



ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING FOR MITIGATING UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: HOW HAVE THE TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS FARED?

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ABSTRACT

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The increasing unemployment in Nigeria is one of the social problems contributing to abject poverty, crime and other civil vices plaguing the country today. Although the public and private sectors have made some efforts in addressing the problem, available current statistics show that both sectors lack the capacity to solely employ the entire manpower base of the country. Considering the potential of entrepreneurial training for reducing unemployment, the Nigerian government through the National Universities Commission (NUC) introduced entrepreneurial education as a compulsory course in various higher institutions. In this study, we aimed to ascertain the extent to which these institutions have implemented entrepreneurial education for mitigating unemployment in Nigeria, using the University of Calabar as a case study. A combination of structured questionnaires, titled students' Opinion Questionnaire and review of extant literatures and theoretical framework, was used for the study. The resulting data showed that the tertiary institutions have not significantly contributed to mitigating unemployment through entrepreneurial education, judging from the low students' acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, their limited exposure to business opportunities and difficulty in sourcing funds to ensure utilization of any acquired skills after graduation.

Contribution/Originality: The paper's primary contribution is finding that that the tertiary institutions have not significantly contributed to mitigating unemployment through entrepreneurial education, judging from the low students' acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, their limited exposure to business opportunities and difficulty in sourcing funds to ensure utilization of any acquired skills after graduation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria produces the largest number of educated youths in Africa but the menace of unemployment has intensified in recent times, leading to criminality and other anti-social behaviors among youths. This paradox is mainly exacerbated by the high rate at which students are being graduated from schools in numbers that are clearly in excess of available employment opportunities. According to [Anyagou \(2009\)](#) the value system of the Nigerian educational sector and the society at large has been the graduation from school to secure a job rather than being self-employed as seen in various developed countries, where government accounts for only 40 percent of job availability and unemployment rate is within single digits. The high graduate unemployment in Nigeria is blamed on the University curriculum which has been geared towards stereotyped goals and jobs, without adequate practical

work. In other words, graduates from various universities in Nigeria acquire various knowledge without adequate entrepreneurial skills to enable them on graduation to practice what they learnt in school and become self-employed through job creation.

To make University education functional, relevant and practical, the Federal Government of Nigeria through the National Universities Commission (NUC) introduced entrepreneurship education as a compulsory course for all undergraduate students in various Universities. According to Williams (2013) entrepreneurship is a process where individuals seek to use their talents, efforts and resources to create and grow ventures that capitalize on business opportunities and thereby create values. The aim is to ignite in the students, entrepreneurial skills is to develop the students' entrepreneurial capacities and mindset (Tulgan, 1999) to help them recognize business opportunities, mobilize resources and exploit the opportunity for self-employment, which will be beneficial for community and national development. The goal is to empower graduates, irrespective of their area of specialization, with skills that will enable them to engage in income-yielding venture if they are unable to secure jobs in the public sector (Bassey & Archibong, 2005). The education is also to raise students' awareness of self-employment as a career option, promote the development of personal qualities that are relevant to not only an employee but also an employer, such as creativity, risk taking and responsibility and providing the technical and business skills needed to start a new venture. Entrepreneurial skills and attitude provide benefits to the society even beyond their application to business activity (Akpomi, 2009) and could create a class of graduates with the right experience and insights to discover and create entrepreneurial opportunities and also gain the expertise to successfully start and manage their own business to take advantage of existing opportunities (Emeruwa, 2005).

While the fast-growing world of change has made the role of the entrepreneur very important and functional, developing countries like Nigeria are still lagging behind in terms of entrepreneurial development in their various institutions. Although various institutions including public and private Universities in Nigeria are meticulously working to mitigate the scourge of graduate unemployment, other Universities tend to pay little or no attention to entrepreneurial development. This study sought to assess the role of tertiary institutions towards graduate job creation in terms of entrepreneurial skill development in Nigeria. The objective was to determine how well the tertiary institutions are playing their role of inculcating entrepreneurial skills in students to help mitigate the growing menace of graduate unemployment in the country, using the University of Calabar as a case study. We determined the extent to which the University has promoted the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, exposed students to business opportunity and promoted business innovations by sourcing for funds for students.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Nigeria has some of the most dynamic and innovative citizens in Africa and produces the largest number of educated youths in the continent. However, the country still has glaring indices of underdevelopment despite its many natural and human resources. Most common among these indices of underdevelopment is the almost constant state of graduate unemployment that has demoralized its manpower base in terms of its utilization. These challenges notwithstanding, theories of economic development suggest that such unfavourable conditions engender rapid growth, provided the available resources are competently harnessed and utilized for the production of goods and services in a competitive economy. In its original sense, entrepreneurship is associated with economics and managerial aspects of enterprises and business development. Schumpeter (1967) linked entrepreneurship with innovations and considered the entrepreneur as creating a new combination of production with the drive to innovate, experiment and expand. Entrepreneurship is a process where individuals seek to use their talents, efforts and resources to create and grow ventures that capitalize on business opportunities and thereby create values. It fundamentally involves the process of undertaking innovations, financing business plans and strategies with the sole aim of production or service rendering. Generally, entrepreneurship encompasses the following activities

involved in the establishment and operation of a business: skill acquisition, identification of business opportunities, decision-making process and establishment and promotion of business plan.

Entrepreneurship education in Nigeria is mostly an academic process involving the inculcation of prerequisite skills for innovations and identification of business opportunities. It is a learning process that begins rather late, at the tertiary level rather than at the elementary education and progressing through the various levels of education. In developed countries, entrepreneurship development begins as early as a child is able to assimilate ideas and thoughts with the sole aim of exposing the child to various innovations to make a better society. Most schools as well as Universities in developed countries are not merely concerned with inculcating students with professional knowledge but aim to provide skills and knowledge that will enable them develop insights for discovering and creating entrepreneurial opportunities.

The existing perception of equating entrepreneurship education with vocational education or business education is quite erroneous as entrepreneurship education is fundamental to education. It is the acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitude to provide learners with the ability to understand the challenges of life and how best to take decisive steps to realize new trends and opportunities through innovations for resolving the various challenges of human existence. What differentiates entrepreneurship education from other disciplines is its drive towards the realization of opportunities. These opportunities can be realized by starting a business, introducing new products of ideas or by doing something in a different way with the aim of achieving goals. Entrepreneurship education should change the orientation and attitude of the recipient to equip him with skills and knowledge to manage various businesses through innovations. Its salient goal should therefore be to promote creativity, innovation and self-employment through the inculcation of entrepreneurship knowledge, competences and attitudes in the learners. The overall objective of this education is to continuously foster entrepreneurship culture amongst students with a view to, not only educating them but to also, supporting graduates of the system towards establishing and maintaining sustainable business ventures, including but not limited to those arising from research.

3. NEED FOR REPOSITIONING ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The Nigerian educational system from its inception was geared towards serving the interest of colonial masters for effective and efficient administration. Education policies during this period were structured such that educated Nigerians were only able to read, write and hold certain low-level positions such as clerks and interpreters without any entrepreneurial or professional skill to be self-reliant and self-employed. The Nigeria industrial policy that evolved immediately after independence placed emphasis on the establishment and enhancement of big industries and enterprises but neglected the improvement of small-scale enterprises (Aladekomo, 2004). This obvious neglect adversely affected entrepreneurship at the micro level, even though economists have proved it to be pivotal for national growth and development. During the first decade of independence (1960-1970), there was an overwhelming demand for white collar jobs for greater number of graduates, being a hangover from colonial educational policies. The failure of big industries to induce the anticipated economic growth and development necessitated the development of small-scale enterprises. This fundamentally paved way for the enhancement of entrepreneurial development. As a result, the Nigeria Industrial Bank (NIB), Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) and Nigeria Bank for Commerce and Industries (NBCI) were set up to encourage entrepreneurial development while huge financial resources were committed to the speedy development of entrepreneurship; however, current statistics have clearly shown the poor state of entrepreneurship, which has compounded the growing state of unemployment and criminality in the country.

In order to curb unemployment, the government is expected to play a greater role in providing the necessary support and policy framework for the success of entrepreneurship education. Saygagi (2007) suggested that fostering an environment that promotes entrepreneurs to invest in technology and new activities is critical to

propelling economic growth and national development. According to Akpomi (2009) entrepreneurial skills and attitudes provide benefits to the society even beyond their application to business activity and by teaching entrepreneurship, the system will use the framework of education to initiate specialized learning activities that will create a class of graduates with the right experience and insights to discover and create entrepreneurial opportunities and also gain the expertise to successfully start and manage their own business to take advantage of existing opportunities (Emeruwa, 2005). Entrepreneurship provides graduate with enough training that makes them creative and innovative in identifying new business opportunities and further stimulate industrial and economic growth of rural and less developed areas (Abdullahi, 2009). However, few empirical studies have been carried out in Nigeria to determine if entrepreneurship training is having the intended effect on nation building. It has been hypothesized that the Nigeria education system is flawed by its gross inability to produce suitable graduate and workforce with adequate technical, cognitive and attitudinal skill required to meet the labour market demand of job creation.

4. CASE STUDY

The study was carried out at the University of Calabar, Nigeria. It was established in 1975 with the sole aim of impacting professional knowledge and entrepreneurship skills to meet the manpower needs of Nigeria. The choice of study area was informed by the assumption that it has a reasonably well-established entrepreneurial training center and vast skills have been presumably impacted to its students.

The population studied comprised all the students who are beneficiaries of the entrepreneurship program of the University. The total number of students as revealed by the University of Calabar Data Base as of 2019 was 42, 257; a random sample size of 400 students was used for the study. The main instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire titled "Students' Opinion Questionnaire" structured into four Likert-Scale eliciting agreement or disagreement with questions posed. Two departments were randomly selected from each faculty in the University, except the faculty of Law for which purposive sampling was used to administer the questionnaires. Data from the field were analyzed and summarized using simple percentages.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Maritz, Jones, and Shwitzer (2015) defined entrepreneurship education programs as any educational program or process of education for entrepreneurial manners and skills, which help in developing personal qualities. Entrepreneurship education has been classified by Van Gelderen, Kautonen, and Fink (2015) as one of the most important components of entrepreneurship ecosystem for improved business creation stability. Data on students' opinion of the contribution the University of Calabar to the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills are shown in Table 1.

Table-1. Opinion of respondents as to whether or not they gained sufficient entrepreneurial skills from the University of Calabar (n = 400).

No.	Question Items	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Varieties of entrepreneurial skills are provided	55(14%)	28(7%)	183(45%)	134(34%)
2	Adequate time is provided to enable me learn various entrepreneurial skills	37(9%)	59(15%)	211(53%)	93(23%)
3	Adequate manpower is provided to ensure the learning of entrepreneurial skills	78(19%)	67(17%)	143(36%)	112(28%)
4	Skills of interest are provided during entrepreneurial training	62(16%)	24(6%)	178(45%)	136(34%)

Fifty-five students, representing 14% of the population agreed that various entrepreneurial skills are provided by the University, 28 students (7 %) strongly agreed, 183 students (45 %) disagreed and 134 students (34 %) strongly disagreed. As to whether adequate time was provided to enable students learn various entrepreneurial

skills, 37 students (9 %) agreed, 59 students (15 %) strongly agreed, 183 students (45 %) disagreed and 134 students (34 %) strongly disagreed. Also, only 78 students representing 19 % agreed that manpower for entrepreneurial skills training was available, 67 students (17 %) strongly agreed, 143 students (36 %) disagreed and 112 students (28 %) strongly disagreed that the manpower was sufficient.

When asked if skills of interest were provided during entrepreneurial training, 62 students representing 16 % agreed, 24 students (6 %) strongly agreed, 178 students (45 %) disagreed and 136 students (34 %) strongly disagreed. The data in [Table 1](#) clearly reveals that the University of Calabar has not to a significant extent, contributed to the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills among students. On the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneur performance, several studies indicated a positive ([Van der Sluis & Van Praag, 2007](#); [Van der Sluis., Van Praag, & Vijverberg, 2008](#); [Van der Sluis., Van Praag, & Vijverberg, 2005](#)) or mixed outcome ([Lorz, Muller, & Volery, 2011](#)). The entrepreneurship education programs can significantly change the entrepreneurial intentions of participants. However, a negative correlation between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship has also been reported ([Oosterbeek, Van Praag, & Ijsselstein, 2010](#); [Von Graevenitz, Harhoff, & Weber, 2010](#)).

[Table 2](#) shows that 23 students, representing 6 % of the sample size agreed to the question that entrepreneurial training enabled them to be self-employed, 41 students (10%) strongly agreed, 129 students (33%) disagreed and as much as 207 students (51 %) strongly disagreed to the question. According to [Do Paco, Ferreira, Raposo, Rodrigues, and Dinis \(2011a\)](#) ; [Do Paço., Ferreira, Raposo, Rodrigues, and Dinis \(2011b\)](#) entrepreneurship education can develop skills for entrepreneurship success, and that entrepreneurs will need it in the future. Some entrepreneurs prefer to rely on themselves believing that they have the skill needed to be successful, but once they discover that training programs offer new horizons to their business success, they develop an interest ([Wu & Jung, 2008](#)). [Ucbasaran, Westhead, Wright, and Flores \(2008\)](#) confirmed that entrepreneurship education is a significant source of skills but this seems not be the case with our study population.

As to whether the entrepreneurial training exposed students to the best possible means of generating income, 65 (16 %) agreed, 33 students (8 %) strongly agreed, 179 students (45%) disagreed, while 123 students (31%) strongly disagreed. Also, only 15 students (4 %) agreed that the training exposed them to the best possible plans, 29 students (7%) strongly agreed, 191 students (48%) disagreed and 165 students (41 %) strongly disagreed. Twenty-two students (6%) considered that the training enabled the actualization of their desired business plans, 50 students (12 %) strongly agreed, 138 students (35 %) disagreed and 190 students (47 %) strongly disagreed.

The various responses from [table 2](#) clearly show that the entrepreneurial training has not significantly exposed students to business opportunities. [Akhuemonkhan, Raimi, Patel, and Fadipe \(2014\)](#) found out that the entrepreneurship centers set up to facilitate the process of entrepreneurship and enterprise development in Nigeria have very weak socio-economic impact on job creation, wealth creation and industrial development of the country. Thus, there is need for further research to ascertain the gap between the policy objectives of some of these centers, including the University of Calabar, with their actual performance and/or outcome.

Similarly, [Archibong \(2005\)](#) suggested that these centers were not necessarily tailored at providing entrepreneurial graduates but rather graduates who consider entrepreneurial venturing as just another alternative or a back-up plan to fall back to where conventional employment (salaried job) is scarce or not available. Thus, entrepreneurial education requires a lot of attention because of the mismatch in its objective, expectation and outcome.

Table-2. Opinion of respondents as to whether or not they gained business opportunities from entrepreneurial skills training at the University of Calabar (n = 400).

No.	Question Items	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Entrepreneurial training enables students to be self-employ	23(6%)	14(10%)	129(33%)	207(51%)
2	Entrepreneurial training expose students to best possible means of generating income	65(16%)	33(8%)	179(45%)	123(31%)
3	Entrepreneurial training expose students to best business plans	15(4%)	29(7%)	191(48%)	165(41%)
4	Entrepreneurial training enables the actualization of students desired business plan	22(6%)	50(12%)	138(35%)	190(47%)

Entrepreneurship training in Nigerian tertiary institutions tends to be confined to the undergraduate level and majorly as an elective course for all students, with the presumption that exposing students to the relevant theoretical knowledge will invariably enhance the entrepreneurial intention and action among students at the end of the program. Several studies in Nigeria have shown that the entrepreneurship education is more theoretically focused with little experiential exposure (Ayatse, 2013; Iro-Idoro, Ayodele, & Jimoh, 2015). Much of what the teaching and learning is centered on is more around telling students about, and not preparing them for entrepreneurship. Although the number of entrepreneurship education programs offered in the Nigeria tertiary education system has grown considerably over the past decade, the actual contribution of such courses has remained little felt (Sofoluwe, Shokunbi, Raimi, & Ajewole, 2013). A similar experience is common in the United Kingdom. It seems that entrepreneurship educators are still uncertain about the objective, impact and effectiveness of entrepreneurship education as a whole.

As shown in Table 3, 18% of the students agreed that the entrepreneurial skills acquired are feasible and cost effective, 14 % strongly agreed, 32 % disagreed, while 36 % strongly disagreed. As to whether the school authorities provided access to funding of students' business plans, only 7 students (2%) agreed, 4 students (1%) strongly agreed, while a majority (60%) disagreed and 37% strongly disagreed. When questioned on the availability of funds for industrious trainees to engage in business based on the acquired entrepreneurial skills, only few students agreed (3%) or strongly agreed (1 %), while as majority disagreed (66 %) or strongly disagreed (30%). Not enough funds are provided by the school for the students to develop business plans as only few students agreed (2%) or agreed strongly Table 3 49% disagreed and 47% strongly disagreed. Potential entrepreneurs in Nigeria have difficulty accessing credit for their businesses. Although there are many financial institutions that offer business loans, their usually high interest rates discourage aspiring entrepreneurs. For instance, major commercial banks have pegged their lending rates in excess of 25%, deterring potential entrepreneurs who are mostly low-income earners. Other obstacles include severe collateral conditions set by banks and other lending institutions. Also, few respondents agreed (6%) or strongly agreed (4%) that the training significantly contributed to business innovations by sourcing for funds for students, compared with 52% % who disagreed or 38% who strongly disagreed. According to Bolton and Lane (2012) innovation and risk taking are strongly related to the intent to become an entrepreneur. The development and teaching of entrepreneurship courses in Nigeria is aimed at producing entrepreneurial graduates with attitude and skills- not just for employment but also job creation (Akhueomonkhan., Raimi, & Sofoluwe, 2013; Ayatse, 2013). The development of entrepreneurial mind-set is captured as an essential exogenous influence on the entrepreneurial intention among university students (Neneh, 2012; Ojeifo, 2013). Equally, teaching and learning within the education system is always being criticised for its attendant mismatch with expected or intended outcome (Babalola, 2007). The mismatch state of the system is well captured in Daini (2006) while advocating for education reform in Nigeria.

Table-3. Opinion of respondents as to whether or not the entrepreneurial skills training contributed to business innovation by sourcing funds for students (N=400).

No.	Question Items	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Entrepreneurial skills acquired are feasible and cost effective	75(18%)	53(14%)	129(32%)	143(36%)
2	Access to funding of students' business plans from entrepreneurial programmes are provided by the school	7(2%)	4(1%)	240(60%)	149(37%)
3	Funds made available by the school for promoting entrepreneurial business plans are made available for industrious students	11(3%)	5(1%)	263(66%)	121(30%)
4	Funds made available for students by the school for promoting entrepreneurial business plans are adequate for the business to be carried out	6(2%)	6(2%)	197(49%)	191(47%)

6. CONCLUSIONS

Unemployment has been a limiting factor in national development as it has escalated into all forms of criminality and social vices in Nigeria. To address this appalling trend, entrepreneurship has been introduced in tertiary institutions in the country. Findings from this study have clearly shown that the goals of the entrepreneurship training are far from achieved. Thus, there is need to strengthen supervision and monitoring of entrepreneurial programmes in various tertiary institutions by the NUC to truly ascertain the extent to which entrepreneurial policies have been implemented as against the current failed programme in the Universities. An enabling environment should be provided to ensure that acquired entrepreneurial skills and innovations can be executed in the society at large, through funding of trainees and innovations to the programme. Sponsorship and credit facilities should be provided to graduates with sound business plans to allow them contribute to national development by reducing unemployment. Also, there should be some major changes to both the content and processes of learning, particularly by placing more emphasis on educating for, rather than about, entrepreneurship. This will require the use of approaches that incorporate skills development and stimulate the mind-set of students.

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