

Reinforcing University Entrepreneurship Education Programme for Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

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Abstract

The dearth of paid employment has forced governments in Africa to prioritize the promotion of entrepreneurship engagement by citizens. One strategy employed by the Nigerian federal government was to make entrepreneurship education compulsory for all tertiary institution students. The policy has been in place for well over a decade; however the extent of its effectiveness is very much in question, with researches turning in mixed results and many unemployed graduates unwilling or unable to effectively engage in entrepreneurship. The purpose of this study was to examine students' perception on prospects, challenges and strategies for reinforcing university entrepreneurship education programme for poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The study was carried out in Kwara State University, Malete and Tai Solarin University of Education Ijagun, both in southwestern Nigeria. To achieve the study purpose, descriptive survey research design was adopted. Three research questions guided the study. The population consisted of all full-time undergraduate students of business education in the two universities. A census of all 202 students was conducted. A four-point rating scale questionnaire was used to collect data from the subjects. The instrument was validated by experts in the two universities. The reliability test, conducted with test-retest method, yielded a reliability quotient of 0.77 which was considered adequate. Frequency counts and percentage were used to analyze the demographic data while mean and standard deviation were employed to answer the research questions. Research findings showed that many respondents agreed that Entrepreneurship Education has great potentials as an instrument of poverty alleviation and sustainable development. The challenges inhibiting the optimization the benefits of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria included poor funding, and inadequate government support for budding entrepreneurs, among other factors. The findings also showed that entrepreneurship can be strengthened for poverty alleviation through effective programme planning, supervision and evaluation. The researcher recommended that government and other relevant agencies should provide incentives and support to university graduates in their entrepreneurship endeavours.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship education, poverty alleviation, SD*

Introduction

The Federal Government of Nigeria introduced entrepreneurship education for all university undergraduate students in 2006. The purpose was to equip students with competencies and qualities needed for entrepreneurial success after school. The primary objective of the programme was to reduce graduate unemployment and promote accelerated economic development. However, almost fifteen years after the programme was introduced, there are growing doubts about its effectiveness as a recipe for poverty alleviation, full employment and national development in Nigeria. These doubts have emerged because in spite of the introduction of entrepreneurship programme, and in spite of a national reputation for entrepreneurship engagement, Nigeria continues to harbor millions of unemployed graduates, some of who have no interest in entrepreneurial activities. This apparent failure has led many to raise questions on the effectiveness of the entrepreneurship programme.

Entrepreneurship education refers to the process and techniques of imparting entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, orientation and techniques. Entrepreneurship education seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurship success in a variety of settings. It is a collection of formalized teachings that informs, trains and educates anyone interested in participating in socioeconomic development through a project to promote entrepreneurship awareness, business creation or small business development (Ademiluyi, 2019).

Entrepreneurship education seeks to develop a person's ability to harness necessary resources to start a new business or grow an existing venture. The belief of some Nigerians is that entrepreneurship education does not need to be taught because entrepreneurs are born and not made. While indeed, certain entrepreneurship instincts may be innate, associated skills still need to be recognized and developed. Also, in light of the rapid changes accentuated by technology and generational peculiarities, new methods and skills have to be continually learnt and re-learnt. Entrepreneurship education is designed to teach the skills, knowledge and attitudes to venture into a new business. This involves, among other factors, ability to identify opportunities and to avoid the many pitfalls awaiting the uninitiated and the less vigilant and the poorly trained. Entrepreneurship education may initially be perceived as expensive, but this is an investment with great return potentials, both to the person and to the nation.

Poverty alleviation refers to measures, both economic and humanitarian, intended to permanently lift people out of poverty. Hipsher (2013) described poverty reduction as one of the world's most important challenges. Poverty according to Hipsher, is closely associated with several measurable negative aspects of standards of living. Programmes designed by different governments throughout the world include microfinance and microcredit. Other poverty alleviation programmes focus on savings and organizing workers through NGOs. These programmes help the poor to accumulate assets, which, in turn, encourages investment in human capital and creates social capital.

The New World Encyclopedia (2017) defines sustainable development as balancing the protection of the natural environment with the fulfillment of human needs so that the needs can be met not only in the present but also in the indefinable future. The term was prompted by global recognition of the close linkage

between environmental health and human development as well as the need to alter social and economic policies to minimize the human impact on the environment.

The term sustainable development was first coined in 1980 by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and came into general usage following the publication of the 1987 report of the Brundtland Commission. The report cast sustainable development as economic and social growth that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1987). The concept integrates social, economic and environmental policies. It perceives development as both a political and economic goal, while sustainability is conceived as an ecological goal. The document identifies the “independent and mutually reinforcing pillars” of sustainable development as economic development, social development and environmental protection.

The United Nations Development Programme (2016) identifies several areas as falling within the scope of sustainable development. These include agriculture, biodiversity, capacity building, climate change, education and awareness, poverty, sanitation, technology, trade and environment, sanitation, water and waste among others.

Nigeria is part of the global economy, currently in transition, which yearns for greater participation of small medium enterprises (SMEs) in a sustainable economy. Today, SMEs in Nigeria participate mainly in the informal sector. Most economies are driven by Micro/Cottage, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) mainly in the informal sector. In many economies, they account for a large segment of productive population. The SMEs in Nigeria account for over 95% of small productive activities outside agriculture, which positions them as potentially strong agents of economic growth and sustainable development (Ramlan, 2012). The Federal Government of Nigeria in its efforts to ensure that her citizens are self-sufficient established many programmes aimed at poverty eradication through entrepreneurship education and provision of funds and other support facilities.

In view of this great attention to entrepreneurship education throughout the land, it is a surprise that many graduates do not yet regard entrepreneurship as a worthwhile alternative to paid employment. Hundreds of thousands of young graduates still roam the streets in search of white collar job chimera. Even those forced into entrepreneurial activities often regard it as a stop gap endeavour expected to last until the first paid job surfaces. This state of affairs cannot effectively address the challenge of poverty or promote sustainable national development; hence the need for this study.

Statement of Problem

In spite of the fact that entrepreneurship education has been a compulsory course for all tertiary institution students across Nigeria for several years, questions remain about its effectiveness in addressing the challenge of endemic poverty in the country. Many students after graduation prefer to roam the streets in search of non-existing white collar jobs to venturing into entrepreneurial activities. This raises questions about entrepreneurship education’s effectiveness in achieving its objectives of promoting entrepreneurial mindset and intention among young graduates..

There is today universal consciousness that no nation can develop beyond the entrepreneurial activities of its people. This is the reason the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced entrepreneurship education program in the first place. There are major questions about whether students are being exposed to the appropriate skills and theoretical experiences requisite for an effective entrepreneurship programme. There is, also, the thought that the Nigerian government and other stakeholders assume that exposure to entrepreneurship knowledge, without adequate post-graduation support structure, is sufficient to promote entrepreneurship among youths. There is consequently, the need to continually monitor whether the programme, as currently designed and implemented, is adequate to achieve its aim and to identify strategies and tactics to reinforce the weak spots. If this is not done, students may continue to imbibe wrong notions on entrepreneurship; needed competencies may not be acquired, while necessary post-graduation support structures may not be available, hence the need for this study.

Research Questions

1. To what extent has university entrepreneurship education programme been useful for poverty reduction and sustainable development in Nigeria?
2. What are the challenges of University entrepreneurship education programme as an instrument for poverty alleviation and sustainable development?
3. How can university entrepreneurship education programme be fortified as an instrument for poverty alleviation and sustainable development?

Methodology

Research Design

The methodology used for this research was descriptive survey design. This is because descriptive survey designs are ideal for studies seeking people's perceptions and opinions (Agboola, 2017).

Area of Study

This research work was carried out in the Departments of Business Education, Kwara State University Malete and Tai Solarin University of Education Ijagun. Kwara State University is located in Kwara State in North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, while Tai Solarin University of Education is located in Ogun State in the Southwestern geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Both have well established Business and Entrepreneurship education programmes. They both offer undergraduate, graduate and research degrees in business education which is the recognized domicile of entrepreneurship education programme.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all final year, undergraduate Business Education students of Kwara State University Malete and Tai Solarin University of Education Ijagun. The schools were selected because they both offer mature business education programmes at undergraduate and graduate levels. Final year students were selected because based on the National University Commission

curriculum, they had been exposed to entrepreneurship education over several years in the university system. They had also had opportunity for internship which normally exposes them to real-life entrepreneurship and employment situations.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Because the population was small and manageable, no sample was drawn. The entire population was studied in line with the postulation of Agboola (2017) that it is ideal to study the entire population whenever possible.

Instrument for data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a 20-item Likert-type rating scale. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items designed after an extensive review of literature. For the first research question, the items were placed on the 4-point rating scale of Great Extent (GE) = 4 points, Moderate extent (ME) = 3 points, Small Extent (SE) = 2 points, and Very small extent (VSE) = 1 point. For the second and third research questions, the options were: Strongly Agree (SA) SA = 4 points, Agree (A) = 3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 points, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point. A total of 200 copies of the questionnaire were administered, and all were retrieved. The data collected to answer the research question were analyzed using mean, standard deviation.

Validity of the Instrument

To assess the face validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed for completeness, format, accuracy, and validity by experts in Business and Entrepreneurship Education and Test and Measurement in Tai Solarin University of Education and Kwara State University. Their corrections and suggestions were taken into consideration in preparing the final version of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument's reliability was determined using the test-retest method. The instrument was administered twice with three weeks interval between the two administrations. The results were correlated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, which yielded a reliability result of 0.77, which, according to Agboola (2017), is very strong.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected by using the questionnaire which the researcher administered to the respondents. The questionnaire items were analyzed with mean rating to answer the research questions, and standard deviation to determine whether the responses were homogenous or dispersed.

Decision Rule

For the first research question, the responses were rated on the following basis:

Great extent, 3.50 -4.00; Moderate extent, 2.50-3.49; Small extent, 1.50- 2.49; and very small extent 0.00-1.49). For research questions 2 and 3, the mean rating of 2.50 was used for decision. This was calculated based on the 4-point rating interval used in the study. For the other research questions, items with mean values of 2.50 and above were considered as agreed while items with mean values below 2.50 were considered as disagreed.

Findings

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on Extent of Entrepreneurship Education's Influence on Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development

Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
Entrepreneurship Education imparts saleable skills for poverty alleviation	3.61	0.58	Great Extent
Entrepreneurship Education provides human relation skills for Poverty reduction	3.64	0.58	Great Extent
Entrepreneurship Education imparts marketing skills for goods and services	3.52	0.66	Great Extent
Entrepreneurship Education encourages entrepreneurial activities among undergraduates	3.59	0.68	Great Extent
Entrepreneurship Education encourages entrepreneurship resilience for poverty reduction	3.57	0.76	Great Extent
Entrepreneurship Education impacts business Management skills	3.54	0.76	Great Extent
Entrepreneurship Education shows sources of business finance	3.55	0.76	Great Extent
Entrepreneurship Education encourages start up among undergraduate	3.53	0.82	Great Extent
Entrepreneurship Education promotes economic growth and development	3.5	0.85	Great Extent
Entrepreneurship Education encourages self – resilience	3.66	0.84	Great Extent

The results in Table 1 reveals that entrepreneurship education helps in reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development in Nigeria to a great extent. All the means scores obtained are above 3.5 which is the benchmark for great extent. This indicates that, in the respondents' collective opinion, entrepreneurship education is capable of reducing poverty among Nigerians, most especially, youths. The standard deviation scores also fall below 1.00 which indicates that the responses clustered round their means, suggesting a broad uniformity in respondents' opinions.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges of entrepreneurship education as an instrument for poverty alleviation?

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Challenges affecting Entrepreneurship Education's Capacity for poverty Alleviation

Items	Means	SD	Remarks
Inadequate government support for entrepreneurship	3.92	0.78	SA
Emphasis on theoretical teaching of entrepreneurship	3.68	0.6	SA
Inadequate facilities for entrepreneurship studies	3.5	0.64	SA
Inadequate interest among students for entrepreneurship education	3.33	0.77	Agreed
Inadequate time for teaching and practical work	3.17	0.78	Agreed
Insecurity of life and property inhibit entrepreneurship	3.04	0.79	Agreed
Poor maintenance culture for entrepreneurship facilities	3.41	0.62	Agreed
High level of corruption	3.14	0.93	Agreed
Ineffective planning, supervision and evaluation of Entrepreneurship education	3.42	0.96	Agreed
Lack of entrepreneurship Centres in institution	3.28	0.78	Agreed

From the Table 2 shows the challenges of entrepreneurship education as an instrument for poverty alleviation. The biggest challenges are: Inadequate government support for entrepreneurship (Mean: 3.92); emphasis on theoretical aspects of entrepreneurship education (mean: 3.68) and inadequate facilities for entrepreneurship studies (mean: 3.50). Others include ineffective planning, supervision and evaluation of entrepreneurship education (mean: 3.42), poor maintenance culture for facilities (mean: 3.41), and inadequate interest among students for entrepreneurship education (mean: 3.33). All the means scores obtained are higher than the 2.5 which was used as the benchmark. The standard deviation scores also fall below 1.00 which indicates that the responses cluster around the mean, suggesting a broad consensus of opinions.

Research Question 3: How can entrepreneurship education be fortified as an instrument for poverty alleviation?

Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Strategies for Strengthening Entrepreneurship Education

Item	Mean	SD	Remarks
Effective planning, supervision and evaluation	3.72	0.45	Agreed
Making available of loans incentives from banks	3.39	0.55	Agreed
Government supporting financially	3.8	0.54	Agreed
Employing capable entrepreneurship education lecturers	3.27	0.65	Agreed
Effectively motivating the lecturers	3.51	0.73	Agreed
Creation of more entrepreneurship Centres	3.42	0.68	Agreed
Providing adequate facilities for entrepreneurship	3.53	0.69	Agreed
Motivating students on the need for entrepreneurship	3.46	0.61	Agreed
Emphasizing practical steps on effective operation of Entrepreneurship	3.72	0.63	Agreed
Provision of adequate securities in the states	3.31	0.83	Agreed

Table 3 reveals how entrepreneurship education can be fortified as an instrument for poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The respondents agreed that entrepreneurship education can be fortified through government's financial support for graduates, by ensuring effective planning, supervision and evaluation, making available loans incentives from banks, employment of capable lecturers for entrepreneurship education, motivation on the part of the lecturers, creation of more entrepreneurship centres, provision of adequate facilities for entrepreneurship, motivating students on the need for entrepreneurship and provision of adequate securities in the state. All the means scores obtained were higher than the 2.5, while the standard deviation scores were below 1.00, indicating that they clustered around their means.

Discussion

The analysis of research question one reveals that the respondents believe that entrepreneurship education can have salutary impact on poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Entrepreneurship education provides saleable skills, human relation skills, marketing skills, all of which are necessary if entrepreneurship is to be deployed as an instrument of poverty elimination and sustainable development. The finding is in agreement with Longe (2017) who stressed the continuing relevance of entrepreneurship skill development in the creation of enterprises. The finding also widely support Igbongidi (2017), whose findings showed that proper skill acquisition and entrepreneurship education programmes can reduce the level of poverty in the economy. This is in alignment with the view of Akpomi (2009), Kalirajan (2009) and Binuomote (2017) who all stressed that entrepreneurship education can help in addressing the level of poverty

in the country by actively engaging and empowering the graduates of the Nigerian education system

The analysis of Research Question 2 revealed the challenges facing entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. The results show that poor funding of entrepreneurship education in particular has been a serious challenge to entrepreneurship, both at the institutional level and the nation at large. This funding constraint has adversely affected the implementation of entrepreneurship education curricula, a fact attested to by National Universities Commission and other supervisory agencies. The progress is also limited by excessive emphasis on theoretical teaching of entrepreneurship, inadequate facilities for entrepreneurship studies, lack of interest among students for entrepreneurship education, inadequate time for teaching and practical, poor government support structures for entrepreneurship studies, lack of interest among students for entrepreneurship education, undergraduate students perception of entrepreneurship education as one of the unnecessary elective or general courses forced on them by their respective school authorities in order to fulfill graduation requirements (Gabadeen & Raimi, 2012). In consequence students' participation in entrepreneurship activities is often perfunctory and evaluation-focused to the detriment of entrepreneurial orientation and skill acquisition (Ifedili & Ofoegbu, 2011).

Analysis of research question three came up with suggested strategies for strengthening Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria. These include ensuring effective planning, supervision and evaluation, making available of loans incentives from banks, government supporting financially, employment of qualified lecturers for entrepreneurship education and motivation on the part of the lecturers because inadequacy of competent lecturers in the field of entrepreneurship to make the course practically interesting and goal-oriented as opposed to too much focus theoretical instructions (Gabadeen & Raimi, 2012). Igbongidi (2017) reported that many experts have reservations on the theoretical contents of entrepreneurship education being delivered to the undergraduates across Nigerian higher institutions. Other suggested steps include creation of more entrepreneurship centres, provision of adequate facilities for entrepreneurship motivating students on the need for entrepreneurship, and motivating students on the need for entrepreneurship. The finding is in support of Mbionwu (2008) who stressed that when youths are given adequate training in skills, they can be self-employed after schooling, thus making them active partners in both sustained community and national development. A well implemented entrepreneurship education programme is capable of reducing youth restiveness resulting from unemployment. The finding also revealed that provision of adequate securities in the states, especially in conflict-endemic areas might reinforce the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education as an instrument of poverty alleviation and sustainable development. This finding is in line with Ademiluyi (2013) who stressed that the insecurity is both a cause and consequence of poor skill acquisition and entrepreneurship education programmes.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that entrepreneurship education is a useful instrument for poverty reduction and sustainable development in Nigeria since it provides several skills and attitudes needed for successful entrepreneurial engagement. It encourages entrepreneurship resilience, and shows direction on sources of business finance. It encourages start up among undergraduates and

promotes economic growth and development. Entrepreneurship Education encourages self-reliance. Entrepreneurship education programmes is capable of reducing the level of poverty in the economy and also, can build in the students' entrepreneurship spirit and culture needed to bridge the gap between youth unemployment and job creation. Also, the study concludes that, entrepreneurship can be strengthened by making available necessary human, knowledge and material resources for entrepreneurship start up and sustenance.

Recommendations

For entrepreneurship education in Nigerian Universities to be an instrument for poverty alleviation and sustainable development, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Government at all levels should reinforce their entrepreneurship support programmes and structures. New graduates should have greater access to training and facilities for entrepreneurship start up and sustenance.
2. Appropriate instructional materials, teaching facilities and support services should be provided for university programmes to enable them achieve the stated objectives poverty alleviation and sustainable develop.
3. Practicing teachers at all levels of education should undergo professional training through seminar, workshops and other in-service training to acquire knowledge and skills in the adoption of entrepreneurship – driven instructional methodology.
4. Federal and State Ministries of Education should build resource centres and networks for exchange of good practice.
5. School administrators should establish effective linkages with entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship support organizations. Linkages with government agencies and NGOs which support entrepreneurship should be established, nourished and sustained.

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