world.

Entrepreneurship education is designed to aids students from all socioeconomic backgrounds to think outside the box and understudy unconventional talents and skills (Udo, 2014). It creates opportunities, ensures social justice, instills confidence and stimulates the economy. Entrepreneurship education stands out to be an antidote to empowerment and sustainable national development, it is also seen as all kinds of experiences that give students the ability and vision of how to access and transform opportunities of different kinds (UNESO 2018). Entrepreneurship education enhances the acquisition of necessary skills for gainful and self-employment. As a specialized training given to students to acquire skills, ideas and managerial abilities and capabilities for self-employment stands as a panacea to unemployment saga in Nigeria (Ezema, 2010).

Importance of Entrepreneurship Education

Education is an important factor in determining the entrepreneurial orientation in individuals. Education may be in the form of informal or formal. The informal form of learning stresses the importance of early role models and reinforcement patterns on the acquisition and maintenance of entrepreneurial behavior. Role models could be parents or peer groups that provide socialization training in entrepreneurship. Formal education is also positively correlated with entrepreneurship. It has also been reported that entrepreneurs of healthy units, on an average, had a higher level of education compared to those who own sick units. Entrepreneurship education needs to gain firm ground to change the face of the economy. It is only under such a scenario that we would witness a longer queue of job providers than job seekers. And our efforts would sure show us productive and efficient youth, par excellence. During liberalization, which started in India in 1991, India exerted greater effort to promote and nurture entrepreneurship. Attempts at various levels have taken place to directly or indirectly promote entrepreneurship. Over the past two decades there has been a growing debate about how well educational systems prepare young people for adult life in general and ‘enterprise’ in the world of work in particular. Emmanuel et al (2022). In the present scenario this debate becomes large.

Key Policy and Programme Areas for Entrepreneurship Education Key

Areas of entrepreneurship education could be specified as follows according to Oludele, and Dosunmu, (2013):

(a) embedding entrepreneurship into education and training;

(b) curriculum development;

(c) teacher development; and

(d) engagement with the private sector.

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Embedding Entrepreneurship into Formal Education and Training.

Embedding entrepreneurship into the formal educational system at all levels requires a strong commitment from the government in terms of policy and resources, since most schools, universities and training programmes are overseen by the government. It is never too early to start exposing students to business and entrepreneurship. Perceptions and attitudes about entrepreneurship start at a young age. By the time students reach secondary and higher education it can be "too late", particularly if they do not pursue further education or if they have developed some negative perceptions about entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial learning should be integrated into the curriculum, rather than only being offered as standalone courses, in order to change the mindset among students. For example, in 2007, Nigeria included entrepreneurial skills in the new basic education curriculum for its primary and secondary schools.

In primary education, the adoption of school books, interactive games and online tools has proved to be particularly useful. For example, the award-winning Disney- Kauffman online game teaches young people (aged 9–14) about the excitement and opportunity of entrepreneurship. The Junior Achievement programme, present in 19 African countries, includes six sequential themes for pupils from kindergarten level up to fifth grade, plus one capstone experience. Students learn the basic concepts of business and economics, and how education is relevant to the workplace. External evaluators have found that elementary school students who participate in the Junior Achievement programme demonstrate significantly higher critical thinking and problem-solving skills than their counterparts.

At the secondary and vocational school level, the implementation of awareness campaigns and extracurricular activities designed to help students to understand the world of work, including visits to businesses, is suggested. For example, initiatives such as Global Entrepreneurship Week help improve attitudes about entrepreneurship, and encourage young people to consider entrepreneurship as a potential career path.

At higher education level, attending elective and/or compulsory courses on entrepreneurship, and participating in more focused activities and projects, has proven particularly effective. Example of this is Enterprise Development Services (EDS), established in January 2003, a center within the Pan-African University in Lagos, Nigeria. EDS focuses on entrepreneurship education and on the provision of support services to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria. Within the university context, entrepreneurship centers can play a key role in catalyzing entrepreneurship education both within and outside of the curriculum. Some of these centers are focused on training (i.e. students and/or entrepreneurs), while others are focused on research. As already discussed, there are also entrepreneurship centers that can serve as hubs or coordinate activities across institutions. They often go beyond what is provided through formal education, for example targeting specific segments of the population, such as youth, women, and other potentially underserved groups. The work of these centers might include the coordination of after-school programmes or activities in community centers.

Curriculum Development

Another key area to be addressed in entrepreneurship education is curriculums that are tailored to the local environment, by leveraging existing resources and by creating new local materials, case studies and examples of role models that entrepreneurs can relate to. Tailor-made curriculums should include appropriate representation of gender, youth, indigenous people, and people with a disability, informal enterprises, and enterprises based in rural areas.

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They could also engage students, since students have a growing interest in entrepreneurship education, and student-led initiatives provide effective models. Entrepreneurship programmes should be developed across disciplines, not just in business schools or economic departments. In higher education, most of the provision of entrepreneurship education is centered on business schools or economics departments, which are increasingly offering specializations and even degrees in entrepreneurship. While this may seem a natural place to start, evidence has shown that the majority of entrepreneurs do not come from business schools but from science, engineering and technology schools. In fact, entrepreneurship can be in any discipline or sector – from medicine, to the arts, to public service. This makes it imperative that entrepreneurship be taught in a cross-disciplinary manner and not confined only to business and economics. In developing countries, some of the areas that should be included in entrepreneurship curriculums, depending on the educational level, include: basic skills (financial literacy etc.), opportunity recognition, business planning, start-up, managing the SME, managing the transition from necessity to growth firms, and exit/transition of ownership, particularly family-owned. The younger the target audience, the more the curriculum needs to be focused on basic skills and awareness rising about business and entrepreneurship.

Effective entrepreneurship education programmes focus on developing entrepreneurial attitudes, skills and behaviors. This includes building self-confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership skills, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. In the area of curriculum development, international organizations are increasingly playing a catalytic role. The European Commission has been focused on entrepreneurship education in secondary and higher education for the past 10 years and has provided significant funding for programmes across Europe. The United Nations, through organizations such as UNCTAD, UNESCO and ILO, has been developing and supporting programmes for entrepreneurship training and education. In addition, technology and media provide mechanisms for reaching greater economies of scale, and for providing greater access and sharing of practices. Not only can technology and media facilitate the development of innovative interactive programmes and materials, they can also help to reach larger audiences, including those in developing countries or regions that might not otherwise have access to entrepreneurship education (Sharma, 2023).

Teacher Development

Teachers are the key to entrepreneurship education. Strategies and plans will not have any impact without effective educators to develop the necessary enthusiasm and understanding among students. There is a need to increase the number of entrepreneurship educators, and to further develop them by providing training, particularly in interactive teaching methods. Networks and the sharing of best practices among educators are critical, too. Often, entrepreneurship starts with a commitment by one individual – whether a teacher or another champion – who starts to develop programmes and/or activities from the ground up. If successful, such individuals attract others to join them, and begin to build momentum. However, the proper incentives and rewards need to be in place to ensure that others engage as well. Professorships or Chairs are a very effective way of providing both recognition and resources to key entrepreneurship faculty champions. Awards provide incentives, too.

In Brazil, a national award has been created for entrepreneurship educators with the participation of 46 universities in 16 States. To date, most of the teacher training initiatives and networks developed have been at the higher education level. More needs to be done at the primary and secondary levels, by providing entrepreneurship training in teacher training institutes. Entrepreneurship education should be very closely linked with practice. Teachers

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should be encouraged to reach out to the business community and to integrate it into the learning process. For example, the Aflatoun teaching methodology encourages "learning by doing". This includes school-wide savings clubs, financial and social enterprises, and group activities within the community. Many systems of schooling around the world are based on old teaching models – the lecture method – whereas the skills needed today and, in the future, require interactive, experiential learning methods. This includes the need to expose students to entrepreneurs and real business situations.

Partnership with the Private Sector

One of the key success factors for entrepreneurship education is the effective engagement of the private sector in facilitating entrepreneurship. This includes business and private educational institutions. In addition, it means developing networks across sectors to spur partnerships and create an environment of trust and cooperation in the local ecosystem and beyond. There are many examples of partnerships with educational institutes and the private sector. For example, through partnership with the University of California at Berkeley, Intel provides entrepreneurship theory-to-practice seminars at universities around the world. In addition, an "entrepreneurship challenge" seeks business plans that commercialize new and truly innovative technologies. Private entrepreneurship centers and foundations also play an important role, both in funding and in serving as centers of expertise on entrepreneurship. It is also important to highlight the role of large domestic and foreign firms in business development. Large corporations are increasingly concentrating on their core operations and outsourcing those in which they do not have a competitive advantage. Thus, they have a strategic interest in developing the competences of local suppliers, and often take part in cost-sharing in local skills development and upgrading programmes. There are many examples of such programmes, as shown by recent UNCTAD publications. With the increasing importance – also as a competition factor – of corporate social responsibility, it is becoming more prevalent for Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2578943 13 transnational corporations (TNCs) to see how they contribute tangibly to the local economy. One way of doing this is to work with potential local suppliers in helping them to establish businesses that can provide basic services, and, in some cases, goods, to the TNC.

Challenges Faced by Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria

The present entrepreneurship education in Nigeria just concentrates on courses which are similar to the general business courses. There is a demand for education programs specifically designed to expand students' knowledge and experience in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship education in Nigeria faces cultural and financial constraints along with insufficient government capacity (Jha, 2023). The significant challenges faced by entrepreneurship education according to Jha, (2023) are given below:

1. Cultural barriers: Entrepreneurship can develop only in a society in which cultural norms permit variability in the choice of paths of life. Unfortunately, the Nigerian culture consists of a network of benefits that in many ways run counter to entrepreneurship. For example, Nigerians believe that being passive and content with the status quo is healthier for the inner soul than striving to improve one's situation. They believe that peace of mind can be achieved from spiritual calm rather than from materialism. People in Nigerians are more sensitive to emotional affinity in the workplace than to work and productivity. An entrepreneur needs to work around the clock and this has kept some people away from their own start-ups. After all, compared with other countries, family life in India is more important.

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2. Difficulties towards Start-ups: Starting a business in India is costly in terms of the time required and the cost involved. While it takes just five days to start a business in the United States and just two days in Australia, in Nigerians it takes as long as many days. The reason for such delay is bureaucratic - too many rules and regulations, and too much paperwork (Ashish Gupta, 2004). On an average, it would cost an entrepreneur nearly half of his/her total income (49.5% of the gross national income per capita) to set up a business, which is 100 times more than what is needed to set up a business in the United States (Ashish Gupta, 2004). The absence of an appropriate entrepreneurial climate, the lack of required infrastructure facilities, and the lack of access to relevant technology hinder rapid industrial development. Most of the time, the Nigerians entrepreneurs have to tackle electricity, transportation, water, and licensing problems.

3. Incomplete Entrepreneurship Education: A survey done by the Entrepreneurship Development Institute, Nigerians in 2003 shows that young people are afraid to start their own business because they are not confident, not capable, and lack knowledge in starting a business. Many people have the opportunity to change jobs or become an entrepreneur if they are properly trained. The students in India are not confident with the traditional education they receive in the university.

4. Lack of a standard framework: Entrepreneurship education is widely spread, has diverse forms and has a large number of stakeholders. But the overall state of affairs is a confused one, one that lacks broad vision, goals, and systematic planning (akin to the 5-year plans for the economy). The lack of a standard framework is a big challenge to the development of entrepreneurship education in India.

5. Dependence on government: Higher degree of dependence on government is another challenge before entrepreneurship education in India. Insufficient private-sector participation and lack of sustainable business models in the entrepreneurship education act as barriers to its development in India.

Conclusion.

Entrepreneurship is a great enabler, which can help level the playing field between developed and developing countries and regions. Embedding entrepreneurship in education and providing greater access are important steps for building an innovative culture and creating entrepreneurial individuals and organizations which, in turn, can create economic growth and jobs, and can help to improve quality of life around the world. Despite the tremendous growth in entrepreneurship education, many challenges remain. One of the predominant challenges is to change the culture and mindset in countries and regions in which business and entrepreneurship are either not viewed favorably and/or are not understood. The low level of exposure to business and entrepreneurship, combined with the lack of role models, seems to be making the shift from necessity to opportunity entrepreneurship in many developing countries difficult. In today's financial environment and for developing countries in particular, funding and compatibility with education, technology and innovation policies can be significant challenges. At the same time, there is no "one size fits all" solution for entrepreneurship education. The challenges and opportunities for entrepreneurship vary dramatically in different parts of the world, as well as for different segments of the educational journey. Local context must be taken into account in devising and tailoring a set of programmes and initiatives relevant for each area. More effective measurement and evaluation of the long-term impact of entrepreneurship education programmes on economic growth and job creation is needed. These should be based on a broadly defined set of outcomes, not only on narrow measures such as the number of startups created. For

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comparable data across countries, there needs to be agreement on the definition of entrepreneurial education and on the scope of what should be measured, and agreement on the process of data collection and on coordinating mechanisms. The entrepreneurship education in the higher education system should satisfy the need for entrepreneurship by selecting, motivating, training and supporting budding entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, the present entrepreneurship education in India just concentrates on related courses. Moreover, the so-called entrepreneurship courses are similar to the general business courses. But general business management education has no significant influence on entrepreneurial propensity (Hostager and Decker 1999). The findings of a survey on business owners in India suggest that management education is not an important driver of entrepreneurial attitudes (Gupta 1992). There is a demand for education programs specifically designed to expand students' knowledge and experience in entrepreneurship. The contents and teaching methods have to be differentiated between entrepreneurship and traditional business courses.

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