

Re-Engineering Entrepreneurial Education For Employment and Poverty Alleviation In The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined the relationship between entrepreneurial educational programmes of universities in the Niger Delta and employment/poverty alleviation in the region. The correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of all final year students of the Department of Economics/ Entrepreneurial studies from Universities of Uyo, Calabar and Port Harcourt, totaling 238. The purposive sampling technique was used as all the 238 final year students were involved in the study. Data collection was carried out with a researcher-developed instrument tagged “Entrepreneurial Education and Poverty Alleviation Questionnaire” (EEPAQ). The instrument, which had 15 items, was duly validated and tested for reliability using the Cronbach alpha formula, with a reliability estimate of 0.71. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis was used in analyzing the data collected for the study. The result revealed no significant relationship between entrepreneurial education programmes of Universities in the Niger Delta and employment/poverty alleviation in the region. Based on the findings, it was concluded that entrepreneurial education programmes of universities in the Niger Delta do not facilitate self productivity among the graduates; and that the programmes have no significant bearing with poverty alleviation in the region. Based on this, it was recommended, among others, that there is need to restructure the course contents of entrepreneurial education programmes in Nigerian universities to make it more relevant to the environment and needs of the individuals.

Keywords: Re-engineering, Entrepreneurial Education, Poverty Alleviation, Niger Delta Region, Unemployment.

1. Introduction

The need for education in the developmental effort of any nation cannot be underestimated. The development of educational sector is sine-qua non for the development in all other sectors. Adamu (2008) asserted that development in any society is anchored primarily on education. As observed by Sule (2004), education is a sure pathway to liberation of the mind and the improvement of socio economic status of people. It also follows that education and training help individuals to be empowered and escape poverty by providing them with the skills and knowledge to raise their output, income and wealth (Aliu, 2007). In the light of these facts, various governments and international agencies are making serious effort in both developed and developing countries to optimally develop the education sector. Although a number of achievements have been recorded in this regard in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, a lot of effort is still needed to meet up with the ever increasing demands and challenges of the region.

The millennium development goals coupled with the pressure of globalization and the increasing number of unemployed graduates have created new challenges for the region to refocus its attention in dealing with the myriad socio-economic problems. It is disheartening to note/observe the deteriorating position of the Niger Delta Region, despite its great natural wealth.

While acknowledging the necessity and importance of education in shaping our culture and destiny, it should equally be understood that a serious departure is needed from hitherto traditional way of doing things especially the manner of training and method of teaching in our universities. There is need therefore to refocus on entrepreneurial education at the university level. This should target alternative teaching methods that will harness, inculcate and develop the entrepreneurial career of the younger generations and also improve their potentiality towards entrepreneurial skills which will consequently foster economic growth and development leading to employment and poverty alleviation.

Entrepreneurship development through education has been receiving attention nationally. Several attempts have been made through researches, mounting of entrepreneurship courses, programmes in both institutions of learning and entrepreneurship research centers for the purpose of developing both entrepreneurship spirit and culture among the people (Akpomi 2009). However, effort has to be intensified to mobilize and enhance entrepreneurial activity which will consequently benefit the individuals, government, and the society at large. The issue of poverty eradication has been a top priority of many governments and institutions especially in developing countries where extreme poverty is conspicuously pandemic (MDGs report, 2007; Kalirajan and Singh, 2009).

Poverty and Unemployment are among the major developmental problems that face every developing economy in the 21st century (Ewhrudjakpor, 2008). In the Niger Delta today, the increasing rate of poverty, unemployment, corruption and so many other social problems has become worrisome to the governments and to every well meaning citizen. Therefore, the need for apparent change is very desirable and necessary for the region to forge ahead and meet up with global trends. The incidence of Poverty in the Niger Delta is on the high side, where 70% of the total population has been classified as poor (Nigeria Entrepreneurship Initiative, 2009; Ewhrudjakpor, 2008) The rate of poverty is however accentuated by the increasing rate of unemployment, high level of illiteracy, corruption and bad governance, among others.

The problem of unemployment is particularly pathetic as the number of graduates from various institutions looking for employment opportunities is increasing day by day in the Niger Delta. It is pertinent to note that entrepreneurial education can bring the desired remedy to this situation. It can be a tool for securing employment and emancipation of people through the provision and acquisition of necessary knowledge and skills to make lives more meaningful. Based on this background, the paper examines the possibilities of re-engineering entrepreneurial education for employment generation and poverty alleviation in the Niger Delta Region.

2. Entrepreneurial Education, Employment and Poverty Alleviation

Entrepreneurship has been recognized as an important and sustaining aspect of any economy (Dickson, Solomon & Weaver, 2008). It contributes in immeasurable ways towards creating new jobs, wealth creation, poverty reduction, and income generation for both governments and individuals. Entrepreneurship is very significant to the growth and development of economies (Keister, 2005). Having understood the vital role of entrepreneurship in economic development, it becomes apparent that careful attention is needed to invest and promote entrepreneurship. Education has been seen as a precondition for entrepreneurship development particularly in a place where the spirit and culture is very minimal. It is said to be an important determinant of selection into entrepreneurship, formation of new venture and entrepreneurial success (Dickson, Solomon and Weaver, 2008). It has been found out that there is a positive relationship between education and individual's choice to become an entrepreneur as well as the result and outcome of his or her entrepreneurial activity.

The move towards poverty reduction should not be considered and treated in isolation, different approaches and strategies need to be employed. For any country to foster genuine economic growth and development, its education system must be considered as basis and essential ingredient. Education is undisputedly considered as the bedrock of any meaningful development (FGN, 2004 in Akpomi 2009), be it economic, social or political. The Nigerian policy on education made it clear on the need for functional education; education to be relevant, practical and based on the acquisition of appropriate skills and development of competencies, as equipment for the individuals to live in and contribute to the development of the society (Aladekomo, 2004). Adejmolola and Olufunmilayo (2009) reported that most Nigerian graduates depend on paid employment and that about 80% of Nigerian graduates find it difficult to get employment every year. At the same time much has not been done by the Universities in trying to ensure collaboration between the entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial programmes. The universities, polytechnics and other academic institutions in the Country stand to benefit a lot from collaboration with entrepreneurs. Similarly, the entrepreneurs may harness and use the expertise of the institutions in promoting their businesses. This kind of interaction and interrelationship will go a long way in bridging the gap that exists between the entrepreneurs and the institutions. Lack of this kind of synergy shows the weaknesses, inadequacies and fallacies of educational programmes in Nigerian universities (Akpomi 2008; Adejmolola and Olunfunmilayo, 2009).

As opined by Adejmolola and Olufunmilayo (2009), education should be refined with a view to creating and enhancing the supply of entrepreneurial initiatives and activities. The bottom line here is to inculcate the spirit of entrepreneurship in the students through entrepreneurial education programmes. This calls for a more serious adjustment of policies and new curriculum in line with the demands of the present time. There is evidence to support a positive and significant relationship between education and entrepreneurial performance, whether performance is measured as growth, profit or earning power of the entrepreneur. However, evidence linking general education to selection into entrepreneurship is ambiguous and cannot be classified as either positive or negative (Dickson et al, 2008). In this direction, an important question is on the reason to become an entrepreneur. Is the selection of entrepreneurship by the students a matter of opportunity or necessity? Opportunity entrepreneurship came into being as a result of exploiting certain opportunities that exist while on the other hand necessity came as a response to employment crisis, this necessitated the option of being self employed (Koster and Rai, 2009; Lippmann et al in Keister, 2005). It can be concluded therefore that refocusing entrepreneurial education at higher education level would lead to youth employment and poverty reduction.

2.1 Nigerian Educational Policy and Entrepreneurship

The history of Nigerian education system could be traced back to the colonial period. The educational policy then was geared towards serving the interest of the colonial masters in terms of supply of manpower for their effective administration of Nigerian colony and protectorates (Aladekomo, 2004). The policy was aimed at producing Nigerians who could read and write to hold certain positions such as clerks, interpreters, inspectors, etc. without any entrepreneurial or professional skill to stand on their own or even establish and manage their own ventures. The Nigerian industrial policy that came immediately after independence placed emphasis on the establishment of big companies while completely neglecting the development of small scale sectors (Aladekomo, 2004). This neglect invariably meant killing entrepreneurship at the micro level in Nigeria at the very beginning, which is considered to be very essential for economic growth and development. The over pressing demand for white collar job for majority of graduates is just an upshot of colonial educational policies.

However, later in the mid 70s, the government because of perceived importance of small scale industries to the economy, decided to focus attention on small and medium scale sectors. Some industrial centers and some institutions were set up to support the activities of entrepreneurs in the small and medium scale industries in the country. Some of the institutions set up were the Nigerian Industrial Bank (NIB), Nigerian Bank for Commerce and Industries (NBCI), Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB), etc. In the 1981 National policy on education, attempt was made by the government to link the policy with the issue of self employment and the industrial policy. But then, the main focus was only on primary and secondary education. The Higher education policy was deficient in the sense that it failed to address the issue of self employment at tertiary level. The Higher education policy was mainly concerned with the development of both higher and middle manpower. Thus higher education policy as stipulated was expected to cater for the production of scientists and technologists and absolutely not directed at self employment, but for the vacant positions in government or public offices (Aladekomo, 2004).

In an attempt to ascertain the way forward and in response to the current socio-economic problems of the country, questions were raised by various people as to what the right education for Nigeria was, and what kind of education may be suitable in propelling development in the country? So many suggestions were made in favour of refocusing the current Nigeria's education system to reflect present realities. As a result, technical and vocational education received a lot of attention at both state and federal levels. Different institutions were established to offer technical education. These included technical colleges, polytechnics, colleges of technical education, vocational centers and schools, etc. In recent times, the most visible education reform in the country is on higher education. Under this reform Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs) and Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs) have been introduced by the government to provide another dimension for higher education in the country. VEIs and IEIs are principally private institutions that offer vocational, technical, technology, professional education and other skills-based training at post basic (VEIs) and post secondary (IEIs) levels to equip youths and working adults with employment skills and knowledge to meet the increasing demand for technical manpower by various sectors of the nation's economy (Muhd, 2008). This notwithstanding, many graduates still come out from universities with the expectation to work for others and not for themselves. Because of the unprecedented increasing number of graduates without corresponding vacancies, refocusing on entrepreneurship education becomes very necessary to make this increasing number of graduates self reliant.

With the growing number of students coming out from various institutions into labour market, if some measures are not taken, there is every tendency that the situation will escalate the rate of unemployment, poverty, corruption and other social vices among the youths in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. It is hoped that the government would encourage a diversification of the economy through adequate support for private establishments and practical acquisition of entrepreneurial skills in all higher institutions in the Niger Delta. It is against this backdrop that there is need to redefine and refocus the current system of entrepreneurial education with a view to creating and enhancing the supply of entrepreneurship initiatives and activities (Akpomi 2008; Adejimiola and Olunfunmilayo, 2009). It is expected that our educational institutions will become centres for inculcating the spirit of entrepreneurship rather than the spirit of passing examinations to get white collar jobs. The best way to do this is to create a curriculum that is all encompassing in developing the spirit and culture of entrepreneurship in the youths through educational programmes in universities and other institutions of higher learning.

2.2 Developing and Supporting Entrepreneurial Careers in Higher Institutions

There is an increasing interest in the area of entrepreneurship education by Universities, specifically the business schools. There is much effort and enthusiasm to teach entrepreneurship courses using wide range of methods such as venture creation by students, developing formal business plan, carrying out feasibility studies, etc. (Vincett and Farlow 2008; Dickson et al 2008). This shift from general to entrepreneurship education

becomes necessary in the present realities and the need to develop and empower the youths in the society. There is a seeming consensus on the importance of entrepreneurship education in ameliorating some socio-economic problems, especially poverty, unemployment, and other forms of social vices in the society. This indicates the need for a re-orientation towards inculcating entrepreneurial skills and values that allow for the acquisition of necessary competencies that can enhance self reliance, independence, youth empowerment and of course poverty reduction (Akpomi, 2009). It is very apparent that challenges and opportunities abound to tap, exploit and possibly turn into goods and services of commercial values through refocusing of entrepreneurial education (Giwa, 2008).

Daodu (2007) in Akpomi (2009) made an investigation on the modalities of using entrepreneurship education as a strategy or instrument for channeling necessary energies of the Nigeria Universities faculties and students away from paid employment to self employment. Many economic and strategic theories have been used to provide a framework in which education can be seen as very important determinant of selection of entrepreneurship or venture formation for individuals in the course of their studies (Dickson et al, 2008). Vincett and Farlow (2008) asserted that there are several attempts to teach students entrepreneurship using venture creation in order for the students to acquire business skills and competencies. People also believe that entrepreneurial behavior can be learned through experience and discovery (Akpomi, 2009). Hence there is need for the type of learning in which students can experience aspects of entrepreneur's way of life. Students are expected to feel and act as entrepreneurs rather than only assuming or pretending to be. This effort will certainly strengthen their inspiration and would be indoctrinated towards the culture of entrepreneurship.

Vincett and Farlow (2008) in their research work identified and suggested some tasks of educators involved in entrepreneurship education.

- Students must have a serious business idea
- A formal business plan is not required, but planning itself is important
- Insist on extensive, direct student contact with outside community, to validate and optimize the ideas.
- The number of businesses is limited so as to allow a highly interactive environment.

3.Purpose of the Study

The study was carried out to determine the relationship between entrepreneurial education programmes of Universities in the Niger Delta and employment/poverty alleviation in the region. Specifically, the study sought to:

- a. Determine the relevance of entrepreneurial education programmes of universities in the Niger Delta to self productivity.
- b. Determine the relationship between entrepreneurial education programmes of Universities in the Niger Delta and employment/poverty alleviation in the region.

4.Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

- a. How relevant is the entrepreneurial education programmes of Universities in the Niger Delta to self productivity in the region?
- b. What is the relationship between entrepreneurial education programmes of Universities in the Niger Delta to employment/poverty alleviation in the region?

5.Research Hypotheses

The null hypotheses below were formulated to direct the study.

- a. There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial education programmes of universities in the Niger Delta and self productivity in the region.
- b. There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial education programmes of universities in the Niger Delta and employment/poverty alleviation in the region.

6.Methodology

The correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised all final year students of the Department of Economics/Entrepreneurial studies from Universities of Uyo, Calabar and Port Harcourt, totaling 238. The purposive sampling technique was used as all the 238 final year students were involved in the study. Data collection was carried out with a researcher-developed instrument tagged "Entrepreneurial Education and Poverty Alleviation Questionnaire" (EEPAQ). The instrument, which had 15 items, was duly validated and tested for reliability using the Cronbach alpha formula.

Table 1: Cronbach's alpha 21 reliability table

Instrument	K	$\sum S_i^2$	S_1^2	r – coe
EEPAQ	15	0.29	0.74	0.71

With a reliability coefficient of 0.71 the instrument was considered significant, hence appropriate for the study.

7.Data Analysis and Results

The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial education programmes of universities in the Niger Delta and self productivity.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between entrepreneurial education programmes of Universities in the Niger Delta and self productivity

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	R
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Entrepreneurial Education (x)	2934	22106	34218	0.114*
Self Productivity (y)	3878	24612		

* $N = 238$, Significant at 0.05 alpha level; $df = 236$; Critical r-value = 0.138

Table 2 presents the obtained r-value as 0.114. This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical r-value of 0.138 at 0.05 alpha level with 236 degrees of freedom. The obtained r-value was less than the critical r-value. Hence, the null hypothesis was retained. The result therefore means that there is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial education programmes of universities in the Niger Delta and self productivity of graduates in the region.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial education programmes of universities in the Niger Delta and employment/poverty alleviation in the region.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between entrepreneurial education programmes of universities in the Niger Delta and employment/poverty alleviation

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	R
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Entrepreneurial Education (x)	2934	22106	32412	0.107*
Employment/Poverty Alleviation (y)	3862	24218		

* $N = 238$, Significant at 0.05 alpha level; $df = 236$; Critical r-value = 0.138

The table presents the obtained r-value as 0.107. This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical r-value (0.138) at 0.05 alpha level with 236 degrees of freedom. The obtained r-value (0.312) was less than the critical r-value (0.138). Hence, the result was not significant. The result therefore means that there was no significant relationship between entrepreneurial education programmes of universities in the Niger Delta and poverty alleviation in the region.

8. Discussion of Findings

Data analysis in hypothesis one revealed no significant relationship between entrepreneurial education programmes of universities in the Niger Delta and self productivity of entrepreneurial graduates. The null hypothesis was retained. By implication, the entrepreneurial education programmes offered by universities in the Niger Delta do not facilitate self productivity of the graduates. The finding is supported by Adejimo and Olufunmilayo (2009) who reported that most Nigerian graduates depend on paid employment and that about 80% of Nigerian graduates find it difficult to get employment every year. At the same time much has not been done by the Universities in trying to ensure collaboration with the entrepreneurs to foster their entrepreneurial educational programmes. The universities, polytechnics and other higher educational institutions in the country stand to benefit a lot from collaborations with entrepreneurs within and outside the immediate communities. Similarly the entrepreneurs may harness and use the expertise of the institutions in promoting their businesses. This kind of interaction and interrelationship will go a long way in bridging the gap that exists between the entrepreneurs and the institutions. Lack of this kind of synergy shows the weaknesses, inadequacies and fallacies of educational programmes in Nigerian universities (Akpomi 2008; Adejimo and Olufunmilayo, 2009).

As opined by Adejimo and Olufunmilayo (2009), education should be refined with a view to creating and enhancing the supply of entrepreneurial initiative and activities. The bottom line here is to inculcate the spirit of entrepreneurship in the students through entrepreneurial education programmes. This calls for a more serious adjustment of policies and new curriculum in line with demands of the present time. There is evidence to support a positive and significant relationship between education and entrepreneurial performance, whether performance is measured as growth, profit or earning power of the entrepreneur.

While testing hypothesis two, no significant relationship was observed between entrepreneurial education programmes of universities in the Niger Delta and poverty alleviation in the region. The null hypothesis was retained. The implication is that entrepreneurial education programmes of universities in the Niger Delta do not have significant impact on poverty alleviation in the region. The incidence of Poverty in the Niger Delta is on the high side, where 70% of the total population has been classified as poor (Nigeria Entrepreneurship Initiative, 2009; Ewhrudjakpor, 2008) The rate of poverty is however accentuated by the increasing rate of unemployment, high level of illiteracy, corruption and bad governance, among others.

The move towards poverty reduction should not be considered and treated in isolation, different approaches and strategies need to be employed. For any country to foster genuine economic growth and development, its education system must be considered as basis and essential ingredient. Education is undisputedly considered as the bedrock of any meaningful development (FGN, 2004 in Akpomi 2009), be it economic, social or political. The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) made it clear on the need for functional education; education to be relevant, practical and based on the acquisition of appropriate skills and development of competencies, as equipment for the individuals to live in and contribute to the development of the society (Aladekomo, 2004).

9. Conclusion

Based on the results of the findings, it was concluded that:

- Entrepreneurial education programmes of universities in the Niger Delta do not facilitate self productivity among the graduates.
- The programmes have no significant bearing with poverty alleviation in the region.

10. Recommendations

On the basis of the findings and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations have been made.

- a. There is need to restructure the course contents of entrepreneurial education programmes in Nigerian universities to make it more relevant to the environment and needs of the individuals.
- b. Entrepreneurial education programmes of universities should centre on self productivity of the benefiting graduates to ensure self employment.
- c. A functional collaboration between the universities and entrepreneurs within and outside the community should be ensured to enable the universities meet up with the entrepreneurial needs of the community.
- d. Entrepreneurial education programmes should seek to inculcate entrepreneurial spirit in the benefiting students.
- e. Graduates of entrepreneurial education should be assisted by the government, multinationals and NGOs to establish businesses of their own.

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