

Strategies for Enhancing the Entrepreneurial Skills of Youths

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Abstract

This paper deals with the strategies for enhancing entrepreneurial skills in Nigerian youths. It examines the characteristics of entrepreneurs and their need for entrepreneurial education. It also points out the role of tertiary institutions in developing entrepreneurs and also deepening entrepreneurial attributes in individuals. It presents that argument that the traditional system of education does not promote entrepreneurship skills but rather stifles them, and that for entrepreneurship to be promoted, there ought to be changes in both the process and content of learning. It suggests that tertiary institutions should gear the learning process towards enhancing the entrepreneurial skills of youths.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, creativity, entrepreneur, education, skills

Introduction

In the last two decades, considerable attention has been paid to the role of academia in producing entrepreneurs. This has become necessary due to continuous decrease in the number of jobs available for school leavers, continued privatization of government owned organizations and consequently the reduction of government interference in private sector. Governments around the world, including Nigeria thus encourage increased private sector responsibility and reduction in

government intervention in job creation. This development has thus created a need for education on entrepreneurship, which encompasses areas such as investing, divestiture, mergers, acquisitions and management. Effort thus needs to be made in order to gear the education system towards being relevant to these aforementioned parameters. This has been done, albeit in a small scale in Nigeria by the establishment of various Centres of Entrepreneurship in tertiary institutions and also the teaching of entrepreneurial studies in these

institutions. This was started in 2006 when the Federal Government, through the ministry of education made entrepreneurship studies a compulsory course in tertiary institutions in Nigeria in order to equip university graduates with basic entrepreneurial skills that will enable them to utilize opportunities that will be available for them after graduation. There has however, been a debate whether tertiary institutions can meet this need of creating entrepreneurs. Research carried out in the UK by the Small Business Research Trust (2010) shows that only 14% of the survey sample believed that entrepreneurial skills could be acquired from a process of learning. This paper therefore aims at addressing what is meant by “the entrepreneur”, highlight entrepreneurs are important to the society and how entrepreneurs can be developed by tertiary institutions.

Characteristics of the Entrepreneur

An entrepreneur is someone who undertakes to make things happen and also does make things happen. This thus makes it possible to agree with Busenitz (1999), who observed that entrepreneurship is the ability to create and build something from nothing. It involves initiating, doing, achieving and building enterprise or an organization. It is the knack of sensing opportunity where others sense chaos, hopelessness, contradiction and confusion and also

moving forward to utilize these opportunities.

Studies have shown that despite different definitions of entrepreneurship, there are certain distinct characteristics that make an entrepreneur to stand out. These are

- **Risk taking ability:** Entrepreneurs are known to be risk takers. However, they take measured risks, and usually carry out analysis and feasibility studies on ventures they want to go into in order to decipher the workability of the venture and also the pitfalls that are obtainable and thus make contingency plans for worst case scenarios (Anyakoha, 2009). Entrepreneurs on the average are more confident than conventional managers in the fact that they are open to taking risks and they also have higher level of self confidence.
- **Self starter and self driven:** According to Anyakoha (2009), an entrepreneur does not need any external force or factor to drive him. He knows that if something is to be done, he has to get it done. This is what gives them the will to go the extra mile in achieving his/her objectives. This also accounts for the reason why most entrepreneurs are “restless” and full of optimism.
- **Need for achievement:** According to Ene-Obong (2006) in Anyakoha (2009), entrepreneurs have a high need for achievement and achievers

will choose situations that are characterised by

- Individual responsibility
- Moderate to high level of risk taking
- Knowledge of results of decisions
- Anticipation of future possibilities

It is the prospect of achievement that drives entrepreneurs. An entrepreneur uses the aforementioned as a yardsticks to measure his success, not only in his business ventures but also in everything he undertakes in life.

• **High Locus of Control:** According to Rotter (1994), an individual has a high locus of control when he/she believes that events in their life derive from their own actions and not from any external factors. For example, if such an individual fails to do well in a test he will blame it wholly on his lack of preparedness and not on any external factor. Matlay (2008) postulated that the entrepreneur maintains a high internal locus of control that makes him/her believe that that achieving a goal is dependent on his/her behaviour or individual characteristics. He/she therefore always wants to be in-charge of everything that takes place around him. Entrepreneurs, according to Anyakoha (1997), the habit of always taking the initiative is necessary for entrepreneurial success. Also, according to Cromie (2000), high achievers usually exhibit

entrepreneurial behaviours and also that a high locus of control is necessary for entrepreneurial success.

• **Desire for freedom or autonomy:** Entrepreneurs always want to be in control at all times, hence their desire for freedom and autonomy. They also have a far greater fear of external control than non-entrepreneurs. According to Hisrich (2005), entrepreneurs value individualism and freedom more than conventional managers and usually have a dislike for social norms, procedures and rules. As a result of this, they find it difficult to excel in stifling environments where their creativity cannot be brought to the fore. This makes them to be labelled 'deviant' in many circumstances.

• **Creativity and opportunism:** The concept of creativity, according to Franken (1999), is the tendency to generate or recognize ideas that are useful in providing possible solutions to problems. Opportunism on the other hand can be defined as the ability to capitalize on existing circumstances in order to create profit or achieve a desired objective. Entrepreneurs have been known to create ventures out of existing circumstances. They also utilize old or moribund ideas by modifying them and using them to solve existing problems (Utsch and Raush, 2000). This they are able to achieve

because of their ability to see problems as opportunities to create solutions and also make profit (Nieuwenhuizen, and Groenwald 2004).

Youth and Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

The Federal Government of Nigeria, in conjunction with the ministry of Finance, with the support of some corporate organizations launched a programme titled Youth Enterprise With Innovation in Nigeria, popularly tagged "Youwin!". It was established with the vision of being a creative and innovative business plan competition aimed at encouraging and supporting aspiring entrepreneurs.

Objectives of Youwin

The major objective of the "Youwin!" programme is to encourage entrepreneurially minded Nigerian youths to develop and execute creative business plans that will generate jobs.

It also aims at exposing these budding youth entrepreneurs to business leaders, investors and inventors in the Nigeria.

Specific Objectives of the programme are

- To attract innovative and creative ideas from young entrepreneurs from universities, polytechnics, technical colleges and other post secondary institutions in Nigeria.

- Provide a one-time equity grant for the over 2,400 aspiring entrepreneurs to start their business concepts and mitigate start-up risks.
- Generate between 80,000 to 110,000 jobs for currently unemployed Nigerian youths over a three year period in which three cycles will be implemented.
- Provide business training for more than 6,500 entrepreneurs in all the geo-political zones in Nigeria.
- Encourages expansion and emergence of spinoffs of existing small businesses in Nigeria.
- Enable entrepreneurs to access a wide professional business network in order to improve their visibility.
(www.youwin.org.ng)

The programme was aimed at young men and women under the age of 45 and provided start up grants for entrepreneurs for to the tune of N10 million. More than 2,400 (two thousand four hundred) Nigerian youths, both male and female benefitted from this program (<https://www.youwin.org.ng/>).

The Youwin project is a highly laudable one because it has encouraged youths to be creative and also focus on entrepreneurship. This has created jobs for thousands of youths directly and indirectly and

the effect will be felt in years to come.

The Need for Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurs play vital roles in every economy. Their role emphasizes the need for entrepreneurship. According to Gibb (1996), there are basically three reasons, which inform the need for entrepreneurship education. These are (i) job creation and economic development (ii) strategic adjustment and (iii) deregulation and privatization of public owned enterprises and state owned organizations.

- *Job creation and economic development:* In the United States of America, more than 59% of jobs are created by small and medium scale businesses (U.S. Small Business Administration (2010). This shows the important role entrepreneurs play in job creation. These jobs created in communities bring about economic development. Successful entrepreneurship ventures in communities usually have a multiplier effect on the community as one successful business will always give rise to another successful business as growth fuels the demand for labour, and other raw materials (Barro, 1997).
- *Strategic adjustment:* The world is entering into an era of unprecedented change. Under such circumstances, society should not

only be able to anticipate change and accommodate change, but also initiate change. As a result of transformation in social and economic environment, it should be a national priority to release and support the skills of men and women who can visualise and push innovations (Matlay, 2008). With the advent of globalization, the markets around the world have become intertwined with each other, causing an increase in competition of products and services. This has also led organizations to find out ways of producing their products and services cheaper, which has led to the popularity of the concept of outsourcing. Also, organizations, in a bid to maximize profits, have consistently been downsizing staff. The big firms that were relied upon to provide jobs, healthcare and pensions for people have gradually reneged on this responsibility. There was therefore a need for individuals to take initiative in order be able to fend for themselves. This, according to Arnold (1995) has led to the establishment of small but growing businesses by entrepreneurs who saw a problem and created ventures with the aim of solving such problems and also providing means of livelihood for themselves and others.

- *Privatization and deregulation:* In Nigeria today, privatization has gained popularity, as the government aims at divesting its

holdings on public companies. This is done with the view that proven entrepreneurs will take over these organizations and run them more efficiently than the government and thus provide excellent services for the public, though they will do it to make profit as well. The justification for privatization has arisen because public organizations have proved burdensome to several national governments to manage and thus the need to decongest. However, these organizations will be better run by entrepreneurs, thus the need to sell these organizations to the right entrepreneurs. An example of this is the privatization of British Rail in 1993 that brought about the advent of companies like Virgin Trains, Cross Country and Stagecoach; making rail transport in the U.K. faster, more efficient and also more affordable to individuals (Alexander, 2009).

Skills Needed by Entrepreneurs

There are essential skills which entrepreneurs should acquire in order to enhance their success. Most of these skills may not always be taught and learnt in schools Akudolu (2010) noted that most school programmes in Nigeria educate students “about” entrepreneurship not “for” entrepreneurship. There is therefore a need to introduce modules that will focus on the improvement of the following skills which are vital for success in

entrepreneurship. These skills, according to Staley, Husock and David (2001), these skills are (i) Communication skills, especially persuasion (ii) creativity skills (iii) critical thinking and assessment skills (iv) leadership skills (v) negotiation skills (vi) problem solving skills (vii) social networking skills (viii) Time management skills

In addition to these skills it is important to create a learning environment that would stimulate their creative thinking (European Commission, 2007). An enabling learning environment is one where students are not only allowed be encouraged to take initiative on projects, driven to learn from mistakes and also taught how not to be afraid of failure (European Commission, 2007).

Ways of Enhancing the Acquisition of Entrepreneurial Skills

In order to enhance the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills by students, the following are necessary:

- Students should be helped to be involved in their own learning. This should include negotiating their learning objectives with their tutor, the processes, resources and activities required to meet those objectives and also ways to determine if the objectives have been met. This will help in stimulating motivation, reduce dependency and also provide experience of role orientation

(Boyles, 2012). Such a learning scenario will also eliminate situations in which students will merely pass through the module and not actively participate in the learning process.

- Students should be involved in real life problem solving situations, possibly in teams. This will enable the students to develop both intuitive and rational thinking and also enable them to understand the multi-faceted nature of problems. It will also improve their communication skills and team building skills as they capitalize on each others' strengths and each person makes meaningful contributions towards solving the problem (Boyles, 2012). This will also help improve their communication skills and also their ability to effectively cooperate with each other. According to the cone of learning designed in 1969 by Edgar Dale in the United States of America, the most effective form of learning is actually performing the task; more effective than reading. Also, simulation of activity is an effective method of teaching, thus activities such as games are effective teachers and learners tend to remember for long what they learn via simulation activity.
- Students should be with role models who are also involved in the learning and assessment

process. This will be instrumental in demonstrating role orientation, motivation and ability.

- Students should be encouraged to formulate more than one solution for open ended questions, and bring out valid, sensible arguments, backed with facts, to substantiate their answers (Boyles, 2012). This will help them in being creative enough to proffer more than one solution to real life problems that they will encounter in future.

Conclusion

The importance of entrepreneurship education cannot be over-emphasized. This is because the study is instrumental in producing consummate entrepreneurs who through their establishment of ventures, contribute immensely to societal growth and development. Entrepreneurship has also gained more importance due to the increase in unemployment and the need to keep youths positively busy. The Nigerian government has also put in place measures to encourage entrepreneurs such as the Youwin programme for both men and women, and also making entrepreneurship education mandatory in federal higher institutions.

Recommendations

Entrepreneurship education should be taught with greater focus on

student participation in the teaching and learning process. There ought to be a high level of emphasis on assignments and practical activities in order to ensure that the lessons taught are imbibed by students.

Teachers should embark on continuous training in order to keep abreast with current teaching trends in entrepreneurship education because this enable teaches to be able to effectively teach the subject area.

The federal government should continue to make entrepreneurship a priority by encouraging local small businesses by offering tax waivers for indigenous companies such as lower taxes, etc.

The course content in entrepreneurship education should feature real-life issues, and students should be encouraged to be proactive in proffering solutions so as to increase their creativity and problem solving skills

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