

APPLYING ‘PROJECT-METHOD’ (PM) FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN 21ST CENTURY NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT: *Entrepreneurship relates to real life jobs, occupations and career skills and hence it is society-specific. However, observation reveals that course content of ‘Entrepreneurship studies’ in many Nigerian universities are theoretically expressed and taught by note dictation, abstract descriptions, unrealistic examples, etc, 100%; dexterity (moving, arranging or operating the structure or technicalities of a job, occupation and career), zero. This paper proposes a redesign of university curriculum into project template; broken into steps, stages or units, where each step represents an aspect of the project (job, task, or skill) to be accomplished per time. Studying this way, four or five years in a row, students would have been oriented to the mechanics and dynamics of such jobs (projects) enough to form a practice. Basic requirements: project classrooms, project pedagogy, project curriculum review, teacher retraining, etc, necessary to administer this method are discussed.*

KEY WORDS: project-method, entrepreneur, entrepreneurship, learner-centered.

INTRODUCTION

When parents paid School-fees exceeding #3.5 million annually at some average-standard and/or quality Nigerian university, they wanted some assurance that their children would acquire necessary marketable skills that would guarantee some financial future. They did not intend to pay hummer-jeep prices 4-years in a row only to receive bicycle performance (Kolb, 1995 - paraphrased).

Unfortunately, Nigerian children still pay exorbitant tuition annually in some average university with no assurance that the graduate skills acquired can guarantee employability and marketability (Obanya, 2009; Alfred, 2010; Yahya, 2011). Most graduates can hardly construct good roads, bridges, and culverts and/or refurbish existing ones; design sophisticated schools and classrooms and/or renovate old ones; diagnose and treat new diseases and/or treat existing ones; build new sea and airports and/or upgrade those existing; design new houses and/or redesign existing ones; invent new food crops and/or reinvent those existing, etc, maybe reflecting teacher strength and/or pedagogy (Igwe, 2002; FRN, 2013).

So far, the best products are civil engineers who build roads, bridges, and houses that collapse after construction; school teachers that fumble through lessons; doctors that kill patients; pharmacists that purchase drugs; agronomists dependent on forefathers’ food supply; Accountants retrained to be counter-tellers; pilots that become airport securities; marine engineers that are hydrophobic;

electrical engineers that cannot connect a switch to the mains, economists that indulge in money laundry, and so on.

The nagging questions are: has quality of learning in most Nigerian universities actually eroded to “substandard” and unacceptable levels? (Ukeje, 1991 p.39). Should Nigeria still be considered a member of the “E-9 countries? (i.e. the nine countries with the highest concentration of illiterates...” (NPC, 2005 in Okorosaye-Orubite, 2008 p. 7). Why do Nigerian universities now produce mere ‘paper (certificate) tigers’, (serial certificate holders) that are essentially unemployable and hence unmarketable? (Aju, 2006; Ebong & Leigha, 2006; Shagari, 2007; Obanya, 2009; Alfred, 2010; Yahya, 2011).

An employment agency believes that “lack of marketable skills on the part of graduates could be one major cause of their unemployment” (The National Directorate of Employment, 2005: 5). The Vanguard (2003) describes a progression: 4.3% in 1985; 5.3% in 1986; 7.0% in 1987 and about 60% in 1997. Dabalen and Oni (2000) also report a 25% unemployment rate among university graduates in Nigeria submitting that university graduates are poorly trained and unproductive on the job; that graduate skills have steadily deteriorated over the decades (1990 – 2000). Youth (15 – 34 years) unemployment became 73.80% almost 15 years ago (NDE, 2002), and may be traversing all educational levels in double-digits: 14.7% at the Primary level; 53.6% at the secondary; and 12.4% at the tertiary level.

In 2006, the Federal Ministry of Education conducted a survey involving more than 10,000 on-line participants to track down ‘products’ of the Nigerian educational sector, particularly in secondary, vocational/technical institutions and those graduated or dropped-out from these institutions between 1995 and 2005. The findings indicate that over 60% youths are either unemployed or underemployed (Bassey, 2001); worse hit are youths within the ages of 20 and 24, and 25 and 44 years (Babalola, 2007).

This breeds ‘poverty’. Todaro and Smith (2009:221) believes that “close to 1 billion people live on less than \$1 per day, and some 2.7 billion - over 40% of the world’s population – live on less than \$2 a day”. Yet, the “poorest 10% of Americans, according to Adelaja (2009:3), are better than a full two-thirds of the world’s entire population”. He also reported findings of a recent study published by a senior World Bank economist that “the richest 50 million people living in Europe and North America have roughly the same income as almost 3 billion (or half) poor people collected from around the world” (ibid).

A United Nations Report ranked Nigeria among the 25 poorest nations of the world in 1999 (Okere, 2006; Okwori, Ede, & Nyiam, 2008); and where 67% of the poor are extremely poor. An estimated 70% of Nigerians live on less than US\$1 per day (NPC 2005 in Okorosaye-Orubite, 2008); 54% of them below the poverty line (Okou, 2006; Ogbu, 2008).

Furthermore, Nigeria places 141 out of 175 countries in Human Development Index – HDI - (Okou, 2006) revealing that Nigeria is worse than some typically poor African countries like Lesotho, Kenya, Cameroun and Namibia. The situation reflects in hunger, malnutrition, diseases,

homelessness, crumbling health care delivery system; lack of safe and portable water; extensive and intensive use of domestic fuel such as firewood, short life expectancy and so on (UNSN, 1995; Otunu-Ogbisi, 2008).

We believe that a ‘practical-based study’ intervention could both mitigate and control the rampaging effect of these twin incidences – unemployment and poverty. And this is where Entrepreneurship studies becomes appropriate because it could impact levels of income generation and employment creation.

METHOD

Documentary analysis

An entrepreneur is a creative person; a risk-taker who recognizes a business opportunity, critically analyze the opportunity, take a decision by assembling the prerequisite human and material resources to execute the programme, resulting in new business venture and profit (Nwagwu, 2007). He exhibit qualities such as: risk-taking; responsibility; confidence; wanting feedback; being energetic; advancing in spite of setbacks; learn from mistakes; goal setting with commitment to achieve them; co-operative with other workers; futuristic; possesses organizing skills; highly tolerant; decisive; and motivated by achievement; not money (Scarborough, 1992 p. 92).

Some roles and interrelated functions that an entrepreneur performs to succeed include:

1. identifying need which are converted into business opportunity;
2. selecting from a pool of project ideas worth investment;
3. setting up a business unit for conducting established business;
4. exhibiting creativity, imagination and innovation by being adaptive, benchmarking, and synthesizing ideas, materials, etc;
5. Assembling business resources and integrate them in the most effective ratio (Akpan, 2004).

Meaning of Entrepreneurship

Interestingly, analytical and critical scholars tend to differ in perspectives and approaches but are unanimous in conclusion that entrepreneurship involve creativity, innovation, wealth creation, and profit making. While Amesi (2017, p. 105) see entrepreneurship as “formation” of new economic activity; Nijhawn and Khalid (2007) describe it as an innovative or creative act that adds value to an organization or society. Basse (2001, p.610) believes entrepreneurship would be synonymous with small scale businesses that “create new products, new processes and/or re-engineer exiting methods of production”. To Nwagwu (2007), creativity and risk-taking are hallmarks of entrepreneurship which can be employed to recognize, critically analyze, and make decisions on business opportunities; assemble required human and material resources, and execute programmes that will result into new business venture and profit.

Furthermore, Hisrich, Peters and Shepherd (2008: 8) view entrepreneurship as a: *dynamic process of creating incremental wealth. The wealth is created by people who assume the major risks in terms of equity, time and/or career commitment or provide value for some product (agricultural, commercial and industrial, etc) or service (transportation, tourism, banking, etc).*

The product or service may or may not be new or unique, but value must be infused by the entrepreneur by receiving and locating the necessary skills and resources.

From a slightly different perspective, Akpan (2004) contends that entrepreneurship is a behavior of profit-seeking individual and institutions who organize other factors or production into commodities for profit-making. Essien (2006, p. 18 -22) argues that self-assertiveness borne out of self-confidence, self-reliance and optimism is a critical character of entrepreneurship. Anyanwu (2008) describes entrepreneurship as recognizing business opportunities, exploiting those opportunities and creating enterprise to exploit the opportunities in the ‘local environment or economy’. One school of thought, Cole, believes that all profit-oriented ventures that provide values for customers’ money exhibit entrepreneurship; another – Schumpeter - insists that entrepreneurship is present only when new things are done or when old things are done in a new way (Akpan, 2004).

RESULT

Irrespective of perspective, the emerging character of successful entrepreneurship is ‘ability’ such as drive, thoughtfulness, human relations, communication, technical knowledge, innovation, responsibility, risk-taking, confidence, desire for feedback, energetic, futuristic, organizational skills and so on. It revolves around creation which leads to self-reliance, self-employment or job creation.

We share the central sentiment of all forgoing scholarly discourse that entrepreneurship relates to creativity, formation, innovation, etc, and must and should involve ‘doing, acting, and constructing, reconstructing’ etc, an enterprise or organization which can hardly be undertaken by writing, abstracting, wishing, and/or describing various business opportunities in classrooms.

In fact, FRN (2013, P. 26) expects entrepreneurship students “to think creatively and transform knowledge through technological processes into wealth and a broader economic base”. But, our entrepreneurship students currently seat down in classrooms to listen and write down descriptions on subjects other than:

Adire, Aso-Oke, Akwaete; and other indigenous fabrics and products; Gwado (local blanket), mats, drums; Welding, sheet metal work; Motor vehicle repairs (Auto-mechanical, Panel Beating, Auto-Electrical, Vulcanizing etc); Electrical wiring Domestic and Industrial; Construction (Plumbing, Painting, Bricklaying, etc); Catering; Performing Arts (Dance, Drama, Film production, Media, etc); Hairdressing and Beauty; Art; Agriculture; Fashion design; Sports; All other vocational skills (p. 27).

FRN (2013) intends to:

- (i) Train post-secondary students, who are desirous of acquiring industry specific skills, knowledge and appropriate certification to pursue a chosen trade or career; and
- (ii) Acquire entrepreneurial skills, among others (p. 47- 48).

It expects core course content of our entrepreneurship studies in the universities to become real ‘doing’ orientation rather than the almost entirely theoretical method, currently engaged in

most, if not all Nigerian public universities. We propose application of ‘a project method’ for better outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The Project method

Entrepreneurship, either as an identified business opportunity or ability such as:

Adire, Aso-Oke, Akwaete; and other indigenous fabrics and products; Gwado (local blanket), mats, drums; Welding, sheet metal work; Motor vehicle repairs (Auto-mechanical, Panel Beating, Auto-Electrical, Vulcanizing etc) Electrical wiring Domestic and Industrial; Construction (Plumbing, Painting, Bricklaying, etc); Catering; etc,(FRN, 2013, p. 26) basically depicts a project or programme with a structural composition. And, in line with FRN (2013) prescription, we suggest that students undertaking entrepreneurship should adopt ‘creativity’ to transform knowledge through manipulation processes into wealth. This suggests, and rightly too, a learner-centered teaching approach because it essentially entails action; that is, ‘doing’, acting, involving use of hands, legs, skills rather than describing and/or writing. It requires dividing a project (say, Adire-making) into micro-units where each specialized unit is completed in steps and stages until the whole ADIRE is made.

This behavior would be difficult, if not impossible, to undertake without engaging replications, models or representation of the real and/or ideal situation applying the offerings of configured classrooms, laboratories and/or workshops. First, the entrepreneurial student should be able to identify or recognize a business opportunity or small scale enterprise available in the catchment area of the university or the country like ADIRE, Aso-Oke, Akwaete; Gwado (local blanket), mats, drums; Welding, sheet metal work; motor vehicle repairs (auto-mechanical, panel beating, etc), construction (plumbing, painting, bricklaying, etc), agriculture; etc, and isolate the steps or stages that would be involved in the project.

Second, the learner locates a configured classroom, workshop, laboratory replete with facilities, gadgets and such other paraphernalia that allows physical manipulations in the identified or recognized project (skill or idea). Third, the student dissects the chosen project (Adire-making) into several steps or stages; each unit representing a step or a stage to be completed per time period. The accomplishment of a given step would set the stage for the next logical step until the whole Adire-project is made.

Fourth, the project student engages activities: i.e. manipulations; arranging and rearranging, fitting, fixing, and reassembling; colour, tying and dyeing with a view to producing a brand new product or add-value (by changing lines, strokes, colours, patterns, etc) on an existing Adire design or model, all under the directive of the Adire-making instructor (teacher) (Fafunwa, 1978; Bassey, 2001).

Fifth, the ensuing new product is then package for marketing in collaboration with suppliers (an individual or firm/s) and receives payments thereby making income. This process is then recycled in a continuum. The condition/s for ‘project-method’ teaching technique is very critical because

where the workshops and equipment are not available or appropriate; reality may not be effectively replicated.

The Nigerian university system is characterized by large class size, insufficient classrooms, poor quality teaching staff and staff offices, workshops with obsolete equipment, or few installed ones that do not replicate reality, examination malpractice and unmotivated workforce (Hartnett, 2000). This new teaching and learning concept must depart from the conventional to a university system characterized by few class sizes, entrepreneurship compliant teaching staff, and so on. This learning concept will contribute to educational development in major ways. First, it will create employment. Students undertaken projects, four years in a row throughout their career would inevitably enroll into the orientation of doing, acting and manipulating. On graduation, it would have been impossible for such student to depart or abandon such demeanour and orientation. This creates automatic self-employment as the student simply continues from where he/she stopped while undertaking the studies in the university.

Second, it will generate income. Proceeds from the student project endeavour are marketable. Hence, in collaboration with suppliers (individual or firm/s) the student suppliers, get paid for services and make easy money income, part of which may go to the department in which the course is domiciled and hence the university, four or five years in a row.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, for any entrepreneurship student to engage in examination malpractice considering what the student himself/herself would stand to gain or lose in such behaviour. It obviously lays the future for any student and solves the problem of examination malpractice, almost permanently.

This is what “experiential learning” (similar version to project-teaching method) is already achieving in most European countries; England, Germany, and Asian countries like India, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea resulting an adequate supply of trained entrepreneurs (Bassey, 2001, p. 613).

CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship is business opportunities (mostly indigenous): Adire, Aso-Oke, Akwaete; Gwado (local blanket), mats, welding, sheet metal work; motor vehicle repairs (Auto-mechanical, Panel Beating, Auto-electrical, vulcanizing etc) electrical wiring, domestic and Industrial; construction (plumbing, painting, bricklaying, etc); catering, venture finance; and international entrepreneurship (Dana, 1992; Idih, 1997). And though, NDE and Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) train graduates and fresher or drop-outs on these skills, universities have also provided specialized training courses. They should redesign courses rich in practical content and delivery to avoid graduates who have first hand university entrepreneurial training experience still need to undergo retraining, as it currently obtains. Entrepreneurship learning or training cannot be undertaken using theory-based classroom teaching methods because it is practical oriented.

Each entrepreneurial skill or idea, either as business opportunity or small scale enterprise actually represents a project i.e. a micro unit to which a whole could be divided where each micro-unit

represent a step or stage to be undertaken towards its full accomplishment and can result from the skillful and innovative application of hands, legs, the head and manipulation. That means, understanding entrepreneurship lies in practical engagement of its units in a real life situation rather than conventional classroom. And the success or failure of the entrepreneurship studies depends largely on the character and orientation of its mode of acquisition in schools.

Thus, adoption of an interventional strategy like entrepreneurship would be an attempt in futility if the teaching thrust falls short learner-centered (an education that includes almost everything within its scope) method that could promote skill acquisition and apprenticeship by students to their master craftsman (the teacher); It is a concept where bricks unbaked from the boys affects house quality for men, and where wool unrolled by the girls could harm cloth stock for the women.

Recommendations

Based on the above conclusion, the following recommendations are considered necessary:

1. University courses need to be redesigned to reflect skills and opportunities indigenous to our society.
2. Tertiary institutions should endeavour to expose entrepreneurship students to the habit of applying eyes, hands, head, and legs to identified business opportunities endemic in their locality throughout their college years in order to develop an enduring orientation.
3. Researches in the universities should target innovating or renewing identified skills into more sophisticated level rather than recycling foreign skills and ideas to the detriment of local concepts.
4. Admissions into universities should be based on demonstrable ability and willingness to transform local skills into fresh ideas to promote self-employment, income generation and national development.
5. Also, there may be need for training and certification teachers with professional specialization and demeanour in entrepreneurship teaching to enhance sharper pedagogical applications in this area.
6. Government in conjunction with stakeholders (individuals, agencies, NGOs, etc) should develop school infrastructure, particularly in constructing entrepreneurship friendly classrooms and workshops in order to effectively enhance entrepreneurship learning in the system.
7. An effective business - education relationship is also necessary to both create enterprise for ensuing education byproducts and tailor education researches towards desired direction of change and sustainability.
8. Educational planners and managers need to recollect data relating to skill content required in the economy and those educational institutions offer as entrepreneurship. This would promote harmony between education and the market economy.

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