

Optimizing Entrepreneurship Training and Development in Nigerian Polytechnics as a Panacea for the Crisis of Graduate Unemployment

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ABSTRACT

Graduate unemployment is one of the major economic crises facing Nigeria. This situation has further been exacerbated by the decay in the Nigerian Polytechnic system which has failed to equip its recipients with the needed entrepreneurship knowledge, attitude and skills to be able to live in and contribute to the development of the nation. It is against this backdrop that the study examined 'Optimizing entrepreneurship training and development in Nigerian Polytechnics as a panacea for the crisis of graduate unemployment'. The study examined entrepreneurship and employment generation, Polytechnic education in Nigeria, Entrepreneurship in Nigeria's Polytechnic system and impediments to effective implementation of entrepreneurship training in Nigerian Polytechnics. The study concluded that the level of entrepreneurship training and development in Nigerian Polytechnics is still very low and characterized by myriad of problems. It recommended that the management of the Polytechnics and other stakeholders should invest massively in training of specialists in the field of entrepreneurship education and the provision of necessary infrastructural facilities that will ensure effective entrepreneurial skill acquisition by Polytechnic students.

Keywords: Optimizing Entrepreneurship, Training, Development, Nigerian Polytechnics, Graduate Unemployment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The epidemic of graduate unemployment is gradually escalating throughout Nigeria. Even as thousands wander the length and breadth of the country in search of elusive white collar jobs, the Polytechnics continue to churn out thousands of graduates annually. Little wonder therefore, that news reports consistently indicate that the ranks of militants, kidnapers and internet fraudsters are filled with hordes of intelligent graduates unable to find rewarding legitimate employment (Binuomote, Oyedele & Ademiluyi, 2017). The inability of graduates to contribute meaningfully to economic development through self-employment informed the introduction of entrepreneurship education in schools. Entrepreneurial training and development is a new agenda in the Nigerian education system. It is a nomenclature resulting from the off-shot of government responses to the challenges of graduate unemployment, poverty and wealth creation (Nwite, 2016). Entrepreneurial training and development is that aspect of general education that equips the recipient with knowledge adequate enough to be able to use personal initiative to spot or visualize business opportunities in his environment. Entrepreneurship education therefore, sensitizes one to become business conscious and business driven.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2013) states that tertiary education should aim to develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual; develop the intellectual capability of the individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environment and acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant. This objective of the National policy is yet to be realized because a greater number of our tertiary institution graduates are jobless even several years after graduation. Nwite, (2016) attributed the poverty rate and massive unemployment amongst Nigerian graduates to lack of entrepreneurship education, which he considered the only key to survival in the present economy.

In order to make Nigerian graduates more resourceful and self-reliant, the Federal Ministry of education introduced entrepreneurship education into the curricula of the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education through their regulatory and supervisory agencies – National Universities commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). This became expedient in order to offer a realistic approach to solving the endemic problem of unemployment facing the nation (Yahaya, 2011).

Functional entrepreneurship education is therefore a vital instrument for nation building and for achieving government developmental objectives, especially the quest for wealth creation, poverty reduction and employment generation. Unfortunately, lapses and inadequacies in the educational system have plaque the process of entrepreneurship skill acquisition so that the desired quality in the graduates is not achieved. Efe, (2014) also supports this when he asserted that the goals of wealth creation or employment generation, poverty reduction and value re-orientation can only be attained and sustained through an efficient education system which impacts the relevant skills, knowledge, capacities, attitudes and values.

The present educational system has failed to equip its recipients with the needed entrepreneurship knowledge, attitude and skills necessary for employment generation due to decay in the system brought about by inadequate functional equipment, inadequate infrastructure, dearth of qualified staff, inadequate textbooks, inadequate funding and so on. This development can be very dangerous, particularly as the future of Nigeria and Nigerians will be determined by the quality of education her Nationals have acquired. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines 'Entrepreneurship Training and Development in Nigerian Polytechnics as a Panacea for Employment Generation' with the view of educating each and every stakeholder in the Polytechnic system on how their actions and inactions have individually and collectively contributed to the current economic predicament of Nigeria.

2. ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The term entrepreneurship training refers to a specialized educational activity that inculcates in learners the traits of risk-taking, innovation, arbitrage and co-ordination of factors of production for the purpose of creating new products or services for new and existing users within human communities (Akhueomonkhan, Raimi, & Sofoluwe, 2013). Zakka, Yongsun and Moris (2018) view entrepreneurial training as a formal training intervention that shares the broad objective of providing individuals with the entrepreneurial mindsets and skills to support participation and performance in a range of entrepreneurial activities.

It focuses on mindsets and skills development including socio-emotional skills like self-confidence, leadership, creativity, risk propensity, motivation, resilience, self-efficacy and the general business knowledge and skills needed for opening and managing a business. It is a specialized training given to people to acquire the skills, ideas and managerial abilities and capabilities for self-employment rather than being employed for pay. Ogundele, Akingbade and Akinlabi, (2012) define entrepreneurship skills as those abilities and competencies that will enable the individual to maximise the resources around him within the limits of his capabilities.

This means that, if the ability of individuals to utilize resources around them is tied to their capacity, there will be a need to build and enhance that capacity towards resource utilization for job and wealth creation. Polytechnic education can help to successfully nurture Polytechnic graduates who can undertake entrepreneurial life on graduation. It is clear from courses and programme offering that the Polytechnic system is technically oriented. However, it houses entrepreneurial oriented courses especially in the areas of business management, accounting, office technology and management, banking and finance, marketing, advertising among others. The expectation is that students irrespective of discipline should be prepared to have a blend of business knowledge especially within their discipline. This therefore informs the need for all Polytechnics to set up a Functional Entrepreneurial Resource Centre that will be well equipped and well linked with expert technocrats who can assist in preparing the students to enable them acquire varied entrepreneurial skills in the polytechnic.

2.1 Employment Generation

The International Conference of Labour Statisticians' (ICLS) definition of employment captures as main components all those who have done some work over a short reference period (usually one week, sometimes one day). It covers two principal categories of workers:

- (i) those in paid employment, i.e. those who have performed some work for wage or salary, in cash or in kind; and
- (ii) those in self-employment, i.e. those who have performed some work for profit or family gain, in cash or in kind (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA), 2013).

In a similar vein, the International Labour Organization (ILO) defines the unemployed as numbers of the economically active population who are without work but available for and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (Anyadike, Emeh, & Ukah, 2012). Unemployment is one of the macro-economic problems which every responsible government is expected to monitor and regulate. The higher the unemployment rate in an economy the higher would be the poverty level and associated welfare challenges.

Employment generation is a progressive growth in employment through the development of plans and programmes aimed at increasing the current employment opportunities. Employment generation focuses on the principal demand-related factors responsible for the growth of employment in an economy or even its decline (Enobong & Uduak, 2015). Employment generation has been one of the important objectives of development planning in Nigeria. Employment generation is closely interlinked with wealth creation and poverty eradication. Wealth creation and employment generation can be achieved by investing in things that will grow in value such as functional education, entrepreneurship, industrial development, small business development, tourism development, agriculture and expansion of local service sector.

3. POLYTECHNIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Polytechnic education in Nigeria is one out of the three arms of tertiary education in Nigeria. Oduma (2018) observes that the polytechnic education is charged with the primary responsibility of producing the technical manpower needed for industrial growth in Nigeria. This is a responsibility the polytechnics discharges alongside with Universities of Technology in Nigeria. It offer courses (programmes) in various fields of Technology and Applied Sciences leading to the award of National Diploma (ND) Certificate for the first two years of study and a Higher National Diploma (HND) Certificate for the second phase of the four year programme in the polytechnic. In each phase (that is, The National Diploma or Higher National Diploma) the students are expected to undergo a one year (internship) industrial training on completion of the programme registered for.

The Polytechnic system was established by the Federal Government of Nigeria via decree No 33 of 25th July, 1979 when it became apparent that Nigeria cannot compete favourably with other countries in high technology as the level of manpower required for driving and growing technology is lacking (Makoji, 2016). Therefore, for the country to thrive in a techno-dominant global economy, technically oriented institutions like Polytechnics needed to be established to produce the technical manpower that will drive technological advancement.

Specifically itemized, the following are the aims of establishing Polytechnic education in Nigeria:

1. The production of high level and middle-level manpower as appropriate in areas necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development.
2. The identification and solution of the technological problems and needs of industry.
3. The production of technicians and technologist and similar business related personnel for direct employment in industry (NPE, 2013).

Specifically, Polytechnic education in Nigeria is therefore, designed and structured to impart knowledge and necessary skills in order to provide competent and well skilled labour force for industrial and technological development in Nigeria. It is therefore, made to be skills acquisition-oriented, scientific, practical and research-oriented as well. One distinctive mark of polytechnic education is the strong emphasis it has on practical based learning, with work-attachment as part of the practical curriculum. The entire curriculum design and instructional delivery pattern are targeted at enabling the students to have on-the-job work experience.

The education provided by the Polytechnic is directly focused on the students' future career. Thus, Nigerian Polytechnics give emphasis to the attachment of requisite skills acquisition in every facet of course delivery. The target here is to develop students' self-belief and critical faculties which are essential for eventful involvement in societal growth and development (Addison, 2012 in Oduma, 2018). Ezeahurukwe and Ameh (2017) note that every course of study in Nigerian Polytechnics has the potentials for entrepreneurship. It is however, regrettable that most Nigerian youths who attend Polytechnics, lack entrepreneurial skills which could make them to be employable, self-employed or self-reliance.

3.1 Entrepreneurship in Nigeria's Polytechnic System

In a positive reaction to solving the endemic problem of sustainable development facing the nation and making the Nigeria's tertiary education system creative, innovative and meeting the needs of the industries, the Federal Government of Nigeria through the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) set up a presidential committee which mandate was to see to the successful implementation of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. This is in realization of the role of entrepreneurship education as a vehicle for equipping Nigeria undergraduates with entrepreneurial knowledge and skills requisite for wealth creation, employment generation and self reliance upon graduation.

To this end, the membership of the committee was derived from the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), Education Trust Fund (ETF), International Labour Organization (ILO), UNESCO and the Hamille Consult, a consulting firm on entrepreneurship education in the country, while the NUC was the co-coordinating body (Otegbulu, Nnabuike & Ani, 2015).

It should be noted that since 1995 (before the directives by the federal ministry of education), entrepreneurship was inserted into the teaching curricula of ND and HND Business Administration and Management only. Though the National Policy on Education clearly states that Polytechnic education should provide for practical, technical and skill based knowledge, scholars still believes that entrepreneurship was all about managing a small and medium business.

Presently, the National Board for Technical Education has tried to meet up with the directive by the federal ministry of education.

1. Training documents for effective implementation of the entrepreneurship programme have been developed. They are the curriculum, teacher's guide and training manual.
2. The programme is now exposed to all students and is compulsory.
3. Every Polytechnic now has an Entrepreneurship Development Centre (EDC). In fact, NBTE has since tied the success of accreditation to the existence of an EDC.
4. NBTE has organized capacity building programmes for Polytechnic lecturers. Also, Polytechnic lecturers have been attending both local and international conferences on entrepreneurship (Ogwuoti, 2017).

3.2 Impediments to Effective Implementation of Entrepreneurship Training in Nigerian Polytechnics

Entrepreneurship education in the Polytechnic system is bedeviled with myriads of challenges which include the following:

Inadequate funding and misappropriation of funds: One of the major challenges to entrepreneurship training and development in Polytechnics is poor and non sustainable funding, largely due to problem of dwindling government revenue, mismanagement of funds allocated for entrepreneurship education and absence of an active private sector involvement in funding entrepreneurship education. This is a fact attested to by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) (Akhueomonkhan, Raimi, & Sofoluwe, 2013). This has contributed to entrepreneurship education not being able to progress beyond what is available on ground at the moment and has hindered the provision of adequate and modern training facilities, inability to employ the services of professional instructors, and so on.

Insufficient qualified entrepreneurship teachers: The Polytechnic system does not have adequate qualified lecturers to successfully implement the entrepreneurship education curriculum. Yahaya (2011) observes that there is dearth of qualified entrepreneurship education teachers in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. This inimical situation poses serious challenge to the successful implementation of the entrepreneurship education programme in Polytechnics. This is because the success of any innovative programme in the curriculum of any educational institution hinges on the ability of the teachers to implement the innovation.

Lack of proper planning: Proper planning is fundamental to the successful implementation of any educational programme. Otegbulu, Nnabuike and Ani (2015) opine that there were no well thought out plans and strategies for implementing entrepreneurship education programmes in Nigeria's educational institutions. This means that the objective of this educational programme will hardly be achieved since there is no roadmap for its successful implementation.

Lack of model entrepreneurship development centres and significant infrastructural deficits: Most Polytechnics in Nigeria lack model entrepreneurship development centres. As these Polytechnics window dress any of their structures and present to the NBTE for accreditation and re-accreditation purposes. Related to this is the gross inadequacy of infrastructural facilities and equipment in EDCs, while the available ones are in poor and deplorable state thereby making the delivery of entrepreneurship education difficult (Efe, 2014).

4. CONCLUSION

The role of entrepreneurship education towards wealth creation and employment generation cannot be underestimated. Nigeria's quest for the attainment of sustainable development has not yielded the desired result because the level of entrepreneurship training in Polytechnics is still very low and characterized by myriad of problems such as inadequate funding, misappropriation of funds, inadequate skilled personnel, poor implementation of curriculum, poor planning, absence of strong network between the schools and the industry and significant infrastructural deficit across most Polytechnics. Emphasis has been placed on theoretical and academic knowledge rather than skill acquisition. The result of this dysfunctional education is that Polytechnics turn out graduates without useful knowledge and skills and who become alienated from their own environment due to inadequate or total lack of entrepreneurial skills.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing discussions, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need for government be committed toward improving funding for Polytechnic education. An intervention funding support for entrepreneurship education should also be provided by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), Petroleum Development Trust Fund (PTDF) and Federal Ministry of Education (FME). The funding is expected to cover capacity-building training, within and outside the country and infrastructural development for all the three levels of tertiary institutions.
2. There is need for lecturers to be innovative in their approach to teaching. Generally, changes in the curriculum have to be accompanied by changes in teaching styles. Therefore, there is a need to involve educators in training programmes that can teach them how to teach entrepreneurship in order for them to understand the special demand of entrepreneurship teaching for experiential learning. Experts with practical experience in entrepreneurship from the industry could also be engaged on full or part-time arrangement.
3. Entrepreneurship education programmes should be made functional through effective planning, organizing, co-ordination, control, budgeting and evaluation using all available resources. This is to enable the outputs to adapt to their immediate and larger society, self, community, national and world, economic, social and other problems which may evolve.
4. There is need for institution-industry collaboration in the training of entrepreneurs. This is with a view to creating a synergy between the training of entrepreneurs and the realities of the labour market. This can be achieved through redirecting government policies towards removing obstacles such as the unwillingness of industrialist to cooperate with the SIWES programme in the Polytechnics.

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