

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AS A NEW PARADIGM FOR TACKLING UNEMPLOYMENT: A SPOTLIGHT ON THE OTM PROGRAMME

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Abstract

The fear of unemployment seems to be 'beginning of wisdom' as it were in Nigeria. Various government policies aimed at alleviating unemployment in the past have made little impact. However, the current policy of entrepreneurship education at all levels and with no regard to programme of study seems to have come to the rescue, especially as practical skills have been included. This paper discusses this trend as a new paradigm to fight this monster, unemployment. It also stresses how the OTM programme by virtue of the rich ICT component is poised to reduce the unemployment queues. The authors then partly recommended amongst others, that the government should invest in EED/Vocational Centres and business incubation centres and parks to assist new and fledgling entrepreneurs.

Introduction

It no longer makes news headlines that unemployment in Nigeria has soared heavens high. It probably is also nothing new to say that this problem is rising at an exponential rather than an arithmetic progression. Graduates keep pouring into an already saturated job market. Imagine the fact that the number of graduates are so high that the number of NYSC members being mobilized have been batched within a year from A to C, and that is how it will continue until its gets to alphabet Z and then maybe combination of alphabets or numbers begin. Several attempts at solving this problem in the past have failed. The shortcoming is at the implementation and execution point. Hence, one such fantastic idea that is on board now as a means of tackling the unemployment dilemma is Entrepreneurship Education Development (EED 126, EED 216, and EED 413) – a course designed with a practical content, and to be taken by ALL students irrespective of the level and programme of study.

One vocation that is not left out is the Office Technology and Management programme, a course of study classified under Business Studies. This course of study aims at training individuals who are skilled and could be self-reliant. This paper therefore intends to examine the significance of Entrepreneurship Education vis-à-vis the OTM programme, for one thing, as a panacea to unemployment and for two as it impacts on our personality, and for three specifically as it can affect students'

academic pursuits and in other fields of life.

Why the Need for a New Paradigm

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defined paradigm as a type of something, a model, pattern. It is a known fact that the issue of making a living upon graduation is an age old topic of major concern to teeming undergraduates, parents and governments, what with the rising wave of unemployment in the country, and the economic meltdown all over the world. Over the years, successive governments have ventured into various programmes and policies intended to tackle unemployment and its attendant social problems have ended up unfruitful. The problem has been at the implementation stage. Examples of such are the Green Revolution (1983), Operation Feed the Nation (1978), Structural Adjustment Programme (1986), Poverty Alleviation Programme (2002) and National Directorate of Employment (1987) as listed by Odetayo (2004). Others include DFFRI, NAPEP, NEEDS, etc. That there is need for such reversal of methodology can be adduced from the comments of an IT and Human Resource expert, Chris Ugenyi who noted that 'our educational system is not practical oriented. People are supposed to know the act of being self-employed, how to create things by looking into different ventures.' What did he advocate as a solution? 'The system should be changed by upgrading the system through the introduction of entrepreneurship practice and realistic business methodology that people can actually go into and survive.' Hence, the emphasis in contemporary Nigeria is entrepreneurship. What then is the Policy objective and thrust of this programme? How has it affected other courses, particularly OTM? What impact will ICT have on the entrepreneurial development scheme? These would form the highlights of this paper.

Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship education and Why so Important

Various definition have been adduced as to who or what an entrepreneur is. A National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) Training Manual (2007) stated that 'Entrepreneurship is a mind set... to be an entrepreneur as a person who habitually creates and innovates to build something of recognized value around perceived opportunities.' This definition conveys the idea of an individual or organization that habitually starts something from the scratch, overcoming obstacles, seeing ideas hidden to others to a logical conclusion and reaping the attendant values and rewards for such efforts.

Odetayo (2004) opined that entrepreneurs "play leading roles in new business opportunities, bringing funds needed to initiate business, organize and direct... operations to provide economic goods and services." The definitions are endless, but an obvious factor is that entrepreneurs are innovative and creative, and hardworking. Why then is entrepreneurship important? Why the government interest in the programme? The answers to the above questions is seen from the comments in the

NBTE Manual earlier quoted, when it stated that this scheme is aimed at:

1. Imparting life skills to students.
2. Helping students learn to identify enterprise opportunities in their neighbourhood.
3. Helping students learn opportunities available for self-employment.
4. Being able to identify successful entrepreneurs in Nigeria and evaluating the role of entrepreneurship in wealth creation.
5. Recognize the indispensability of the small scale, private sector enterprise as the dynamic engine needed for general economic development.

In Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, an Entrepreneurship Development Centre has been established which co-ordinates vocational and practical skill acquisition by the students of the various departments in the institution. A number of skills are floated from which students made a choice.

Amongst the vocations students can choose from include:

1. Electrical Installation
2. Keyboarding
3. Fruit Juice Making/Yogurt Making
4. Photography
5. Film Editing/Video Coverage
6. Electrical & Gas Welding Fabrication
7. Automobile Electrical
8. Animal Fattening
9. Poultry Production
10. Fishery/Fish Farming
11. Radio/TV Repairs
12. POP and Pillar Design
13. Painting Designing and Decorating
14. Website Development/Desktop Publishing
15. Data Base Maintenance
16. Photocopying, Scanning etc.
17. Bakery/Pastry
18. Computer Assembling & Maintenance
19. Book Binding/ Printing, Publishing
20. Carpentry and Joinery
21. Air Condition/ Refrigeration Maintenance
22. Soap Making
23. Pomade Making
24. Irrigation
25. Aluminium Fabrication
26. Bread Making

Thus, the comments from the book *Doing Business in Nigeria* (2008) acknowledged that “starting a business is one of the paths out of poverty”. This much is the comment of Odetayo (2004) when he stated that entrepreneurship will prepare graduates in the face of massive unemployment trailing our graduates today.” The recent death of applicants into Prisons and Customs Services come readily to mind. Also, its importance is seen in some of the things it teaches students. These include the characteristics of entrepreneurs, some of which are discussed below:

Characteristics of Entrepreneurs

The following are important characteristics, but by no means all:

Self Confidence – Entrepreneurs views obstacles as stepping stones to greater heights rather than stumbling blocks. They see success as a beginning not a destination.

Risk Taking – Not afraid of taking moderate risks.

Result Oriented – Perseveres and determines to achieve set measurable objectives.

Drive and Energy – Is not lazy. Puts all physical and mental energy towards his business and goal.

Long-Term Investment – Takes present decisions bearing the future in mind.

Leadership – Motivates and guides others towards achieving and accomplishing its goal. Encourages team work and team spirit.

Creativity – Is resourceful and versatile, always seeks ways to improve business.

Examining the Link between Entrepreneurship Education and the OTM Programme

The OTM programme, previously known as Secretarial Studies, had strong emphasis on Shorthand and Typewriting. The aim of that programme was to prepare the students for the world of work (NBTE in Arikwandu, 2005). However, with the dynamism of technology and constant flux in the world of work, it became necessary to enrich and expand the programme to meet the needs of the contemporary office. This is especially essential as curriculums ought to change in response to the current needs of society. This resulted in the expansion of the course content and change of nomenclature from Secretarial Studies to Office Technology and Management (OTM). This change and expansion came along with a lot of infusion of new courses which are ICT based (Nwaogwugwu, 2007).

This programme is a skill course, a vocation which can equip students to be self-reliant at graduation (Ifesi, Arikwandu & Irorakpor, 2007; Okoro & Agomuo, 2008). Of course, this course falls under business education Ndinechi in Ogunfuminayi (2004) conceived business education to encompass all the names for the many studies including Secretarial education. Education about business and for business.

As has been widely acknowledged in various quarters, the effect of technology – ICT – is pervasive having proliferated and affected all spheres of human activities (Awake!

November 2009). What of the World Wide Web which interconnects Computers, the core of ICT? In the words of Otagburuagu and Eze (2007) these “websites have become great oceans of information and send communication across millions of miles.” In fact, such facilities have shrunk the world to the dot at the end of this sentence. Such enterprises which fall into the category of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) here become imperative. According to CBN Guidelines affirms that the Federal Government views such “SMEs as vehicles for rapid industrialization, sustainable economic development and employment generation.” It further states that such efforts will stimulate economic growth, develop local technology and generate employment. It abounds with opportunities for electronic business contacts – e-business, e-Commerce, e-Government and e-everything else we can think of.

Again, entrepreneurship is all about innovation, seeing opportunities that others might not. Mohammed (2008) aptly put it this way, 'the entrepreneurs vision is usually supported by an interlocked collection of specific ideas not available in the market place.' There is no gainsaying that information is at the core of innovation, and results of such innovations must be communicated to the widest extent possible. The Link? Technology that powers such aims and brings them to fruition. No wonder why the NBTE Training Manual on Entrepreneurship Education stated some of the competencies of entrepreneurs to include “a body of knowledge, which consists of a set or body of information stored to be recalled at an appropriate time... There must be a high sense of information seeking.” Mohammed, quoted earlier stated that information can help the budding entrepreneur is available, and part of the places where such was is from the internet.

What do all these mean for the OTM profession? The fact should speak for itself, and the fact here is that the OTM programme is rich in its ICT component. At this point, it is essential to examine the ICT Component of the OTM programme. In Arikwadu (2010), the ICT components were divided into five classes. The table below clearly shows the classifications and the levels at which they are taught.

Table 1: OTM ICT Components

S/No	Classification/Component	Course Title	Level
1.	Word Processing	ICT I ICT II ICT Office Application	ND ND HND
2.	Designs/Printing and Publishing	Desktop Publishing Adv. Desktop Publishing	ND HND
3.	Data/Records Management	Data Base Management	HND
4.	Internet Accessibility	Web Page Design Adv. Web Page Design	ND HND
5.	Decision Making System	Management Information System	HND

(Source: Arikwandu, 2010).

It must be pointed out that the courses as enshrined in the OTM curriculum should be taught at no less than six hourly practical content approach weekly. A thorough scrutiny of the above course content will show that the OTM programme is totally ICT compliant and that its trainees are equipped with high level of computer competencies. The implication? That the OTM course should be seen as a veritable tool for reducing unemployment. Hence, OTM trainees can and should apply the benefits of their entrepreneurial education into scrutinizing this programme and seeking areas for self-reliance which the programme presents. Thus, such self-employed ones will be in a better stead to employ others, the by-product of which is a reduction in the unemployment queues.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities in OTM Programme

By virtue of the classification provided by the ICT components as suggested above, the following are few of the possible areas of business:

1. Office/Secretarial Services Providers (Business Centres)
2. Printing and Publishing – Books and Stickers
3. e-Commerce Specialists
4. Brokerage Services (Forex/Shares)
5. Office Designers (that is suggest suitable office equipment, just as interior designers) and adequate software programs for use in offices
6. Package Conferences, Seminars and workshops
7. Consultancy Services
8. Data Base Management experts and Knowledge Management Specialists
9. Contractors
10. Computer/System Maintenance/Services, etc.

11. Data Retriever
12. Bulletin Board Services
14. Bulk SMS Service Providers
15. On-line Services Consultants
16. On-line Job Search
17. Printing Broker
18. Resume Service
19. Software Conversion Service
20. Stenography Service
21. Time Management Specialist
22. Business Plan Writer
23. Computer Software Sales
24. Database Consultant
25. Seminar (Speakers) Service
26. Information Consultant
27. Public Speaker
28. Speech Writing Consultant
29. Computer Composer
30. Computerized Special Effects Designer
31. e-Marketing/e-Commerce
32. Motivational Speaker
33. Desktop Publishing

The possibilities are endless, as this profession serves as the foundation and springboard for wider scope of activities. This might as well be referred to as the programme's hidden or underlying curriculum.

Applying Entrepreneurship Knowledge to Academic Work and Other Spheres of Life

Earlier, the characteristics of entrepreneurs had been listed. Such pleasant characteristics if imbibed would improve human relations. But these authors posit also that such traits could indeed be applied by students in their academic life on the one hand and by everyone else in their various fields of endeavours for the matter. Thus, **for students and everyone for that matter should be entrepreneurial about their studies and various pursuits.** The characteristics itemized above will be applied here:

Self Confidence – Do not claim 'let my people go results' as your portion. Those who graduate with distinction do not have more than one head. Invariably, people should aim for the best in their endeavours. They should be confident enough to settle for the best and nothing less.

Result Oriented – Persevere and be determined. Do not allow any subjects, like

Shorthand or mathematics or calculus to floor you. Consider these as challenges and opportunities to improve. Take systematic steps to overcome difficult subjects. For all others, any difficulties should be tackled relentlessly.

Drive and Energy – Do not be lazy about your studies. No 'fire brigade approach' to your studies and exam preparations. Be focused on your studies. For all others, be focused on your life pursuits and be enthusiastically passionate in the process.

Long-Term Investment – Bear in mind that education is a long term investment. Therefore do not do things now that will jeopardize that future, for example exam malpractice. Similarly, we need not engage in any vices that will truncate our success in any sphere of life.

Leadership – Motivate and guide other students towards achieving and accomplishing academic goals. Encourage team work and team spirit by organizing tutorials. Again, such trait will make us contribute more positively to the development of our environment.

Creativity – Try various studying and recalling techniques, e.g. mnemonics, etc. Always seek ways to improve your performance.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it could be rightly deduced that Entrepreneurship Education is a very good policy move by the government towards alleviating unemployment. Its benefits transcends the business world. It encompasses even social advantages for everyone who allows entrepreneurial spirit to flow and run in their veins.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward:

1. That the practical's content of the EED curriculum be sustained and improved upon.
2. That students should not take for granted the EED program and course.
3. That government should invest in EED/vocational training and business incubation centres and parks to assist new and fledgling entrepreneurs.
4. Students preparing for the IT and NYSC should prepare their minds towards entrepreneurship and self reliance and seize such opportunities to work at it.
5. Stakeholders should not look down on the OTM Programme, since its rich ICT content is a stepping stone to financial independence.
6. Any funds contributed for the purpose of entrepreneurship programmes and activities should be used singularly for such.

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