

Repositioning Nigeria University Education for Economic Development through Entrepreneurship Education

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Abstract

Nigerians have always realized that education is the singular factor that brings about national development. The central goal of university education is to prepare one for productive employment. Such employment can be a paid one or a self-employed one. This paper examines the problem militating against university education, its implications for economic development and its products in terms of suitability for the changing environment. The world is changing as a result of technological and economic advancement and this creates peculiar problems and challenges which most Nigerian graduates cannot cope with and this makes them not suitable for employment. This paper emphasizes the need to get Nigerian graduates trained on entrepreneurship skills and knowledge through well planned and executed entrepreneurship education by re-positioning University education. Once this is done, Nigerian graduates will be happy and be fulfilled. They will be productive and committed as employees or employers of labour as they transit to a meaningful life in the world.

INTRODUCTION

Education is seen as the tool that facilitates economic, social, political and technological advancement and diversification in all human societies. In the words of Adu (2005), education is described as the sum of a person's, acquired experiences and according to Aladenusi and Ayodele (2012) and Tadipe (2005), education is the spring board for societal and global development as it brings about substantial and meaningful changes.

Adegbesan, (2011) stated that people and nations are what they are because of the nature and type of education they are exposed to. Education today must have the effect of making it possible for a country to have a steady supply of highly creative citizens who help to keep improving the living conditions of the general citizenry and to solve the existential problems that are thrown up from time to time. (Adegbesan, 2011). Nigeria is fifty four years old as an independent nation and the philosophy of education since 1960 has been that of propagating functional and self – reliance education. National Policy on Education (1998) revised (2004) categorically spelt out the philosophy of education in Nigeria. However, in most cases actual performance of Nigerian graduates who have certificates raise doubts about the authenticity and workability of this philosophy. Nigerians who are products of universities are issued with beautiful certificates after passing prescribed courses. Employers complain that many university graduates are poorly prepared for work. In many cases, employers compensate for inadequate academic preparation by organizing remedial courses for new employees. Developed countries subject graduates of our universities to examinations in an attempt to ensure fitness into their own system. Nigerian university education system emphasizes theoretical knowledge at the expense of education for economic development.

The assumption that all acquired knowledge in the university is geared towards practical utility in respective jobs has caused many Nigerians to raise the following questions:

- a. Do all university products have the ability to adequately demonstrate or exhibit their competence either in written or oral communication?
- b. Can this nation after fifty four years of political independence achieve economic independence?
- c. What is wrong with acquired knowledge from the university?
- d. What shall we do to save the situation?

Focusing on the last two questions above, it is the right time to teach undergraduates the concept of entrepreneurship education to help them learn wealth creation. The question then is what is entrepreneurship education? Many professions have defined entrepreneurship in different ways in the middle ages (Igbo, 2006) but according to Gana (2001) entrepreneurship is the ability to seek investment opportunities and establish an enterprise based on identified opportunities. Esomony (1981) defined entrepreneurship as the effective manipulation of human intelligence as demonstrated in a creative performance. Salami (2011) sees entrepreneurship as a process by which individuals pursue opportunities. The entrepreneur is seen as an actor, innovator or a developer of technology. He is also a person who owns or controls a business through which income is gained. An entrepreneur is a person who in a bid to survive makes profit from his/her own business. Entrepreneurship education has been embraced by almost all the developed countries so it is important to develop the spirit and culture of entrepreneurship education in this country. Entrepreneurship education is the type of education that shape people's mindset and also provide the skills and knowledge that one requires to develop an entrepreneurial culture. Entrepreneurship education should be available to all university students regardless of their courses. In order to enhance competitive advantage it is important to introduce entrepreneurial

education into existing education since education is internationally accepted as an index of development. The relationships between education and development have since been established and are mutual. Entrepreneurship education is viewed by Omolayo (2006) as the term given to someone who has innovative ideas and transforms them to profitable activities. Alberti, Sciascia and Poli (2004) defined entrepreneurship education as the structured formal conveyance of entrepreneurship competencies which in turn refer to the concepts, skills and mental awareness used by individuals during the process of starting and developing their growth oriented ventures. Entrepreneurship education goal is to promote creativity, innovation and self-employment by developing personal attributes and skills that form the basis of an entrepreneurial mindset and behavior. Entrepreneurship education should not be confused with business education and economic studies.

Problems Facing University Education and its Products

Nigeria today is passing through a lot of changes in virtually every field of her citizens' endeavour. These changes are no doubt, more on economic development. We are in a period of business and industrial changes using new methods and techniques. There is an increased search for skilled workers and specialists in various fields. University education has a role to play with regards to long range unemployment of university products. There is a declining job market for university products that lack skills or ability to utilize the knowledge acquired from the university.

Many Nigerians cannot ascertain where the problems of university products lie, is it that the lecturers transmit impracticable education from the colonial masters or is it that lecturers themselves are not capable of imparting functional skills. It is common for a holder of B.Sc. Degree, (Mechanical Engineering) to tow his broken down vehicle to an illiterate road side mechanic for repairs. B.Sc Agriculture graduates are known not to be able to operate a tractor or any other agricultural equipment and holders of B.Sc computer science who cannot type and print their application letters abound. There is also the tendency of well to do Nigerians to travel overseas for mere medical checkups in spite of our numerous medical personnel in the country. These occurrences are real and mind boggling.

The curriculum aims at the total educational development of the individual through the acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitudes while the syllabus is purely examination focused and hence, contains only the content that will enable students to achieve academic excellence. The aspect that needs to be looked at closely is the content of the curriculum studies and the acquisition of specific knowledge, skills and attitudes.

If we compare the curriculum in engineering in a Nigerian University with what obtains in a University in Ghana, the content will most likely be the same. The curricula of universally accepted courses or programmes in Nigeria are not in any way inferior to any that may be obtained in countries with similar courses. There may be environmental and cultural differences here and there but the basics are essentially the same.

The point is that if standards are to be measured by the curriculum content of academic programmes of Nigerian universities, the quality measured will be similar to those found elsewhere in similar programmes. The problem may be lack of delivering and clear translation of the content to the understanding of the students.

Lecturers need to meet the standards clearly stated in the National Policy on Education (2004). The policy prescribes that all teachers in educational institutions, including universities, should be professionally trained. According to Ivowi (1999) in Baikie (2006), the import of this provision is to give lecturers competence in their respective subject matter, pedagogy-exposure, and experience in principle and practice of education, skill processes, resourcefulness, behaviour motivation and finally evaluation of self. With regards to the above policy requirements, lecturers are not trained. Majority of lecturers argue that they have been in the university for many years lecturing so they do not need to obtain teacher training certificate to lecture.

Nigerian universities present problems which are summarized as follows:

- Universities admit students with diverse educational background and this leads to students studying courses for which they have no aptitude and are therefore exposed to learning material for which they are ill-prepared to assimilate.
- Universities are faced with the problems of facilities and under funding. A large number of students have to use limited classrooms, hostels, and technologies.
- Universities produce large numbers of graduates, and all of whom expect to join the labour force. According to JAMB figures for 2012, Nigeria has one hundred and eight Universities. The existence of these implies that there is a large production of young men and women who are willing and ready to work. However, some employers in the country now insist on the acquisition of second – class upper degree as a prerequisite for employment, while others require years of working experience (Sun New, 2004).

Globally, the public sector is under intense pressure to reposition its operations to become relevant in this ever changing world. It is thus necessary for both developed and non developed countries to search for result-oriented ways of undertaking, organizing and managing public services and ultimately, redefining the role of modern states. The new paradigm advocates “the application of private sector management practices into the

public sector, strengthening the prerogatives of managers, measuring performance, increasing competitiveness and cost cutting". The traditional role of the state as the primary employer of labour, is not plausible as public sector management is now concerned with concepts such as "down sizing" "right sizing" and "contracting". This development has practically heightened the state of insecurity, distrust and even discontent among a large number of university products who seek public employment.

Teaching itself involves the process of imparting knowledge to an individual with a view of creating permanent useful changes in the individual. This involves prudence, skill; organizational acumen, effectiveness and proficiency in language. The effectiveness of language is pertinent because communication in the universities is pertinent whether from teachers to students or students to students. Poor command of language is a factor militating against university education because their products do not care to learn correct pronunciation, syntax and semantics of the language. It is obviously difficult for a graduate who has poor command of English language to pass down a message. According to a recent World Bank study, employers complain that the quality of university products especially their communication skills have fallen continually for two decades (Boltag, 2002).

New corrupt strategies are being devised. Peter Eigens, the chairman of transparency international (TI) observes that there is no end in sight to the misuse of power by those in public office and corruption levels are perceived to be as high as ever in both developed and developing nations (Deleone and Green, 2004). Thus, corruption is clearly seen when it comes to employment. Adedokun (2003) captures the situation by saying that appointments into various establishments may be influenced through corrupt practices. Factors that are taken into consideration include ethnicity, god-fatherism etc. No matter how brilliant the performance of a candidate may be during an interview, he/she may not be appointed while someone with low performance is appointed. Therefore, most university products go through aptitude tests and interviews whose outcomes are hardly known. Due to these facts poverty and unemployment have reached embarrassing levels and the lack of employment opportunities for young graduates has led to frustration, insecurity and uncertainty about the future. The lack of employment opportunities for graduates is a great loss to the society in view of the amount of resources that had been invested by parents and government and the consumption demands which the unemployed graduates make on the economy. Therefore, the question now is to what extent will university education in Nigeria help in eradicating unemployment in the country and enhance economic development of graduates and citizenry through entrepreneurship education.

The rationale for entrepreneurship in Nigerian Universities

Nigerian education system during the colonial period was geared towards serving the interest of the colonial masters in term of supply of man power for their effective administration of Nigerian colony and protectorates (Aladekomo, 2004). The policy at that period was aimed at producing Nigerians who read and write to enable them hold certain positions such as clerks and interpreters. These Nigerians had no professional skills to enable them stand on their own or even establish and manage their own ventures. The Nigeria industrial policy that came after independence placed emphasis on and paid attention to the establishment of big industries neglecting small scale sectors (Aladekomo 2004). This neglect affected entrepreneurship at the beginning and negatively influenced its importance for economic growth and development.

Again the majority of graduates are looking for white collar jobs. This is an upshot of colonial education policies when the government saw the importance of small scale industries to the economy and supported entrepreneurs' activities in the small and median industries in the country.

However, Nigerian university Education is at a cross road as far as producing graduates who will work and bring creativity into their work place is concerned. The results of a survey jointly sponsored by the NUC and Education Trust Fund (ETF) on need skills like literacy, oral communication, information technology, entrepreneurship, analytical problem – solving and decision making rated Nigerian graduates as poor. This view of Nigerian graduates further explains why there is an increase in the unemployment rate of Nigerian graduates (Oviawe, 2010).

Given the growing numbers of graduates coming out from the various universities into labour market and the increasing unemployment rate, government is worried about the situation and need to take measures to rectify the situation. Policy makers and government are pondering what the right education for Nigeria should be and what kind of education will be suitable in propelling economic development in the country.

In order to reduce the persistent socio- economic problems especially unemployment among graduates and high incidence of poverty in the country, the need for entrepreneurship education arose. Calls for reorientation among students and their teachers who believe in being employed rather than seeking self-employment after graduation have been made. Government is expected to play a greater role in providing the necessary atmosphere and policy frame work for success in this direction. While students are in the university they should acquire the necessary skills and training to identify an exploitable opportunity for economic development.

Developing entrepreneurship is a means of providing employment and a powerful weapon of fighting poverty in the country. In order for Nigeria to be transformed economically it should create appropriate human resource space through education. This human resource space is to have ideal educational environment for producing individuals with the mindset of self-reliance, creativity and high productivity in order to cope with the 21st century world of work (Alu, 2007). So it is necessary to reposition university education systems with a view to creating and enhancing the supply of entrepreneurship initiatives and activities. By this, it is expected that our universities will become centers for inculcating the spirit of entrepreneurship rather than the spirit of passing exams to get white collar jobs.

Problems associated with introducing entrepreneurship education in the Nigerian university

To address the problem of graduate unemployment and strategically position the economy for leadership, entrepreneurship education was introduced as a compulsory course. Despite the compulsory nature of entrepreneurship Education in the universities many Nigerian graduates will still be unemployed after graduation. This is due to the facts that the content and management of the course is still porous and the objective of introducing it seems to be defeated. There is need to find out the challenges facing the programmes in the universities and how to manage them. In order to fulfill the objectives, there are some challenges which are classified by Inegbenebor (2005)

- 1) Wage-earner culture does not favour entrepreneurship education given the values of the society.
- 2) Due to the ignorance of university administration, it may not give the level of support for the programme which is necessary.
- 3) What to teach and to whom- every undergraduate is entitled to it but due to large size classes it may not be effectively taught.
- 4) Who to teach Entrepreneurship Education, those to teach should have special training and experiences.
- 5) Lack of teaching materials.
- 6) Government and policy makers have not started to address the problems at university level.

Suggestions for the way forward

The changing work place calls for a changing career orientation in terms of development.

North Dakota Department of Career and technical education (2003) defines career development as the process of helping people develop and accept an integrated and accurate picture of themselves and their role in the world of work. Therefore, career development aims at preparing students for successful employment when they leave the university system.

Unfortunately, most of the products of this nation's universities are without skills needed in the labour market and as such, they are outdated at graduation and are therefore unable to compete in the fast changing work place. Gordon (1997) pointed out that the work place is characterized by many complex tactical and strategic tasks that require the assimilation of increasing amounts of new knowledge, personal thinking, application and problem solving abilities and high work load with extremely variable contents. The workplace situation makes career development inevitable. Kolo (1992) notes "those who attended occupational teaching class become more realistic in preferring those vocations that are in line with their personality traits and school subjects' combination than those who were not exposed to occupational teaching classes". Promoting this kind of entrepreneurship education would facilitate timely career adjustment thereby minimizing the outcry of unemployment by those without defined job skills.

Furthermore, Nigeria is a nation in transition from state-led-economy to private-sector-led-economy. Therefore like most transitions, it is crisis-laden either temporarily or otherwise. This crisis is partly evidenced in highly limited employment opportunities and the new character of job requirements; hence there is the need for activation of the traditional sectors of the economy with entrepreneurship education in such areas as agriculture, fishing, pottery etc. In these areas university products could be gainfully employed

Nigerian educational objectives include the provision of equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels as and when practicable (Section 18, 1999 constitution). These objectives are purely inadequate in addressing the contemporary educational needs of Nigerians most especially university products. Though equal and adequate educational opportunities are very important, that alone does not address the fundamental needs of university products. Education should make the university product relevant to himself, the nation and the international community by providing relevant knowledge, skills and exposures. This will contribute to career happiness that come as a result of engaging in more meaningful work that meet the changing needs of the individual (Imel, 2002). Therefore, there must be constitutional amendments to reflect the real educational needs of the university products in terms of direction and content for Economic development.

This must be followed by public policy and financial backing to actualize this national challenge for Economic development. In this direction, career counselors need retraining in order to provide suitable guidance to university products to facilitate proper transition to the world of work.

A predominant number of the products of Nigerian universities are in the humanities. Therefore, their programmes of study should be revamped to accommodate the need of science in the society and also provide them with the entrepreneurship skills and knowledge that they need to secure a job and to compete in the technologically advanced world economy.

Improvement in their communication skills and the use of computers and information technologies will increase their productivity and in the long run, translate into lasting, durable and participatory democracy. Communication skills should be taught as a compulsory course in the department and not as a general course. There should be a rethinking about the classification of degrees. The classification should be in two categories pass degree or fail degree. Transcripts will only be used when it is required by the employers

-A new approach in our teaching techniques and new approach in our assessment procedures of student should be introduced giving room for students to assess their lecturers.

-With the expansion of university education and consequent output of qualified manpower, government should be well advised to have a good look at the economic structure of the country, restructure it and make it more responsive to national development

- For the sake of diversity, university education must offer a range of options that take into account the different expectations. These options must be customized for the following:

1. People seeking certification in order to access the labour market.
2. Those that want to work in the banking industries.
3. Those that want to work in the communication sectors.
4. Those that want to work in the manufacturing sectors and building sectors. These wide ranges of options should be built into the university education curriculum. These new currents should incorporate a number of skills and knowledge that will help university products for economic and productive jobs.

- Self employment is deemed a key alternative in the face of the restrictions imposed by the labour market. In order to achieve this purpose, the government should establish a University bank whose responsibility is to offer products of that particular university soft Loans in order to make them self-employed and the loans should be given based on the feasibility studies of intending self-employed graduates. Their statements of result will be used as collaterals and the lending bank should monitor the project to ensure that the loans are strictly used for the purposes given.

- Investments in university education should also be directed at improving productivity and supporting job creation and to improve infrastructure as well as create the enabling environment.

These are inevitable developments which we must prepare ourselves for in the light of the pressure that are brought to bear on universities.

Curriculum review needs to be more extensive to accommodate entrepreneurship at the university level because entrepreneurship education activities are a real-life vehicle for developing academic skills. Entrepreneurship education should be taught at faculty level not as a general course.

Educational planners and administrators need to be sure that class sizes are reduced to manageable size and continuous assessments should be properly administered to students without failure. Also instructional materials should be adequate and in good condition.

Only well trained lecturers should be employed to teach and head entrepreneurial centres recently approved by NUC on university campuses and government should encourage bodies to establish good study centres with well qualified personnel to educate and train the prospective entrepreneurs in the country.

Entrepreneurship lecturers should periodically be retrained and also be active in the area of research to update their skills in order to be relevant in today's era.

Conclusion

Today's concern with university education is between two scenarios, the process of globalization of technological development and the backdrop of poverty characteristics of the Nigerian society. Both have important socio-economic implications which will determine new challenges for university education and in turn will lead to rethinking of its philosophy and practice.

This paper has shown that university products are most affected in the world of work. The situation is not hopeless. To keep pace with transformation, it calls for re-positioning of university education and re-orientation of university products to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours through entrepreneurship education that are on demand by different employees. Business organizations should not continue to operate in a disjointed manner. They should cooperate to make university products successful in the world of work that is becoming highly disseminative and sophisticated. Again some of the measures being recommended in this presentation may appear too revolutionary but we are talking about a new dispensation in the Nigerian university education and we must therefore introduce measures which will help in stabilizing the system for the benefit of the products.

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