

Achieving Excellence in the Operations of Entrepreneurship Development Centres in Nigeria Higher Institutions

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There have been several policy interventions in Nigeria that were aimed at stimulating enterprise development. In line with this effort, entrepreneurship syllabus was embedded in the higher institutions curriculum to stimulate entrepreneurship mind-set among Nigeria graduates. And Entrepreneurship Development Centres (EDCs) sprang up in various institutions with varying approaches to the challenges posted to them. With almost a decade experience in entrepreneurship educational development in our higher institutions, a stock-taking of their activities and way to achieve the aims and objectives is urgently needed. It was discovered that these centres, which most institution have established have not reach their potential capacity. So, the paper takes a look the current mode of operation of the some of the centres and their impacts on their graduates. In conclusion, the paper recommend ways and manners the centres can meet the contemporary challenges and their roles in enterprise development, skill acquisition and entrepreneurship education.

Key words: Entrepreneurship Development Centres, Entrepreneurship education and Enterprise development.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship education has been receiving attention globally with the development of curriculum and programmes for the purpose of developing both entrepreneurship spirit and culture among students of higher institutions (Akpmi 2009; Adejimi and Olufunmilayo 2009). Apart from meeting up with global challenges, different countries of the world also want to solve different social economic problems confronting them. The capabilities and efficacy of entrepreneurship education is believed, if given proper attention, is capable of solving most identified societal socio-economic problems and a necessary impetus for development. Nigeria, like other late starters, introduced entrepreneurship in the curriculum of her higher institutions in 2006 (Yahya, 2011; Gabadeen and Raimi, 2012) with different universities introducing entrepreneurship education into their array of courses and this reflected in Nigeria's national policy on education which states that education is the most important instrument for propelling change, as no fundamental change can occur in any society except through educational revolution that impact on the intellects (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1998). The need for entrepreneurship education started in Nigeria in the mid 1980s when the economy collapsed due to political instability and inconsistencies in the social-economic policies of successive governments. This resulted in very high youth and graduate unemployment (Arogundade, 2011).

Nwangwu (2007) asserts that the failure of tertiary education to inculcate the entrepreneurship philosophy in students has led to wastages in terms of both human and natural resources...because graduates from these tertiary institutions are not well equipped with the skill with which to exploit the natural resources that abound in Nigeria and this has rendered the pursuit of self-reliance among our graduates difficult to attain. Another problem identified by Ayodele (2006) is irrelevant education that is Bookish, theoretic and white-collar job's oriented. Odi (2013) acknowledged that graduates are hunted for by both private and public sectors but things have changed to the extent that many graduates of tertiary institutions are now sellers of recharge cards or work as bus conductors... that employment prospects amongst qualified persons have increasingly competitive and the job openings are equally limited.

In the same vein, the introduction of entrepreneurship courses open the door to the establishment of Entrepreneurship Development centres in these institutions. As mentioned earlier, each one approaching it differently under different names. These centres according to The Federal Government of Nigeria are to coordinate the offering of a benchmark entrepreneurship course to all students irrespective of their disciplines since year 2000. The strategic objectives of the national policy are to: (1) improve the capacity of youths to develop positive independent and innovative thought process and overall entrepreneurial mind-set and (2) the development of vocational skills to stimulate future graduates towards venture and wealth creation.. on the long run these centres inculcate entrepreneurship culture and skill and train students on some different forms of vocations they can start with as an entrepreneur after their graduation which, according to Small Business Service (2005) is "the possession of entrepreneurial skills to create new knowledge based social enterprises is vital to addressing these social and environmental issues effectively".

What is entrepreneurship education?

Entrepreneurship education is sometimes used interchangeably with entrepreneurship training and skill acquisition. It can be learnt in formally or informally to make students possess the skill and ability to identify, screen and seize available opportunities in the environment. (Sexton and Smilor, 1997; Jones and English (2004). And it is very crucial for entrepreneurship development because it is the engine that propels creativity and innovations into practical manifestations in form of business ventures and other investment opportunities. Fry

(1992) observes that entrepreneurship has been one of the fastest growing disciplines in the U.S.A in the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century about 1600 universities in the North-America offers different courses in entrepreneurship (Inegbenebor,2005).

Arogundade (2011) Entrepreneurship education is aimed at developing students' competences and entrepreneurial intentions towards starting a business as a career option... it is aimed to equip students with the skills to be self-reliant. Entrepreneurship education seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings. Entrepreneurship education consists of three ingredients: creativity- creating all kinds of ideas; Innovation- find value in selected ideas; and entrepreneurship- develop a business from the innovative idea (Thomsen Business Information, 2012).

Fayolle (2011) explained that ultimately, entrepreneurship training is designed to teach you the skills and knowledge you need to know before embarking on a new business venture. Arvanites et al (2009) state that innovative educational methods are needed to develop the entrepreneurial spirit and talents that are necessary to function effectively in an environment of strong market forces and complex people issues. They added that for entrepreneurship education to be most useful, it must address and develop in students, the skills necessary as an entrepreneur.

(Arvanite,2009) said it is to stimulate and challenge the students into creative and innovative ideas and concepts that result into setting-up and sustaining business ventures and other investment opportunities. Also it is to inculcate the traits of risk-taking, innovation... for the purpose of creating new products or services for new and existing users. (Acs and Storey 2004, Minniti and Lévesque 2008, Naudé 2007, Kanothi, 2009). Mauchi1 et al., (2011:1307) defines it as "the process of providing individuals with the ability to recognize commercial opportunities and the knowledge, skills and attitudes to act on them."

Shane and Venkataraman (2000) concluded that the thrust of entrepreneurship training entails identifying the sources of opportunities... evaluate and exploit them. When entrepreneurship education is well delivered students are able to identify opportunities and enhance trainees' creativity, innovative abilities, beliefs and recombination skills (Sofoluwe, 2007; Fuduric, 2008). When the definition of OECD Entrepreneurship Indicator Programme is reshaped to fit into the present discourse, then entrepreneurship education can be described as a training that stimulates learners to better their lives by generating value through the creation or expansion of economic activity, identification and exploiting new products, processes or markets (OECD Entrepreneurship Indicator Programme, 2009). To Towobola and Raimi, (2011) it is a pragmatic and meaningful interaction between learner and instructor for the purpose of developing the ability of the learners to identify, evaluate and generate ideas and solving business problems in a unique way...for self employment, sustainable growth and development as evident countries like Japan and America (Witte and Wolf, 2003; Raimi et al., 2011). This will eventually, put into students the spirit of leadership, problem solving, negotiation skills, self direction and self management (Soskice, 1993; Sofoluwe, 2007; Gabadeen and Raimi, 2012).

From several definitions provided above, entrepreneurship education can be conceptualized as a specialised and all-round training programme designed to make students wealth creators by getting the necessary skill to develop their latent talents and potentials.

Objectives of Entrepreneurship Education

Using Paul (2005) as a guide, entrepreneurship education is structured to achieve the following objectives.

1. To offer functional education to the youths that will enable them to be self-employed and self-reliant (Oyelola, 2010).
2. Provide the young graduates adequate training that will enable them to be creative and innovative in identifying novel business opportunities.
3. To serve as a catalyst for economic growth and development of a nation
4. Offer educational institution graduates with adequate training in risk management
5. To reduce rate of poverty
6. Create employment opportunities
7. To reduce the rural –urban migration
8. Provide the young graduates training and support that will enable them to establish small and medium sized businesses.
9. To inculcate the spirit of perseverance in the youths and adults which will enable them to persist in any business venture they embark upon.
10. Create smooth transition from traditional to modern industrial economy.
11. To make graduates from educational institutions employable

Role of Entrepreneurship Development Centres (EDCs)

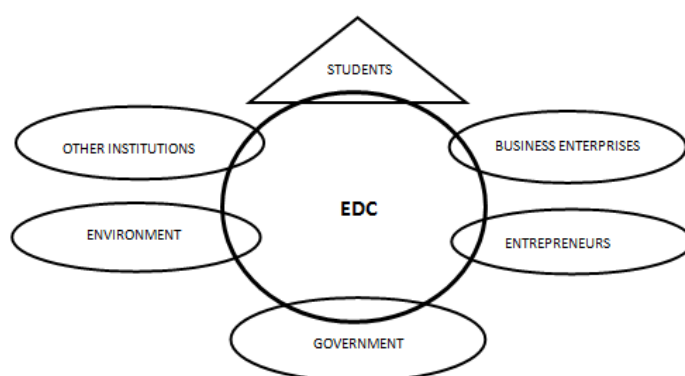
To achieve the above mention objectives the Entrepreneurship Development Centre (EDC) has the following roles to play:

- (a) To participate in the review and adaption the current curriculum to suit the various requirement and challenges of the environment
- (b) To develop student with entrepreneurship spirit with relevant tools and techniques

- (c) To design a framework for student on how to start and manage all functional areas of business enterprise which include: production, marketing, personnel and finance.
- (d) To develop students with networking skill as it is today's cornerstone of success of modern businesses
- (e) To generate graduates that will be employable as it was before in the 60s and 70s
- (f) To produce graduates that will actualize the various economic development programmes of the government especially the vision 2020 agenda
- (g) To upgrade and raise new class of would-be entrepreneurs that can compete with global businesses
- (h) To provide physical structures, training materials, equipments, human resources and other facilities that would assure international competitiveness, effective and sustainable services.
- (i) To practically engage students with product development and business management
- (j) To provide active and functional incubation centre for starters with agreed terms business friendly policies
- (k) To practically engage student with positive and beneficial interaction with their immediate environment

Strategy for EDCs to achieve excellence in Institutions

For effectiveness and achieving excellence, the EDCs can use the below all inclusive bird strategy.



Peluola S. B et al (2013)

Looking at the bird-like figure it means the focus (head) of all the activities is the students. They are the ones undergoing the training process and they are product of the EDCs. On the left side (wing), we have the business enterprise that will provide practical medium for the students. From they will feel business. The second on the left is the entrepreneurs that will provide mentorship and other practical experience. The right side (wing) has other institutions. This will give room for exchange of notes and cooperation. It also includes institutions that provide specialized training e.g. public speaking among others. While the environment will provide means for product development and testing ground for developed ones. The bottom (tail) that has the government will provide policy and updating the curriculum. At the centre (body) of all is the EDC that interact and benefit from to perform excellently (fly).

Practical steps

For the functions to be practically implemented, the below medium can be taken:

Establishment of business venture

The EDC can also engage in business enterprise with students as employees (with salary) taking different positions to run the business.

Organizing competitions

This can be intra or inter institution. Various types like business plan competition that will give them the opportunities of learning how to present their good ideas in black among others.

Establishment of entrepreneurship clubs

This should be tailored towards product and skill development. Interested students will, from the on-set, would have this at the back of their mind when joining the club.

Networking events

This should involve the bringing together different entrepreneurs of high repute, business owners and employers of labour, financial institutions, students from different institutions and the government agencies.

Special research project

After environmental scanning, the EDC can stage a special research to bridge identified gaps or tap into identified business opportunity e.g. mass communication students starting a radio station for their institution.

Mentoring programme

The country is blessed with a lot successful entrepreneurs in various fields. The EDC should occasionally and consistently organize mentorship programme for students to learn practical from them. It will also serve as a

networking tool.

Organizing excursions and field trips

Trips and excursions will expose student with current trends in the industry as it relate to their field or otherwise.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Evidently, the EDCs have a lot of potentials to develop and train students to be useful for themselves and the country if effectively run. Currently, Nigeria is seriously lagging behind in preparing her workforce (the students of higher institutions) for the challenges of the dynamic global village. The development of entrepreneurship education through the EDCs will go a long way in providing the necessary impetus for needed working force and economic growth and development thereby boosting productivity, increasing competition and innovation, creating employment and prosperity and revitalizing the nation's economy. In summary, we can conclude that improved and sustainable economic development depends strongly on entrepreneurship education. It is against this background that the following recommendations are proffered for effective running of EDCs in Nigeria higher institutions.

1. Government and other education stakeholders should make sure that our educational programme at all levels are relevant to provide our youths with needed entrepreneurial skills.
2. The NUC and NBTE should review of the entrepreneurship curriculum with a view for effective adaptation to our environment because the current UNESCO and ILO based one has many of its content that do not fit in to the realities and happenings of our country
3. Training and retraining of entrepreneurship educators to yield the expected much celebrated global competitiveness.
4. The incubation centres should have modern and relevant facilities for entrepreneurship training.
5. Establishment a good and functional network and synergy among the identified institutions in both private and public sector for the excellent performance

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