

## Entrepreneurship Education and Youth Empowerment In Contemporary Nigeria

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### Abstract

Unemployment of young people especially graduates have reached an alarming height in the nation. This is due to the fact that education system is expanding much faster than the economy. The economy is currently shedding jobs more than it creates. Graduate/Youths scuffle for the few available jobs leaving so many unemployed. Youth self employment seems not to be impressive because very few individuals venture into self employment. It is for this reason that the researcher is looking carefully at entrepreneurship education as a way of exposing students to the knowledge of various skills and businesses while in school so that after graduation they become self employed rather than job seekers. The paper discussed the concept of entrepreneurship education and youth empowerment, the youth empowerment strategies, constraints to entrepreneurship education in Nigeria and ways of promoting entrepreneurship among Nigeria youths. It was recommended among others that the entrepreneurial concept should be integrated into the school curriculum from elementary school to post-secondary education. Pedagogy and facilities must be upgraded to deliver the entrepreneurial educational experience and youths must be ready to imbibe entrepreneurship culture at school and when they are out of school as a possible remedy for unemployment.

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**Keywords:** entrepreneurship education, youth empowerment, strategies, unemployment.

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### INTRODUCTION

Unemployment, particularly of the active youthful population is no doubt a social problem plaguing Nigeria. This requires the rethinking of strategies to tackle the challenge. Despite the high number of graduates been turned out every year, it is unfortunate that many remain unemployed after graduation because of the few vacancies available and because of the type of training they were exposed to which seems not to favour self employment, it could be as a result of the disequilibrium between labour market requirements and lack of essential employable skills by the graduates (Diabalen, Oni & Adekola 2000) as well as faulty interaction between the educational sector and the economy. These shows that the University education provided may not have adequately solved the economic problems of the nation.

It is for this reason that the researcher is carefully looking at entrepreneurship education as a way of harnessing the youth as assets and making them more realistic about the world of work. Borat (2006) contended that the ability of any country to successfully meet the challenges of job creation depends on dynamic entrepreneurship. Research by COM (2006) also suggests that there is a positive correlation between entrepreneurship and economic growth. The youth need to be empowered and orientated to have the right attitude to life. Education should develop an awareness of entrepreneurship

from the early age. This will help them to develop initiative, be more creative and self confident in whatever they undertake as well as act in a socially responsible way. Therefore, the paper delve into the concept of entrepreneurship education and youth empowerment, the youth empowerment strategies, constraints to entrepreneurship education in Nigeria and ways of promoting entrepreneurship among Nigerian Youths

### Concept of Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship as a concept evolved many centuries ago and it has formed the basis for economic growth and development. It has been defined in different ways by various people. Earlier definitions of entrepreneurship centered on its role as go-between and by the middle ages, it was seen in terms of large scale projects. By the 18<sup>th</sup> C the entrepreneurship was differentiated from the capitalist and the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> C viewed entrepreneurship from an economic perspective. (Yahaya & Nuhu 2011).

Entrepreneurship from a general point of view can be defined as response to the diverse opportunities and potentials that exist within an individual and his environment. The concept refers to a creative and innovative response in economic and social ventures, it involves setting up of business ventures through willingness and ability of an individual to explore investment opportunities and being able to run it

successfully, through making it profitable or suffering loss of invested capital. It involves combining resources to increase value and introducing change and innovation into the production process and creating wealth and employment opportunities. Education is a veritable tool for achieving the goals of the society. According to the World Bank (1999), education is fundamental to construction of knowledge economy and society in all nations. It is through education that knowledge and skills are transferred to individuals, and their competencies and abilities developed. Thus youth entrepreneurship education has been given prominence all over the world. Through entrepreneurship education, youth are provided with knowledge, skills and innovation so as to encourage them to develop entrepreneurial acumen in variety of setting (Wikipedia 2008).

Entrepreneurship Education refers to programs that promote entrepreneurship awareness for career purposes and provide skill training for business creation and development. (Vesper 1990) Education can prepare for new venture initiation by transferring knowledge and developing relevant skills that improve the self – efficacy and effectiveness of the potential entrepreneur. (Gomen, Hanlon and King 1997). Entrepreneurship Education encourages students to think innovatively around their future career or employment options, as well as how they can contribute directly to their community's well-being. Such programmes are helping to reduce youth vulnerability, social marginality and poverty, especially in distressed or disadvantaged communities. Entrepreneurship education inspires young people to do all the right things – understand the relevance of a good education, gain financial literacy, plan for financial independence, explore their talent and most importantly, stay in school and develop pathways to college.

### **Concept of Youth Empowerment**

The futuristic focus of entrepreneurship education is the basis of relationship with empowerment. Youth simply refers to a young person between childhood and adult age. It is a transition period between adolescent and adulthood. However, it must be emphasized that there is no consensus regarding the age bracket of a youth. Ejiogu (2001) maintained that person who is aged between 17 and 20 years is a youth. (FGN 2001) and Oluwadare (2004) considered persons within age bracket 10 to 24 years as youths. The United Nations defines youth as person between ages of 15 and 24 (UN and world Bank) and 15 to 29. (The Commonwealth) Nevertheless most of the definitions of youth point to a stage of between adolescent and adulthood. In Africa, like most developed countries, a person is defined as a youth when the individual reaches the age which is generally referred to as the age of

majority. This age is often 18 in most countries and therefore that particular individual becomes an adult member of society.

Youths have both positive and negative attributes which are predominant and distinguish them from the adults. They are energetic and full of life; they are fearless (sometimes to a fault); they are generally militant, rebellious and have disregard for social norms and ethics. They usually lead campaigns against what they perceive as injustice inequality, discrimination and violation of fundamental human rights. Youth is the age of discontent and rebellion. (Ejiogu 2001) They remain the bedrock on which every nations development thrives. They are the most exuberant, the sharpest in memory, the most talented, the most innovative and the healthiest in most societies. These qualities have made them the most potent resource without which society is lifeless. Despite these positive attributes, they are arguably the most vulnerable, most deprived, most discriminated against, the most marginalized, mostly exploited particularly by politicians, the most counterproductive, and the most endangered species in society especially in Africa (Del-Tumi 2011).

Empowerment means assisting people to overcome obstacles which might prevent them from achieving their potentials. The need for empower arises from the inability of an individual or a group of people to actualize their dreams and reach their greatest potential due to artificial barriers created by individuals and other groups within the same society (Olakulein and Ojo 2006)

Youth Empowerment is an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people including adults. (Valrus and Fletcher, 2006). Youths are empowered when they acknowledge that they have or can create choices of life, are aware of the implications of these choices, make an informed decision and accept responsibility for the consequences of those actions.

According to Fletcher (2005), youth empowerment means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others. It simply means assisting the youth to overcome the difficulties which might prevent them from achieving their potentials.

### **Challenges of Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria**

A number of challenges had been observed to hinder the growth and development of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. These no doubt has adverse

effect on unemployment among the youths in our society. They are:

#### **Social/Cultural Attitudes of Youths**

The fear to take risk and the stigma of failure are key factors why young people don't engage in entrepreneurship. Some who engage in small scale business usually discontinue after a little while if it does not prosper as they wish. Many are highly impatient to see their business grow at a snail speed. The entrepreneurship culture of taking risk is not built in them and to develop it over night had been a great challenge. The influx of foreign goods into the local market and corresponding unfortunate development of the uncontrollable local demand for foreign goods are disincentives that militate against the growth of start-up business by youths.

#### **Entrepreneurship Education**

Most Nigeria youths do not have access to entrepreneurship training; materials, teachers, and equipment. The learning environment and support tools are not available in our schools. Adequate teachers to provide the needed appropriate skills and attitudes are not available. The entrepreneurship programmes are not included in the school curricular. The current educational system although to some extent teaches entrepreneurship, does not promote youth entrepreneurship development in any sense. A comprehensive entrepreneurship education in all disciplines should be introduced so that all disciplines can learn how to make money on their own without seeking for jobs. It is generally observed that when a business is seen to be flourishing everybody then divert to it. If after sometime the business is flooded and it is no longer flourishing people rush out of it again. As a result of this entrepreneurship becomes a failure.

#### **Access to Finance**

The lack of initial start off capital is a great challenge to many youths. Credit facilities for potential young entrepreneur seeking to start their own are not available. Developing young entrepreneurs ought to be a major poverty alleviation and wealth creation strategy of the government. In most instances, small business in Nigeria can rarely meet the conditions set by financial institutions, who consider lending to SME's risky because of inadequate guarantees and insufficient information about their credit worthiness. The perceived risk associated with dealing with chants that have little financial history, along with the relatively high costs associated with SME finance, overregulation of the industry and interest rate ceiling imposed on financial institutions by government detract from the attractiveness of serving the small sector. The absence of adequate youth enterprise development support systems where credit facilities could be accessed to facilitate growth of enterprise had been a bone of contention. There are no youth

enterprise research centres, well resourced vocational and skills training institutions and policy framework for enterprise development.

#### **Poor Saving Culture Among the Youth**

Poor saving culture among the youth serves as a major setback for accessing credit for start-ups. Young people hoping to be entrepreneurs must be made to understand that commercial banks and lending institutions are there primarily to protect and add value to share holder's investment. They are neither charity institutions nor funding agencies. To access funds, therefore they must prove to such banks that they own equities in their enterprises rather than expecting full scale financing of their enterprises. The idea of taking loans with the mind-set of not willing to pay back possibly because it is government money is also very common among Nigerians both youth and adults. Some micro finance institutions had been indebted while some ventures like this championed by the government had failed because those who take such loans failed to pay back. The loan which is supposed to revolve is no longer revolving because of indebtedness as such necessary financial assistance could not be given to deserving entrepreneurs.

#### **Get Rich Quick Menace**

The desire for quick riches and material gains by young Nigerians has made the initiation of their enterprises unattractive and delaying. Youths of nowadays are too ambitions to get rich quick. They look for money by all means either through robbery, prostitution, stealing etc. Rather than investing what they have, they buy big cars, live flamboyant life, build house at the expense of expanding their business. What some adults spent many years to achieve is what they will want to do within a very short time. This could pose a big challenge on their entrepreneurship development.

#### **Economic, Social and Political Factors**

Economic factors such as policy reversals, high and double taxation, difficulty in procuring licenses, high inflation, and unstable exchange rates are some concern areas for potential entrepreneurs. Registering business is also incredibly difficult. Politically, some governments policies favour friends and associations especially when it comes to awarding government contract and other benefits; this result in social malaise from systemic corruption which dissuades many people from venturing into business. Frustrated youth look away from entrepreneurship and turn to the public sector where they are certain they will collect their pay at the end of every month without the worries associated with running a business.

### **Strategies for Youth Empowerment**

Youths are believed to be the reservoir of the nations strength, leadership and productivity. Hence, youth empowerment will in no small measure re-channel their energies towards worthwhile and productive activities needed for self and national development. In this wise, the following strategies can be employed to empower youths for increased performance and productivity.

### **School Curriculum Reform**

Entrepreneurship education should be made compulsory in schools at all levels. This will inculcate in students from an early age, the qualities required of them to take up positions of responsibility. Schools, especially universities should provide their students with the fundamental tools to succeed academically and in life. It is high time more attention is paid to the problem of mismatch between teaching in our educational institutions and the needs of the labour market which usually create unemployment among the youths. To this end, school curriculum should be updated and restructured to meet the demands of the economy. New curricular and teaching methods should be introduced that will engage the students and build a closer connection between school and work. The curriculum should be taught by teachers who engage their students in the discovery and development of their entrepreneur talents. The curriculum should be certified to meet national testing standards, content rich and well organized. Moreover, more opportunities should be given to students to acquire practical experience in the use of machinery, equipment and tools in their chosen career. More qualified teachers should be available to teach vocational, innovative entrepreneurship and job skills. Teaching resources and models should be developed to ensure students centered learning and teachers should be adequately prepared to administer lessons on entrepreneurship and innovation.

### **Developing Entrepreneurship Culture**

Promoting entrepreneurship among youths requires going beyond the school curricula to engage and empower youths. A strong entrepreneurship culture should be built in the youth. This should be done through non-governmental organizations, community based organizations and institutions like the family, churches and uniform groups. They should openly support the agenda of wealth creation, innovation and entrepreneurship “code ethic” in a more sustainable way to provide that basis upon which a new paradigm can be created. This would complement the state agenda, which is to create a conducive environment where entrepreneurship can thrive. Therefore all sectors of our society must participate in promoting entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education, especially to our youth.

### **Improving Technical and Vocational Education**

The government should refocus its attention on technical and vocation as a sustainable means for improving entrepreneurship education, self employment and youth empowerment. This should be in terms of improved facilities and making the curriculum to reflect the current needs. The curriculum should promote a culture of enterprise and entrepreneurship as a viable career option, inspire and equip young people in the local community to learn and succeed through enterprise, stimulate entrepreneurship thinking amongst young people, enhance leadership skills and increase community awareness as well as enhance the educational experience of future leaders. If these are accomplished it will reduce the apathy towards technical education by youths and thus initiate youths into the culture of self reliance.

### **The Role of Government**

The government should facilitate entrepreneurship in a non-interventionist way. A smooth – running market economy is the best way to encourage entrepreneurship, rather than direct support. Government should provide business friendly infrastructure by providing a framework of enforceable competition law that discourage monopolies and unfair competition as well as by intellectual property rights that protect a firm’s valuable but often intangible, knowledge assets. Government policies and other national business environment factors could be marshaled to influence the rates and types of entrepreneurship. Government should create an enabling environment that reduces the barriers to market entry. This can be possible by integrating entrepreneurship into the country’s economic development efforts. They should also invest in diverse sources of risk capital to fund entrepreneurs but also to provide the fiscal incentive for investors to provide funding.

### **The Role of Higher Institutions**

Higher institutions should partner with government in developing the required strategy for fostering entrepreneurship both at the individual and the firm level. They can originate the content and set the tone for developing the policy and institutional framework for entrepreneurship. They should promote entrepreneurship among other disciplines beside science and engineering. They are to raise awareness by teaching and nurturing students about entrepreneurs and their individual experiences, equip students with necessary skills and knowledge to start a successful business. Higher institution should also promote innovation by supporting academic and research activities wherein business and institutions of learning can partner to nurture innovation and entrepreneurship.

### **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**

Technology has the capability of enhancing quality of life and economic performance. When youths do not have the knowledge or skills to use the latest technology, it affects their outlook of life. The internet and other Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure are not available in rural area where the majority of the Nigeria youth reside. This situation denies them an alternative means of skill acquisition, information access and other advantages. The government should be aggressive in providing ICT education at all levels of education while out of school training should be given to the dropouts. There should be adequate funding of education, every school teacher must be computer literate; ICT education should be integrated into the curricula of all levels of education and implementation. Through this, the youths will be ICT literate and will be integrated into the global village and explore the various opportunities offered by ICT.

### **Micro Enterprise Development:**

Micro enterprise development is a way of empowerment. Micro enterprises create jobs in a community; they provide for financial stability of individuals and neighborhoods and also help in restoring and building communities through a philosophy of self-help. They can help in alleviating poverty, and increasing economic self sufficiency. The participants in micro enterprise development programme will become self employed and remain self employed, experience significant asset accumulation and decreases in welfare assistance received, and create secondary employment opportunities.

### **Creation of State Entrepreneurship Education Innovation Fund**

Creativity and innovation on the part of Educators and other partners are vital way of empowerment. The state governments should create small pools of funding to help stimulate such innovation. These funds could be managed by a state advocate or advisory council, or by a state department of Education. The fund would provide small seeds grants to support development of new Entrepreneurship Education models that would help advance the field. The fund could operate as a demonstration grant program or as an annual competition.

### **Youth Entrepreneur of the Year Award:-**

Youth Entrepreneur of the year award program could also be organized as an encouragement to get young people excited about entrepreneurial careers. This could be organized by the government to encourage entrepreneurial skills. Awards are an effective marketing tool to raise interest, educate young people about the benefits of starting and running their own

business. They also provide a platform where successful young entrepreneurs are showcased and become role models for other young people to emulate and thus contribute towards an interest for young people to get involved in business. The awards can consequently contribute towards the growth of youth owned enterprise and contribute towards the social upliftment of society. Thus competition could be at the National, State and local government level. Teams of business people national and state leaders should be made to attend the events and patents could be facilitated for the best products. This could be a great challenge to others.

### **Institutionalize National Entrepreneurship Week and global Entrepreneurship Week**

Policy matters should support national and global entrepreneurship week (February 21-28, 2009) and Global Entrepreneurship Week (November 17-23, 2008). This will help to expand entrepreneurship education everywhere and prepare business leaders of the future. During the week, the youth could be engaged in workshops competitions and other programmes that are designed to encourage them embrace invention, innovation, creativity and imagination. These celebrations will also allow students and parents to see entrepreneurship as career option for becoming self sufficient.

### **Supportive Community Environment**

The communities should be encouraged to work in partnership with the school as a "learning Laboratory" where students can practice the knowledge that they are gaining in the classroom. This may involve apprenticeships, selling products at school events, interviewing local entrepreneurs or doing a community service project. The local experts can be utilized to work with young entrepreneurs. This will make entrepreneurship 'real' for students and it is also a lot of fun for adults. In addition to these roles, community leaders taking an interest in young entrepreneurs can change attitudes among young people about the community and their future. Building relationships with students who want to get involved in the community supporting their efforts, and celebrating their community and entrepreneurial projects can help them develop into productive citizens and also make their community more attractive to young people as a place to stay or return. This may on the long run help to reduce the rural-urban drift.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

National development, either from the socio-economic or political context is concerned with the entire life and needs of citizens. It is also concerned with the solving national problems and addressing pressing national issues. Thus the role of youths in the process of building a virile nation and igniting the fire of self-reliance which is necessary for national

development cannot be over emphasized. The youths can only play the laudable roles of national development if they are empowered through entrepreneurship education. Through well planned and executed entrepreneurship education, the Nigerian youths will learn to be happy and fulfilled persons. They will be productive and committed as employees or employers of labour. They will allow their unique abilities to be used for the development of the national and global goal.

As a result of the discussions above, it is thereby recommended that:

1. Youth economic empowerment should be aligned to government policies, strategies and programmes.
2. Financial support, training and facilities need to be provided in order to ensure the youth active participation.
3. The spirit of entrepreneurship among Nigerian youths should be promoted through seminars and workshops on corporate leadership and entrepreneurship
4. The higher institutions should focus on curriculum that is aimed at a growing job market and expanding the production of qualified professionals most required by industries.
5. Pedagogy and facilities must be upgraded to deliver the quality education and training necessary to prepare youth properly for the entrepreneurial education experience.
6. Youths must be ready to imbibe the entrepreneurship culture at school and when they are out of school as a possible remedy for unemployment.

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