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**UNDERGRADUATE ENTREPRENEURIAL TRAINING: A  
CATALYST FOR GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY AND  
POST UNIVERSITY WORK EXPERIENCE**

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**Abstract**

*The paper observes the increasing challenges posed by the worldwide economic downturn, particularly as it results in high level of unemployment in most countries, particularly in the developing economies. It therefore makes attempt at exploring the possible need for entrepreneurship education in our tertiary educational institutions as a way to prepare graduates of such institutions for challenges ahead of their graduation. Various efforts of the Federal Government of Nigeria in integrating entrepreneurial training into the curriculum at universities, polytechnics and colleges of education were observed. The paper looks at the nature and type of entrepreneurial skills required by trainees for the Nigerian economy, the need for such training, the process and effects of such training and the employability of graduates. The paper concludes that the introduction of Entrepreneurial Education will assist in maintaining stable societal development, creating and maintaining an*

*entrepreneurial culture, attitude and drive within the young age group.*

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial education, Unemployment, Employability, Work experience.

## **Introduction**

In the last few decades, the concept of entrepreneurship has become vital as a result of constant and increasing economic challenges, particularly unemployment. With the soaring unemployment rate in Nigeria, self-employment and micro/small enterprises initiatives are presently high on the country's national agenda, in the hope that they will provide alternative channels of employment. Yearly, thousands of university graduates join the labour market in search of gainful employment while many companies are downsizing and outsourcing their functions. Strong global competition and use of technology accelerate the work processes, causing the loss of many jobs. The crisis is there, but so are the opportunities derivable from these technologies. Many reasons have been advanced to explain the rising level of unemployment amongst graduates, especially in Nigeria. One is the quality of practical and theoretical training to which these employees-to-be were exposed. Experts (Obisesan, 2010; Ehirheme & Ekpenyong, 2012) have also hinted at a possible mismatch between the type of education received in Nigeria's tertiary institutions and the actual needs of industries and other employers of labour. The third, and perhaps, the most poignant factor is the general orthodox orientation of Nigerian graduates, to depend on paid employment upon graduation rather than use their training and exposure to create jobs and allied economically-viable businesses. Thus, when working for a company becomes insecure and uncertain, people start to become their own boss.

To tackle the already sizeable unemployed graduates in Nigeria, the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced entrepreneurship education. The introduction of entrepreneurship education by the Federal Government of Nigeria represents one of the concrete efforts to stem the tide of rising graduate unemployment in the country.

Writing on entrepreneurship education, Anyanwu, Obichere and Ossai-Onah (2012) explained that “it is the process of inculcating the knowledge of creating value by pooling together a unique package of resources to exploit an opportunity”. As presently conceptualized, entrepreneurship education is implemented in Nigerian tertiary educational institutions to equip the undergraduates with business skills that would make them self-employed and job creators rather than job seekers, at graduation. Based on the understanding that entrepreneurship education will free the enterprising and innovative spirit of the beneficiaries, the Federal Government of Nigeria has approved its incorporation into the curriculum of her higher education institutions. The National Universities Commission (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), in line with their mandates as regulators of universities, colleges of education and polytechnics programmes, insist that students must take and pass specific entrepreneurship courses before graduation.

To make up for the curricula inadequacies in meeting employment problem, the NUC in July, 2004, organized a workshop on entrepreneurship for Nigerian universities as a way forward. The workshop produced a draft curriculum on entrepreneurial studies for Nigerian Universities. Consequently, many Universities have initiated entrepreneurship education programmes in an attempt to reverse graduate unemployment trend by giving the needed training in entrepreneurial skills to students for setting up businesses and to consider self-employment as a viable career option. Countries are motivated to increase the rate of entrepreneurship training to promote economic and social wellbeing. Tertiary institutions are expected to take center stage in the process of continuous development of entrepreneurship in a nation, to generate employment, and improve the economic development (Fatoki & Oni, 2014). According to Maina (2013), job creation would be enhanced by quality entrepreneurship training which will invariably reduce unemployment, poverty and social vices in Nigeria. He therefore concluded that entrepreneurship is a gateway to employment in view of volatile economic realities.

According to Onegbu (2014), entrepreneurship education/training is the purposeful intervention by an educator in the life of the learner to survive in the world of business. It has as its focus an action orientation, primarily embodied in teaching students how to develop a business plan. While Teshome (2014), submits that entrepreneurship education has come to denote all forms of knowledge delivery that seek to empower the individual to create real wealth in the economic sector, thereby advancing the cause of development of the nation as a whole. This was supported by Basse and Archibong (2005), who are of the opinion that the goal of entrepreneurship education is intended to empower our graduates irrespective of their areas of specialization with skills that will enable them to engage in income yielding ventures, if they are unable to secure jobs in the public sector. It is a reorientation from job seekers to job creators.

Entrepreneurship education develops and stimulates entrepreneurial process, providing all tools necessary for starting up new ventures (Postigo & Tomborini, 2002). It is commonly believed that entrepreneurship education is an imperative that would make a positive contribution to improving the entrepreneurship orientation of people, leading to the acquisition of skills, creativity, confidence, drive and courage, in order to create employment for self and others. Also, Oluwatobi and Ogunriola (2011), opined that one of the potent factors that enhance the wealth of nations is that of human capital. For Nigeria to accelerate its socio-economic development, there is the deliberate need to focus attention on human capital development through regular interaction of planners, employers and builders of human capital to facilitate the process of meaningful national development (Raimi, 2013).

Graduate employability and post university work experience are now issues of both national and global concern owing to the ever-rising number of unemployed graduates and inexperienced employed graduates. In recent times, there has been increasing global concern over the continuously heightened rates of unemployment around the world, particularly in most developing countries, where the youths have been identified as the most affected groups. As a result, various governmental and non-

governmental organizations have initiated policies through support agencies such as National Directorate for Employment (NDE), the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Small Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN), National Office for Technology Acquisition and Promotion (NOTAP), Raw Materials & Development Council (RMRDC) among others to address the problems of unemployment among Nigerian citizens (Olayinka 2010; Emmanuel, 2012; Akhuemonkhan, Raimi & Sofoluwe, 2013).

These aforementioned strategies were initiated with the hope that the development of self-employment and small enterprise initiatives would serve as a measure to unlock the economic potentials of the people, increase the capacity to empower and equip individuals in society to participate and benefit from their national economy as well as facilitate economic development which forms the basis for transformation (Unachukwu, 2009, Ekpo & Edet, 2011). More recently, the Federal Government of Nigeria established another means to inculcate self-employment (entrepreneurship) culture in students of tertiary institutions. This is to reduce the problem of unemployment among graduates and ginger the graduates towards the entrepreneurial spirit and instill in them competencies needed for post-university work experience. The paper therefore, examined the nature and type of entrepreneurial skills required by trainees for the Nigerian economy, the need for such training, the process and effects of such training and the employability of graduates.

### **Nature and Types of Entrepreneurial Skills**

According to Hannon (2009), the skills learned by students during their academic career can be placed into the two broad skill categories. That is, technical and non-technical skills. The technical skills refer to subject-specific or content specific knowledge and competence that are relevant to a particular discipline; while the non-technical skills are those skills which are relevant across many different jobs or professions. Non-technical skills are typically not job specific. They are generic to a range of different work contexts.

According to Jackson (2016) today's employers often require new graduates to add immediate value to their organisations and this can only be done through either innovative or initiative of the graduates. Thus, undergraduates must develop both technical and non-technical skills to achieve this goal. He therefore concluded that the development of only technical skills is no longer considered sufficient for graduates.

Williams (2011) concurred that the most effective way for graduates to stand out among the crowd is to prove that they possess outstanding credentials in a number of non-industry specific desired skill areas. For graduates to be successful in the tough environment, candidates for jobs must distinguish themselves from other candidates with similar qualifications. This is where creativity, innovation and initiative come in as the graduates without sufficient non-technical skills fail to utilize the opportunity provided for them by the economy judiciously. It is no longer sufficient for new graduates to have knowledge of an academic subject but lack in skills and competencies that are germane for a job. This was supported by Wilson (2012), who asserted that universities must prepare and equip graduates with entry-level knowledge and skills for the labour market.

If Nigeria is to make a success in employment rate, there is the need to stimulate entrepreneurial mindsets among young people, encourage innovative business start-ups, and foster a culture that is friendlier to entrepreneurship and to the growth of small and medium-sized businesses. The important role of education in promoting more entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours, starting even at primary school level, is now widely recognised.

### **The Need for Entrepreneurial Education**

Entrepreneurship encompasses an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It covers creativity, innovation and risk taking, and the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. This supports everyone in day-to-day life at home and in society, makes employees more aware of the context of their work and better able to seize opportunities, and provide a foundation for

entrepreneurs setting up social or commercial activities. Entrepreneurship education should not be confused with general business or economic studies, as its goal is to promote creativity, innovation and self-employment. Entrepreneurship is a vehicle to improve the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities and to sustain a healthy economy and environment to achieve this individual need an entrepreneurship education (Adewobi, 2019).

Entrepreneurship education focuses on life. A successful entrepreneur must not only have knowledge of the business world, but also possess a set of generic attributes, skills and behaviours - such as those related to communication, creativity, and problem-solving that is important to life as well as to business. Therefore, if entrepreneurship education is conducted with a view to promoting students' personal attributes, then it can have a substantial impact on students' careers, regardless of whether they plan to become entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship education can also be a societal change agent. Danko (2015) found that entrepreneurship education is a great enabler. Entrepreneurship education equips students in many aspects like self-empowerment, values clarification, role modeling, and systems thinking. This is important for all students, not only those who aim to become entrepreneurs.

The value of, and need for, entrepreneurship education can be summed up in a report by the Global Education Initiative of the World Economic Forum (Wilson & Sepulveda, 2009). While education is one of the most important foundations for economic development, entrepreneurship is a major driver of innovation and economic growth. Entrepreneurship education plays an essential role in shaping attitudes, skills and culture of the graduates. Hayward and Sundes (2015), believed that entrepreneurial skills, attitudes and behaviours can be learned, and that exposure to entrepreneurship education throughout an individual's lifelong learning path, starting from youth and continuing through adulthood into higher education as well as reaching out to those economically or socially excluded is imperative.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2008) stated that entrepreneurship education is made up of all kinds of experiences that give students the ability and

vision of how to access and transform opportunities of different kinds. It goes beyond business creation. It is about increasing student's ability to anticipate and respond to societal changes. Education is the key to national development (Maina, 2013). Generally, education is confirmed to have a positive effect on entrepreneurship (Kuttim, 2014). The growing number of tertiary institutions offering Entrepreneurship education is an attestation that entrepreneurship can be taught (Hafiz & Sa'ad, 2015). This is the more reason why Fretschener and Weber(2013), maintained that the main objective of entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions is to empower graduates irrespective of their course of study with skills that will provide them the opportunity to engage in income yielding business, whether they are able or not able to secure paid employment in public or private sector.

Entrepreneurship education seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurship success in a variety of settings. According to Chukwudi and Nwosu (2018), entrepreneurship education is structured to achieve the following objectives: to offer functional education for the youth that will enable them to be self-employed and self-oriented; provide the youth graduates with adequate training that will enable them to be creative and innovative in identifying novel business opportunities, to serve as a catalyst for economic growth and development; offer tertiary institution graduates with adequate training in risk management; to make certain bearing feasible; to reduce high rate of poverty; create employment generation; reduction in rural - urban migration; provide the young graduates with enough training and support that will enable them to establish a career in small and medium sized businesses; to inculcate the spirit of perseverance in the youths and adults which will enable them to persist in any business venture they embark on; and create smooth transition from traditional to a modern industrial economy.

### **Process and Effects of Entrepreneurship Education and Graduates Employability**

Studies have shown that entrepreneurship process is a vital source



of developing human capital as well as plays a vital role in providing learning opportunities for individuals to improve their skills, attitudes and abilities (Brana, 2008; Shane, 2009; Ekpo & Edet, 2011). It has further been argued that students who graduated in entrepreneurship reached higher scores in entrepreneurship intention and entrepreneurial self-efficiency than students who graduate in other disciplines (Noel, 2001).

Similarly, Wilson (2007), submits that entrepreneurship education serves a medium of increasing students' interest in entrepreneurship career. In addition, Owusu-Ansah (2004) reported that most people were motivated to a large or very large extent to start-up a business by virtue of their exposure to entrepreneurship trainings and concluded that the impact of entrepreneurship education on career intentions and aspiration of tertiary students in Ghana cannot be over emphasized. Another study from Kumara (2012) has further revealed that students who have received entrepreneurial education often develop positive attitudes and beliefs towards self-employment and entrepreneurship intention to a large extent. Additionally, Hannon, (2009) have found that an estimated 78% of students surveyed in Ireland who have passed through entrepreneurship education expressed interest in starting their own business in the future.

On the other hand, the concept of employability has in recent times remained the focus of government, employers, job seekers and educators. Employability refers to a person's capability for gaining and maintaining employment. For individuals, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and abilities they possess, the way they present those assets to employers and the context within which they seek work. Employability incorporates the dual aspects of supply and demand of labour to show that advancing one's position in the labour market by gaining credentials is partially dependent on structural factors outside the individual's control (Imeokparia & Kennedy, 2012). Thus, graduate employability is defined as referring to a wide range of attributes and competencies that enable a job seeker to gain and maintain employment (Kim, 2012), while Dike (2016), defined it as the capacity to get a job, function in a job and be able to progress within the job or between

jobs. In a narrow perspective, employability can be understood as preparation for a job in which case students are only given knowledge and skills directly related to the job they would wish to pursue (Olayinka, 2010). This understanding has a limitation of leaving out the soft skills which employers are strongly looking for in graduates (Weissemann, 2012; Kim, 2012).

Studies have shown that while academic qualifications are essential, in today's highly competitive labour environment, it is attitudes and aptitudes (soft skills) of job seekers which include problem solving, flexibility and adaptability, team work, confidence and integrity, analytical skills and communication skills that are more important to employers (Kim, 2012). In a more expansive or broader perspective, graduate employability can be understood as the non-market traits such as formation of public good values, valuing diversity, problem solving, among others, that presents a prospective employee as a productive member of a team (Kim, 2012). This was supported by Samuel (2014) who was of the opinion that besides academic qualifications, employers now look for the presence of non-academic skills such as analytical skills, communication skills, good interpersonal and social skills, team work, motivation, time management, problem solving, among others in graduates. This was supported by Nishantha (2015), who agreed that Diplomas and Degrees are no longer worth what they used to be in the labour market in enhancing the employment prospects of a graduate, it is now soft skills that matter. The above assertion was confirmed by Weissemann (2012), who found that employers are now looking for people possessing both hard skills (professional, technical knowledge and administrative knowledge and skills) as well as soft skills.

According to Garwe (2013), while the state of the economy has an influence on the number of graduates who can get employed, it is other factors such as the soft skills that define who get the job. This was further supported by Popo and Barckhuizen (2016) who agreed that factors such as lack of technical and industry-specific skills, knowledge and abilities or interactive attributes that include communication skills, interpersonal skills, team work, problem solving and self-motivation among others make the graduates to

be wanting when looking for job. The term employability is often used interchangeably with the notion of work-readiness. Yorke (2010) contends that work-readiness is a set of conditions sufficient for gaining initial employment, while employability is a set of skills which are necessary but not sufficient for gaining employment. Whatever term is used, it is better to note that graduates need to be both employable and work-ready to increase their chances of employment (Cheung, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the teaching of entrepreneurship education at the tertiary institutions would be seen as an added impetus tailored at re-engineering the overall tertiary school curriculum for maximum national productivity. This implies that entrepreneurship training should be seen as a necessary approach instituted to instill the needed competencies in Nigerian graduates to enhance their employability and self-reliance. Again, it could serve as an important means of empowering or developing the capacities of youth in tertiary institutions and a medium through which to generate employment opportunities for other graduates and themselves. In other words, quality entrepreneurship education play a vital role in equipping Nigerian youth with necessary intellectual capacity, skills and right type of work habit or attitude that could enable them to create jobs for the growth of Nigeria economy. It can therefore be concluded that the function of entrepreneurship education in maintaining a stable societal development cannot be over-emphasized. This further justifies the need to inculcate and solidify entrepreneurship education in Nigeria universities in order to create and maintain an entrepreneurship culture, attitude and drive especially within the young age group.

### **Way Forward**

Government should encourage entrepreneurial activities which are believed to be the remote cause of unemployment problem in Nigeria. Also, National Directorate of Employment should be allowed to give loans to people with viable and profitable projects that could

guarantee employment through the product of both industrial and agricultural consumable products and goods. The government should also improve the power sector to end the looming energy crisis in Nigeria and encourage entrepreneurial activities. This could help to improve the graduates' employment rate in the country which in turn will improve the people's standard of living.

Furthermore, there should be a government-regulated means on the lending rate from banks to encourage graduates to borrow money in order to invest more on small-scale businesses as lack of access to finance or high-interest rate contributed to the major problems of entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. The government should also concentrate on cautioning against the rising unemployment rate in Nigeria. This could be achieved by the establishment of programmes that will encourage the unemployed graduates in skill development which invariably leads to self-employment irrespective of their locations. If this is done, a reduction in waste of manpower will be observed and this will contribute to the buoyancy of the nation's growth. Finally, government spending should tend towards local production to caution inflationary conditions in the economy.

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