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Graduates' Entrepreneurship Programme: A Proper Framework for National Economic Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The numbers of persons graduating from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are on the increase and exacerbating the unemployment problem in Nigeria, while employment generation has not kept pace with the signals from the labour market. Presently about 300,000 graduates annually from HEIs and are mobilised into the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). The labour market consequently tilts in excess to the supply side than to the demand side. In view of the saturation in the job seekers in search of paid employment, self-paid employment or entrepreneurship remains a very table tool to engage the HEIs graduates. This will ensure national development The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) had last June declared that about 29 million Nigerians are unemployed. In view of the level of unemployment among graduates and the 'employability' of the graduates, scratching the surface of our educational malaise is not acceptable. The expectation is that the relevant views and propositions on practical solutions on how to revamp the education systems to potentially complement national development strategies through a simultaneous response to skills gaps in the economy, particularly in entrepreneurship. To this end, the paper employs a content analysis approach to probe into the relevance of entrepreneurship in enhancing the self-employment of graduates and non-graduates alike as a means of curtailing unemployment and enhancing national economic development. The study deduced that graduate entrepreneurship education is important to national development as it enhances economic growth through the gained adequate knowledge, ideas, skills and motivation. The study, therefore, recommended that all educational agencies at various levels must collaborate to ensure the implementation of entrepreneurship education for accelerated economic development.

INTRODUCTION

Higher Education in any country is vital for the development of the nation's human capital. It is therefore pivotal that Higher Education Institutions strategically create the right environment for graduates to acquire the required skill needed for world of work. This will lead to improved growth and development in any nation as these graduates through the knowledge acquired will help increase productivity in the economy. Higher Education Institutions therefore have been accredited with the role of ensuring the production of highly skilled manpower who would also adopt the right entrepreneurial skills that would allow them to function in the society. The constant increase in the amount of graduates churned out yearly from the various HEIs in Nigeria has prevented them from achieving the objective of training/preparing graduates for the society at large. The proliferation of these institutions also affects the quality of graduates produced. This in actual fact has been one of the major problems of national development in Nigeria. Several economic problems in the country have also affected the effectiveness of HEIs in producing graduates who possess the required skill to function in the various sectors of the economy. Meltdown in economy, increases youth unemployment due to the huge skill gap are also factors affecting graduate employability.

Many HEIs today have found it difficult to bridge

the ever increasing gap between the graduates and the requirements of the workforce. Nigerian undergraduates lack the pre-requisite skills such as problem solving skill, communication skill, interpersonal skills and ability to work in a team as required for functioning in the work place. Oliver and Pitan (2015), posited that with the emergence of new jobs and changes in technology, the global economy and population, there are signs that work patterns are changing rapidly, all of which are well suited to workers. Hence, there is the need to create that balance between HEIs and the requirements of the labour market. Also, facts have shown that in Nigeria, the increasing rate of unemployment experienced by graduates is not only attributed to the scarcity of jobs, but also could be likened to the deficiency of graduates with employable skills that are needed in the labour market.

The Labour Market and Graduate Employability

As a result of the mass production of graduates from most of the HEIs, we can observe that this development has a ripple effect on the relationship between the demand for labour and the supply of labour. Distortions are prevalent in the Nigerian labour market and these distortions according to Newton (2015) arise as a result of the rising unemployment of graduates in the country. He further added that it is no longer enough for graduates to have a good degree but they should also

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possess the skills and attributes required to compete and collaborate in a dynamic knowledge economy and world of work. Labour market is therefore constantly tilted in excess to the supply side than to the demand side, leading to saturation of the market. This means that graduates who possess the required qualifications for employment would not be employed or would be underemployed as the case may be. There is definitely a threat to the nation's development as the implication of having unemployed youths roaming the streets would lead to several vices such as; cyber-crime, drug abuse, robbery and ritual killing. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) during its Global Employment Trends (2013) reported unemployment is slowly ravaging the Nigerian economy. Hence, there is the need for the Government, policy makers, stakeholders and individuals to begin to consider alternative strategies such as, Entrepreneurship to effectively tackle the problem of unemployment.

Several problems have been associated with unemployment apart from the fact that it hinders economic development. Research has shown that most graduates attended higher institutions of learning so as to graduate with good grades, join the workforce, make good money and live their ideal picture perfect lives. However, employers of labour in different sectors of the economy have highlighted that Nigerian graduates are unemployable, this is because they lack the pre-requisite skills needed in the work place. In actual fact, HEI's have been criticized for the fact that their mode of training has little or no relevance to the social and economic needs of their countries (Rufai et al. 2015), which consequently leads to the production of unemployable graduates.

Nweke (2006) in support of the findings submits that for nearly five decades of political independence of Nigeria, relevant skills needed by her manpower to drive a great National Economy is still lacking. The rate at which a large numbers of graduates were being disqualified during job tests and interviews owing to their inability to meet up with the world employment requirements it is imperative to build employability curricula into higher education. Ijaiya (2007), believes that the un-employability of these graduates has compounded the dimension of this problem as their having no skills means that the graduates turned out from HEI's have not acquired the saleable skills to be gainfully employed. Hence an urgent needs to address the situation.

The current trend in Nigeria shows the education sector rising at an alarming rate in the face of this anomaly. There is still the constant rise in the proliferation of Higher Education Institutions. This can only be attributed to the increase in the demand for education.

This paper focuses on how HEI's with the help of National Universities Commission (NUC), should begin to think inwardly and consider alternative approaches to assisting in solving the problem of unemployment by promoting more entrepreneurial related courses that would help graduates adopt the necessary skills to become self-sufficient in the society by focusing on

entrepreneurship, research and innovation.

Conceptualising Graduate Unemployment vis-à-vis Entrepreneurships Programmes

Higher Education Institutions are very important in achieving national development as they are largely responsible for high level manpower training. Other contributions of HEI's to national development include;

i) Providing the right environment for developing and inculcating values that are necessary for graduates to be self-reliant in the society.

ii) Increasing potential for skill acquisition and developing graduates interpersonal skills that would enhance employability.

iii) Providing a common ground where individuals have equal opportunities to acquire physical, intellectual and vocational skills.

Part of the excerpts from the National University Commission (2004) showed the qualities that employers look in graduates for employment. These attributes are graduates analytical skills, communication skills, social skills, technical and managerial skills among others.

HEI's have also been encouraged to concentrate on personal development programmes, vocational trainings, seminars and other programmes that instigate creativity and innovation in graduates. Boeteng and Ofori-Sarpong (2002), affirmed that graduate employability needs are in terms of competencies and skills gathered while in school rather than years spent acquiring certification.

Entrepreneurship is very important in combating unemployment in Nigeria. It has been ascribed several meanings by various authors. Gana (2008) sees entrepreneurship as the willingness and being able to seek out investment opportunities in an environment and be able to establish and run an enterprise successfully based on the identified opportunities. The concept of entrepreneurship focuses on building individuals innate abilities that would be useful in the society at large. Similarly, Ihekwoaba (2007) posits that entrepreneurship as a concept occurs when an individual develops a new approach or innovates a new idea to solving old problems under conditions of risk. Emphasis on entrepreneurship and personal development programmes in HEI's will definitely proffer lasting solutions to the unemployment problems in the Nigeria. NUC (2007), stated that the entrepreneurial studies and vocational training are out to making beneficiaries to think creatively to job creation during their undergraduate days and after graduation from the university. The inclusion of vocational and technical education as well as entrepreneurship education to HEI curriculum by National Universities Commission (NUC) and National Board for technical Education (NBTE) has been a welcome innovation in preparing graduates for the world of work. Falola (2009). Entrepreneurship helps graduates identify business potentials within their immediate environment and more importantly develop the ability to turn this potential to substance by applying requisite skills to enhance economic productivity. This is

the bane of this study as the paper seeks to emphasize the need for HEI's to concentrate more on entrepreneurship education. This will in turn have a positive effect in the overall development of the nation's economy. This is in line with the assertions of Akpoveta and Agbomah (2009), as they believe that graduate unemployment is attributed to the failure of the educational system to recognize the place of creativity and innovation but place more importance on paper qualifications and certifications. This is what this study seeks to address by reiterating the fact that entrepreneurship is the main key to attaining self-employment which opposes paid employment. Job creation is a tool for developing the economy of any nation and this can only be achieved if graduates are adequately equipped with information on becoming entrepreneurs.

To attain this height, the government needs to provide the enabling environment for graduates to implement their entrepreneurial skills. This will be of immense benefit to the nation as individuals will not have any reason to be idle instead: they would channel their innate abilities to a more productive cause.

Graduate Employment, Entrepreneurships Programmes and National Development

Graduate entrepreneurship education is important to national development. Many developed countries today thrive on entrepreneurship as their mainstay and catalyst for overall economic development. They believe in youth empowerment programmes that will enhance creative, idea generation and innovation. That is why countries like Japan, China, USA, and Germany will continue to enjoy enhanced economic growth. The shortage of entrepreneurial skills is a major factor influencing unemployment of graduates in Nigeria as reported by Adebisi and Oni, (2012). In view of this, there is the need for overall transformation of the educational sector in Nigeria. Entrepreneurship education should cut across all levels of learning as well as all institutions of learning. Graduate unemployment can traced further to the educational system operated during pre and post-independence era in the country. Emphasis was on formal education rather than vocational/entrepreneurship education that equips graduates with requisite skills for employment or job creation. The introduction of the National Youth Service Corps seemed to be a respite in equipping graduates with opportunities for skill acquisition.

The one-year scheme has since lost its value due to the number graduates produced every year. Over 300,000 graduates across all the various HEI's are produced yearly and in spite of the Federal Governments efforts on job creation, most of these graduates are either unemployable or there are no jobs at all. Babalola (2007).

In view of this, the federal government in further attempts to curtail the ravaging situation, several support organizations have been created over the past five decades. The various institutions created aimed at creating

employment/entrepreneurial opportunities through skill acquisition programmes, job creation, poverty alleviation schemes, youth empowerment among others. These agencies include; National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), Industrial Training Fund (ITF), New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), Micro Finance Banks (MFB), National Directorate of Employment (NDE). These organizations were set up to tackle the problems of unemployment, social vices, development of work programmes for a pool of entrepreneurs, encouraging self-employment and up-grading the social status of youths in Nigeria.

Entrepreneurship education therefore provides students with adequate knowledge, ideas, skills and motivation to achieve excellence through entrepreneurship in diverse environments.

It is important that graduates are encouraged to compulsorily engage in entrepreneurial activities as it provides a suitable lifeline for national development. There is need for deep teaching and research in the area of entrepreneurship to entrench the spirit during higher education. This paper is therefore positioned to support the HEI's promotion of the entrepreneurship programme.

CONCLUSION

Graduate Entrepreneurship is highly essential to nation building. Developing countries such as Nigeria need to invest and inculcate in their budding youths the necessity to develop that interest in entrepreneurship at an early stage in life. This paper shows the importance of graduate entrepreneurship as a catalyst for overall national development. It also emphasises the need for appropriate strategies to be adopted to improve graduate employability in the country. This paper affirms that developing the right skill, connecting learning with practical observations from the labour market and knowledge on the application of these skills will make graduates more employable.

Higher Education as the pinnacle of the educational process and the level that precedes employment, must give all these strategies outlined in this study rapt attention if we are to experience the benefits that accrues from entrepreneurial education. The unemployment rate in Nigeria has reached an intolerable state and should be tackled head long until a lasting solution is implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the worrisome situation in Nigeria, all hope is not lost as the unemployment situation can still be remedied. All educational agencies at various levels must collaborate to ensure the full implementation of entrepreneurship education programme. National Universities Commission and other educational regulatory bodies for higher learning must begin to emphasize compulsory entrepreneurship courses for students at all levels. This would instil that sense of awareness about their career and also a sense of direction at an early stage. It also helps students make proper career decisions that will help them become self-

reliant. The structure of Industrial Trainings/Attachment programmes in HEI should be reviewed. Higher Institutions should make it compulsory for students to go on Industrial Trainings as requisite for graduation. The benefit of this form of first hand training and experience can never be overemphasized as students are exposed to the various skills needed to make them employable. Private establishments and government agencies should also be involved in the promotion of entrepreneurial knowledge. Seminars, lectures, trainings can be organised by these agencies to identify and groom potential entrepreneurs. The Bank of Industry should not be left as the nation is moving towards a more self sufficient economy through the development of the agricultural and manufacturing sectors. Symposiums can be organised to help youths (undergraduates and graduates) tap into the opportunities that abound in these sectors.

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