

NEED TO STRENGTHEN LITERACY SKILLS FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL GROWTH

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Introduction

The question of who is an entrepreneur or what is entrepreneurship, has raised interest among students, researchers, government officials and even lay people. But the word entrepreneur originated from France. Literarily it means 'between taker' or 'go between'. Webster (1981) described the entrepreneur as the person who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business. Okpukpara (2011) traces the origin of entrepreneurship to the 18th Century when the French economist, Richard Cantillon associated the 'risk bearing activity' in the economy with the entrepreneur. By the turn of the 19th century, precisely in 1821, Says as cited in Odigbo & Owoseye (2005), described the entrepreneur as one who moves economic resources from areas of low productivity to areas of high productivity. In furtherance to that, Hisrich et al (2008) define the entrepreneur as an individual who takes risks and starts something new. So an entrepreneur is not just a risk bearer but also an innovator. A good example of one of the earliest entrepreneurs is Marco Polo who established trade routes to the Far East. This became the forerunner of today's international

trade and commerce. In the middle ages, the term entrepreneur was applied to people who managed large production projects such as building castles and fortifications, abbeys, cathedrals etc. But by 17th century, the entrepreneur as a risk bearer emerged again. The entrepreneur became one who entered into contractual arrangement with the government of the day to perform certain services or supply stipulated products, ready to enjoy both profits and risks. Richard Cantillon, a noted economist who is today regarded as the founder of the term 'entrepreneur' postulated that the entrepreneur is a 'risk-taker' and that merchants, farmers, craftsmen and other sole proprietors who buy or do business at a certain price and sell at an uncertain price, therefore operating at a risk are all entrepreneurs. By 19th and 20th centuries, the entrepreneur became an innovator i.e an individual developing something unique.

Today, entrepreneurship becomes the process of creating something new and assuming the risks and rewards. The entrepreneurial process involves pursuing a new venture whether it be pushing new products into existing markets, existing products into new markets, and/or the creation of new organizations or enterprises. The process by which an entrepreneur comes up with the opportunity for a new venture thereby identifying new opportunities and determining how to pursue it to success, is entrepreneurship. This may be why Says as cited in Odigbo & Owoseye (2005), described the entrepreneur as one who moves economic resources from areas of low productivity to areas of high productivity.

With this background, it becomes obvious that entrepreneurship is a necessary ingredient for stimulating

economic growth and employment opportunities in all societies, whether developed or developing. Okpukpara (2011), maintains that in the developing world, successful small businesses (SMEs) are the primary engines of job creation, income growth and poverty reduction. Other scholars have suggested ideas to improve the entrepreneurial process. Some scholars see entrepreneurs as a special class of people endowed with special traits to be innovative. As time went on, however, this view was contested. Drucker (1985) stated: 'I have seen people of the most diverse personalities perform well as entrepreneurs.' This means that it is possible to develop entrepreneurial skills through training aimed at improving the human capital. And that is where education comes in.

Education and Entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition

Throughout the world, education is regarded as a strong tool for the development of nations. This is because education equips people with the literacy skills which carry them throughout life. The development of any nation is related to the development of human beings and the development of any nation is a function of their literacy index. Odimegwu, (2005) posits that governments all over the world are aware of the place of literacy education and so invests seriously in the education industry as a way of laying a strong foundation for national growth. It is believed that high quality education will serve as a catalyst for human and national development. And high quality education is the equivalence of high literacy skills. Highly literate people are able to fit in well into the society, to find a way to develop gainful employment through creating wealth. This will reduce the situation where graduates of secondary and tertiary institutions roam the streets hoping and looking for non-existent jobs. This scenario raises a number of issues. Despite

the huge investments in education, despite the population explosion in our institutions, secondary and tertiary, despite the constant review of entry requirements for admission purposes and review of mode of entry, the products of our education system seem to be falling short of expectation resulting in unemployment, underdevelopment and poverty.

These issues with far reaching consequences. It becomes paramount to review our educational programmes for more effective outputs so as to avert the imminent danger posed by semi-literate graduates who are not able to fit properly into the society. There is grave danger when our graduates cannot compete favorably in today's global economy driven by Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This researcher believes that one of the ways to confront the problem is for institutions of higher learning to ensure that the necessary literacy skills are strengthened. Undergraduate students should be equipped with entrepreneurial skills so that on graduation, they could become 'job creators' and not 'job seekers'. Ene (2014) believes that many successful world economies have a long history of academic entrepreneurship education. As stated in Klandt & Volkmann (2006: 65), record shows that universities in the USA are generally regarded as the pioneers of academic entrepreneurship education. As early as 1947, foundations for entrepreneurship education at the university level were laid with Masters in Business Administration (MBA) courses like Management of New Enterprise. In 1953, Peter Drucker introduced 'Entrepreneurship and Innovation' at the University of New York. In the US, a dynamic development process in entrepreneurship training started in the early 1970s and continues till today. By the end of 2002, (Vesper and Canor)

more than 700 entrepreneurship programs were included in the curriculum of business schools and universities in the USA. The result is that the economy of USA is stable. There are more people in private businesses than in public offices. America is said to have a high literacy index. The economy is strong and is able to sustain millions of youths from Nigeria and elsewhere who troop into America. America is not so interested in the certificates paraded by applicants but rather in the demonstrable skills. So schools should design and implement literacy programmes that result in practical and problem-solving skill acquisition.

Okpukpara (2002) maintains that, entrepreneurship education programmes are successful in encouraging entrepreneurs to start new business, or improve the performance of old ones. Enterprise/Entrepreneurship education programmes provide social experiences such as opportunities to exercise significant responsibilities, to start one's own business, and to observe relevant role models.

It follows that the right type of education can develop literacy skills to the point where latent resources inherent in man, come alive. The resources include knowledge, skills, talents, experiences and attitudes. It is through education that the right type of trainings, skills and attitude are cultivated and imparted to the citizenry. This goal is clearly stated in the National Policy on Education. According to the policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN 4th Edition 2004), the goals of tertiary education shall be to:

1. Contribute to human development through high level relevant manpower development and training;

2. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individuals and the society;
3. Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment;
4. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which would enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
5. To promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
6. To forge and cement national unity; and
7. Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

To a large extent, all the above mentioned goals of tertiary education stress that the learners must develop their physical and intellectual capabilities to be able to become self-reliant and useful members of the society. This means that the curriculum must be mindful of such provisions and find ways to pursue them.

Entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition is a way of responding to the challenges of the new millennium such as unemployment, poverty, diseases that are wrecking the underdeveloped world. Ogunkunle (2009) defined wealth creation as a system that teaches people inside knowledge and develops avenues of income for themselves and their families. It is having financial freedom, whereby citizens can get rid of the vicious circle of poverty, corruption and crime. People have to be made aware of how to accumulate wealth for investment, create jobs and increase productivity. This will lead to enhanced national development. Development is a process that begins

with the mind. The challenge is to develop the academic curriculum in such a way that education integrates knowledge with practice, thereby strengthening the various literacies. Entrepreneurship courses should be included among General Study Courses. Students should not just dwell on theories of business but could also take courses that are directly related to successful business management and apply these in their various disciplines. They should include practical courses. According to NOUN handbook (2008, 62-67), such courses may include:

- Use of English I & II
- Principles and practice of management
- Introduction to Business Management
- Business Communications
- Micro Credit Policy and Institutions
- Management Information Systems
- Consumer Behavior
- Business Ethics
- Small Business Finance
- Business Policy
- Investment Analysis
- Distribution and Sales Management
- Risk Management
- Human Resource Management Principles.
- Principles and Practice of International Trade
- Analysis of Financial Management
- Etc.

The above listed courses and others are expected to lead students to practical ways to establish a business, how to grow a

successful business, managing the finances of a business, how to write business proposals and letters and many more. Students could be assigned to understudy existing businesses to have a firsthand view of the successes and pitfalls. It will be a more practical thing similar to but more effective than the Student Industrial Work Experience (SIWES), or the Industrial Training scheme (IT). The difference is that these courses would be built into the school programmes to be part of the curricular provisions for every course of study. From time to time the students would be engaged in seminar classes to discuss and review their experiences. This is the secret behind the emergence of the new world economies of China, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and other countries where students produce, even for export, electrical and technological toys such as handsets and accessories, earphones, watches and clocks, hair driers, electrical bells, home theatres, musical equipment and many home appliances. Nigerian students in their JETS (Junior Engineers, Technicians and Scientists) club have produced startling things like toy cars and airplanes. Such enterprise spirits should not only be cultivated and sustained throughout the school days. This approach should explore the entrepreneurial openings of every subject or course of study and build such capacities in the students. On completion of the course of study, graduates of a well planned entrepreneurship acquisition programme would be in a position to establish something that can create wealth and generate faster economic growth.

Skills Needed for Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship skill acquisition implies that individuals after acquiring certain skills will change their

outlook and mind set which will make it possible for their ideas to be converted into action. It is also possible that institutions of learning systematically, organize training programmes to build the capacity of their products/graduates to take up business ventures that can cause a lot of economic change and create wealth. Such people will not only be self employed but will employ others thereby reducing unemployment. According to Okpukpara (2011), there are certain recurring attributes such as innovation, creativity, risk-bearing, value addition and profit orientation common with successful entrepreneurs. These are part of the literacies that should be inculcated into the students. In addition, Ajagu (2005) lists some terms associated with successful entrepreneurs and they include: initiative, attitude, leadership, organization, decisiveness, responsibility, perseverance, energy, industry, self discipline, self confidence, feedback, conscientiousness, fearlessness and boldness and non-procrastination. Highlighting the extreme importance of these skills, Ajagu (2005: 96) had this to say on perseverance which is one of the salient qualities of successful entrepreneurs it is the ability to be continuously focused towards one's goal despite all odds and failures. In fact one's ability to surmount obstacles, hardships, opposition and failures and still succeed makes him a successful entrepreneur. Successful entrepreneurs do not give up. Success, most of the time is attained by those who refused to take defeat as final. In fact, no success story is complete without some level of woeful experience. A teabag will not release its flavor until it goes through hot water. Winners are ex-losers who refused to quit.

Ogunkunle (2009) also noted that the curriculum for wealth creation should be integrated into the existing school curriculum with specific emphasis on equipping learners with

(Literacy) skills such as:

- a). Thinking skills.
- b). Problem Solving Skills
- c). Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Skills.
- d). Language Skills.
- e). Basic Skills.

Practical Literacy

The inadequacy of education is immediately felt each time one comes across a graduate who cannot express himself well, or a graduate who is languishing in unemployment. Such a graduate has not acquired survival skills that can ensure self reliance as stipulated in the national policy on education (NPF 2004). In addition to the reading and writing, every school leaver should develop his/her literacy skills to include practical work skills. Now that Nigeria is promoting entrepreneurship as a way to fight poverty, there is need to include and strengthen literacy skills for a lasting economic break. In addition, it will reduce the possibility of illiterate graduates who provide cheap unskilled labour. They are equally a gullible, ungovernable, irrational group of people in the society. They are commercial drivers, motor park touts, political thugs, okada drivers who have transformed to keke napep drivers, barrow pusher and load haulers, servers of artisans, all are unskilled young men who are parasite to the society, hanging on the fringes of the society and eking out a living by fair or foul means.

Strengthening Literacy Skills for Entrepreneurial Growth

Initially literacy meant the ability 'to read and write' in the first and second languages. With time, emphasis shifted to the significance of literacy and so the meaning expanded to

include numeracy. So the definition now became the ability to read, write, count and use numbers for solving problems (Otagburuagu 2006). Literacy was the parameter for identifying and defining someone of importance, otherwise known as 'a man of letters' and so it became an aphorism 'Reading make the a man, writing a total man' in social and economic circles. Such a man earned fat salaries and worked tall and exhibited pride of his literacy skills.

Today things have changed. The scenario is quite different now. The economy has undergone revolutionary changes due to technology and globalization. The literacy skills of yesterday could no longer sustain the economic lifestyle of today. It therefore means that the literacy skills must expand to be relevant. Its definition had to change.

By 2006, Otagburuagu et al saw literacy as both a process of skill acquisition for productive and purposeful life in the society as well as a product of organized intellectual schemes and effort. Literacy is also a tool for man's total empowerment. Every society needs literacy for capacity building. To the extent that international agencies such as United Nations , the World Bank and UNESCO, use literacy index in policy formulation and in the classification of societies. It therefore is not a surprise that with the advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the global economy became dependent on it. The definition of literacy now adjusted to include the ability to read, write, use numbers for work and problem solving and apply ICT skills in everyday life Otagbruagu (2007). So in reality, literacy skills should adjust to the current demands of the time. So entrepreneurship skills form part of the new literacy demands of the day. In order to meet the economic demands of the day, the populace must strengthen

their literacy skills to incorporate entrepreneurship skills. This will move the country forward. Government appears to be rising to the occasion. In response to the dwindling economic situation, Nigeria seems to realize that entrepreneurship programmes could be an answer. The Federal government has invested heavily in Small and Medium Scale (SMEs) Enterprises as a way of prompting young ones to show interest in business development. The government has made funds available for micro credit through several schemes like the 'You Win' 'The Bank of Industry' 'Sure—P', 'National Directorate of Employment' (NDE), Agricultural transformation programmes, etc. At present, many state governments like Enugu, Kogi, Ondo, Ekiti, Benue Ebonyi, etc have all allotted some funds as soft loans and micro credit for the promotion of Small and Medium Scale (SMEs) Enterprises and other entrepreneurial programmes. There are programmes like the Open Apprenticeship Scheme meant to help school graduates to acquire one business skill or another.

However, it does appear that not much success has been achieved judging by the large number of job-seekers who troop out each time there is an invitation. The case of the Immigration interview that claimed some lives in April 2014 is still fresh in our minds. The reason is simple. Most school leavers possess nothing except the basic literacy skills of reading, writing and numeracy. But one thing needs to be done if these entrepreneurial projects will survive the first few years and then grow. The young entrepreneurs are mostly school graduates with only basic literacy skills. But is that enough to sustain them in the business world. Therefore the need to strengthen these literacy skills in our students. Many scholars see literacy as both a process of skill acquisition for productive and purposeful life in the society as well as a product of organized intellectual

schemes and effort. It is also a tool for mans total empowerment. Every society needs literacy for capacity building. Therefore literacy skills must go beyond the ordinary but into serious academic knowledge and skill acquisition. It is also a tool for mans total empowerment. Every society needs literacy for capacity building.

If literacy also means skill acquisition, it can lead our student to acquire skills that can lead to job creation, before graduation. In fact, the curriculum should ensure that our students acquire the necessary literacy skills to equip him for life out of school. The whole education system should review their curriculum to be technically or vocationally biased.

The following are some of the ways the schools can strengthen the learners' literacy skills and ensure self reliance when they leave school:

1. Some students of technical secondary schools maintain themselves in school doing electrical maintenance works, wiring houses and changing fuses. Some become electrical contractors. They execute jobs as carpenters and upholstery designers. They can repair fridges and air conditioners. The work in foundaries and fabricate small machines and spare parts and house hold utensils. It is on record that many companies like the Nigerian Bottling Company and the Nigerian Breweries at 9th Mile Corner Enugu yearly request a certain number of students from Government Technical College, Enugu. These are students who possess some authentic skills necessary to the needs of the companies.
2. The same is true of many Polytechnics. At Idah Polytechnics, students who study food technology work in the school bakery and processing chambers, producing bread, cakes,

pastries , ice creams, salad creams, fruit juices and tomato puree among others as their project work.

3. Some were able to process farm produce into finished products eg from cocoa to beverages such as Bournvita, Milo; from palm produce to vegetable oils, soaps, body creams; from bambara nuts to bambara flour; cassava flour in place of the imported wheat flour etc.
4. The department of Computer Science should offer trainings to other members of the community, sales and maintenance services to the entire school community. Their students should be able to mount cyber-cafes offering internet and other services.
5. Those in textile trade should go into fashion and designing, making clothes for people even as students, so that they are able to continue after school.
6. Various trades should be incorporated into the school curriculum. Tanning and leather works where they make shoes, bags, belts and other things for household and industrial uses. Even bead making can sustain an industrious student.
7. Cosmetologist who make soaps, detergents, body and hair creams, candles, polish or establish hair dressing saloons and beauty shops.
8. Those in Agriculture (animal husbandry) should own farms . Many years ago, school pupils owned their own farms which they nurtured till the crops are harvested. It used to be a pleasant competition. Today's students of

agriculture should be encouraged to own or manage their animals as piggery, fishery, poultry, bee-keeping, grass cutter farms. This is what obtains in Covenant University in Nigeria, where students supply goods and services to the university community. At Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu, students of Mass Communication operate radio station programmes in the university radio and handle the printing matters of the school. . Those in Industrial Chemistry produce soaps, hand sanitizers, toilet cleaners and many other things. Other institutions should borrow a page. Every course read in the university has an end product either as goods or services. Institutions should strengthen the basic literacy to incorporate skill acquisition. With this, the goal of the National Policy of Education, which says that the education system should ensure that students 'acquire both physical and intellectual skills which would enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society, will be realized.

9. **Discerning and tenacious spirit:** Young people must be taught to critically observe their immediate and distant environments with a view to discerning their needs in goods and services.. First their skills of discernment must be trained and strengthened to be able to detect the needs and services in the environment and see them as business openings. In addition they need the boldness and courage to undertake a business enterprise and be ready to bear the risks involved. They must develop and use their thinking skills to apply to emerging problems and have the skill to tackle them. Above all, it is important to develop the tenacity of purpose to hold on until success is achieved.

10. Language and Communication Skills are essential for the success of any enterprise.

As it is English is the language of education in all our schools being a core subject and the language of instruction in all classes from primary three upwards. English is a second language to Nigerians and is used for interpersonal, academic, business and official purposes. So, budding entrepreneurs must develop English Language proficiency effectively in the global economy. Good Use of English skill is critical to the success of an entrepreneur. (Izuagba and Ezenwa 2010; Otagburuagu 2007; Hisricch et al 2008 and Ene 2014).

So entrepreneurship education/curriculum now refers to a curriculum that adequately equips learners with skills, knowledge, and attitude to survive in the business world. Quoting Nelson and Leach (1981), Offorma (2005) asserts that entrepreneurship.... Curriculum equips learners with occupational survival skills and these skills as subsumed in problem solving skills, human relations, decision making, effective communications, high drive to achieve and creative skill. Put differently, it is a kind of curriculum that provides learners with the expanded literacy which take them to hands-on experience that will make them self reliant. Thereby adequately preparing them for entry into the job market either as suppliers of labour or as job creators.

Expanded literacy skill should be part of the curriculum if our graduates will be effective entrepreneurs.

Recommendations

There is urgent need to strengthen the literacy skills of our students through diversifying the curricula of academic

institutions in Nigeria as a response to the many emerging and disturbing issues such as unemployment and the inability of graduates to fit into the society after graduation. Entrepreneurship education is a move in the right direction. Based on this, the following recommendations are made:

- Entrepreneurship appears to be a positive approach towards finding the solution to unemployment. Institutions at all levels must respond by intensifying skill acquisition. Government should show adequate commitment.
- Curriculum planners should emphasize appropriate methodologies to train students in entrepreneurial skill acquisition.
- Literacy skills should be seen to include skill acquisition including knowledge of Information and Communication Skills.
- Language and communication skills must be part of the entrepreneurial skills for purposes of managing the business and maintaining interactions and interrelationships.
- The entrepreneurial programme should be such that students should be made to perceive the needs of the society early enough in their school life, to embrace it whole heartedly as a way of life.
- Nigeria should emulate other leading world economies like America and some Asian countries where entrepreneurship skill acquisition programmes have been part of their curriculum of schools for a very long time now.
- Government may consider short courses in existing establishments where theoretical and practical business courses are undertaken to consolidate the literacy skills already acquired.

Conclusion

The main reason for entrepreneurship skill acquisition for school leavers at all levels is to avoid the frustrating and debasing experience of unemployment. It is calculated to make students to look inward for self-employment. There are basic literacy skills which should be strengthened if learners will be able to establish and manage a business successfully. Entrepreneurship should be enhanced by the acquisition of certain skills including language skills. (Ogunkunle 2009).

The development of entrepreneurship skills will optimize the use of certain unexploited resources in the learners, to generate self-employment and a self sufficient economy. In addition entrepreneurship skills acquisition will, according to Ogunkunle (2009):

- a). Foster positive attitude to employment;
- b). develop entrepreneurial skills;
- c). educate current and future generations;
- d). develop inter- personal skills.
- e). Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

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