

Entrepreneurship Education for Persons with Special Needs in Nigeria

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Introduction

Persons with special needs are otherwise known as the exceptional persons; and are the beneficiaries of special needs education. They are individuals whose specific abilities or disabilities make their learning needs special (Iroegbu & Ezeanochie, 2009). These individuals include the visually impaired, the learning disabled, the intellectually challenged, the gifted and talented, the physically and health impaired. The special learning needs of these categories of persons could be in the areas of wants, deficiencies, exceptionalities, and experiences that require instructional services, treatment or therapies for better achievement of life goals (Nwanan & Milaham, 2008). Nevertheless, teaching and learning process involving person with special needs must be geared towards the realization of the national education objectives as articulated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria's National Policy on Education. These objectives include the following:

- i. Giving concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children irrespective of their physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities.
- ii. Providing adequate education for all people with special needs in order that they may fully contribute their own quota to the development of the nation.
- iii. Providing opportunities for exceptionally gifted and talented children to develop their talents, natural endowments/traits at their own pace in the interest of the nation's economic and technological development.
- iv. Designing a diversified and appropriate curriculum for all the beneficiaries (FRN 2004; p. 48).

However, it is regrettable that despite the above educational policy specifications, a lot of persons with special needs have failed to attain self-reliance and independence after schooling. Many of them have no doubt received the necessary formal education and/or vocational training without securing employment. The reasons for the unemployment matters for these categories of persons may not be far from the fact that most employers tend to see them as unproductive or incapable of functioning in job settings (Chukuka, 2008). Moreover, the current practice in educational provision for them does not provide them with the prerequisite experiences that can enable them to become self-employed. They appear to face enormous barriers to employment opportunities such as discrimination, exclusion from education and inaccessibility of the physical environment.

Besides, the training they usually receive appears to limit them to job seekers instead of creators. This, therefore, implies that persons with special needs ought to be prepared for economic independence right from school in order to fend for themselves in the rapidly becoming industrialistic and materialistic world economy. Sequel to this, entrepreneurship education promises a viable alternative to overcoming the unemployment saga facing persons

with special needs in Nigeria. Hence, entrepreneurship education entails the training of the individual (with or without special needs) to actualize his/her potentials and contribute to nation building. This paper therefore focuses attention on concept of entrepreneurship; entrepreneurship education; education of persons with special needs and expected innovations in education for persons with special needs to acquire entrepreneurial skills. Also, the paper discusses strategies to impart entrepreneurial skills in persons with special needs in Nigeria; and benefits of entrepreneurship education. Finally, the paper concludes discussion on the issues highlighted above.

The Concepts of Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship is the art of being enterprising. It is the willingness and ability of the individual (irrespective of status) to seek out investment opportunities, establish and run an enterprise successfully. Mangvwat and Sekuk (2008) define entrepreneurship as the ability to be adventurous by undertaking some daring or difficult tasks, especially in the business arena. Binta (2006) defines it as a purposeful activity of an individual or group of associated individuals undertaken to initiate, maintain or aggrandize a profit-oriented business unit for the production or distribution of goods and services. Therefore, entrepreneurship in this context means a skill that persons with special needs can learn to engage in economic activities with the aim to contribute their quota towards national development. In this respect, the nation's education system must aim at achieving an enviable position of activating in its recipients (irrespective status) the potential for critical thinking and effectiveness in the society. In this manner, the recipients of such education (with reference to persons with special needs) would have been prepared adequately to be self-determined and self-reliant.

On the other hand, entrepreneurship education is an educational system and/or teaching given to learners (with or without special needs) in and outside the school. It entails preparing a potential entrepreneur (one who undertakes) to become flexible, creative and an active participant and respondent in the dynamic society. This implies that entrepreneurship education is an aspect of education (teaching and learning process) that seeks to provide learners with knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings. It is indeed a distinctive aspect of education that assists learners (with or without special needs) to appreciate that:

Although a job may be successfully accomplished today by performing a given set of tasks, tomorrow an entirely different set of tasks and skills may be required; and because businesses (or job skills) are always changing; workers are to be conversant with new ways to do a given job or new ways to do a given job better (Okeke 2008; p.4).

This means that entrepreneurship education arms the individual with knowledge, information and training that will enable him or her to function adequately in a dynamic economic environment like Nigeria. It trains an individual (irrespective of status) now to carefully assess available opportunity, develop new innovations and eventually become creative (Ayannuga, 2008).

Education of Persons with Special Needs

Education of persons with special needs is that system of education that uses special tool to address the special learning needs of the exceptional child. It is a service-oriented system of education focusing majorly on the content and processes of educational intervention for persons with special needs. Also, it is a system of education, practice and curriculum-based enterprise that is especially concerned with the classroom instruction of persons with special learning needs (Iroegbu, 2007). In a related development, Ozoji (2008) posits that education of persons with special needs aims at compensating for their special learning problems.

In fact, this system of education is currently and constantly expanding its 'modus operandi' in instructional and material provisions for educating persons with special needs in order to achieve universal education for all school-aged children notwithstanding their physical or mental capacity. Invariably, education of these categories of learners is simply referred to as special needs education. The specialness of this aspect of education is actually in its philosophical orientations, professional practices and customized organizational contents to suit its special clients' needs.

Expected Innovations in Education for Persons with Special Needs to Acquire Entrepreneurial Skills

Generally, our education system has constantly been restructured and streamlined to embrace changes that have rocked all aspects of human endeavour. In keeping with this trend of events, stakeholders in the education of persons with special needs are faced with the compelling challenges of examining and adapting innovations that are likely to make special needs education worthwhile. Thus, this system of education (special needs) has progressively moved from training persons with special needs in full time special schools through mainstreaming to inclusive settings. Now, the contemporaneous issue is the entrepreneurship education. Therefore, in order to ensure adequate acquisition of entrepreneurial skills by persons with special needs; our education system must be flexible enough to reduce barriers in switching through education programmes and to transfer relevant educational qualifications and credits when necessary.

Again, educational partnership ought to be established between the employers of labour and the educational institutions where persons with special needs are being trained. This will not only create awareness on the part of the Nigeria polity about the entrepreneurial potential of persons with special needs but also develop deeper understanding of entrepreneurship education as a viable educational system option. Employers' organizations can play the role of helping to shape education policy in order to align curricular activities of these categories of learners to the needs of the labour market in the short, medium and long terms.

Our education system must be innovative enough and aimed at equipping its recipients especially persons with special needs with such entrepreneurial skills as strategic alliance and creative ability in sourcing funds and designing business plans. Persons with special needs are no doubt the most vulnerable group to unemployment matters in the Nigerian polity. This trend of events must stop if the nation's philosophy and psychology of educating persons with needs are to become a reality. Innovations are therefore necessary in the current special

needs education practices in order to reposition and redesign educational and /or vocational training for persons with special needs.

With the integration of entrepreneurship education in the training programmes for persons with special needs the curriculum of activities should incorporate and impart too, skills such as production, repairing and marketing of wheelchair, audio-visual equipment, mobility canes, tailor-frames, ear moulds (hearing aids) as well as the technical know-how in setting up small scale businesses. Again, beneficiaries of special needs education, should be accommodated in the mainstream of the general education in order to enable them acquire the entrepreneurial skills needed for entrepreneurship. Bhattacharje and Akhourri (1986) cited in Ikwulono and Oriade (2009) described entrepreneurship as innovation in itself that is brought about by the initiative capacity of an individual to develop new ideas. This implies that the individual starts from "having nothing" to have something. In this regard, education of persons with special needs should embrace curricular activities that could provoke in them new ideas, goal setting and creative personality.

More so, this system of education must be characterized by a high need for achievement, order, autonomy and problem-solving (Ikwulono & Oriade, 2009). The implication being that instructions meant for these categories of learners must be structured in parallel to the economic incentives derivable from the economic and market environments pertinent to entrepreneurship. This no doubt, goes hand in hand with the managerial perspective, which focuses on managerial skills that would enable them to exploit and pursue economic opportunities in their environments. According to Ihekwoaba (2007) cited in Ayannuga (2008) an entrepreneur is an individual or group of associated individuals who are rugged, dogged and persistent in search and operation of business activities. So, the type of education that will impart on persons with special needs the prerequisite entrepreneurial skills must be such that could expose them to persistent searching and discovery of business acumen. Indeed, they need to acquire entrepreneurial skills that are capable of enabling them to convert new ideas into successful innovations, originate ideas, always looking forward to new ways of doing things, persevere and be creative in doing things (Chukuka, 2008).

Strategies to Impart Entrepreneurial Skills in Persons with Special Needs in Nigeria

To impart skills and knowledge that are meaningful and challenging to persons with special needs in Nigeria, there should be adequate planning or preparation irrespective of their differential exceptionalities in order that they become teachable whether in formal or non-formal setting. Nevertheless, entrepreneurship education can be provided in many settings. Here, there is no one right programme or set of activities rather, it is a matter of identifying what works for the individual or group of persons with special needs served in a programme. The following strategies could therefore be tenable in the impartation of entrepreneurial skills to persons with special needs in Nigeria:

- i. Age of the prospective beneficiaries: The age at which a child with special needs is to be introduced to an entrepreneurial skill must be taken into cognizance. Entrepreneurship education should therefore be introduced to the child at the ripe age i.e. when the child is ready to learn; otherwise it becomes a failure.

Interests and abilities: Whatever entrepreneurial skills meant for persons with special needs should be tailor-made to sustain their interests in order to boost their abilities in handling ventures requiring such entrepreneurial skills.

The time they have to devote to entrepreneurial activities: Adequate time should be given to persons with special needs to devote entrepreneurial activities in schools. Because without adequate time schedule those who require individualized attention/instruction during teaching and learning process will be left out.

The available fiscal and human resources (i.e. community support, business support): Before embarking on entrepreneurship education for persons with special needs it would pay-off to take into account the available fiscal and human resources as well as their sources. This is mainly because any educational programmes for persons with special needs are rather capital intensive.

The expertise of staff and the kind of training and support staff might need: It has been stated elsewhere that "the specialness of education for persons with special needs is actually in its philosophical orientations, professional practices and customized organizational contents to suit its special clients' needs". In this respect, expertise on the part of staff and support staff and the kind of entrepreneurial training for persons with special needs is indispensable otherwise the whole thing will amount to effort in futility.

The effect programme participation may have on youth supports and benefits: A specific period of time should be set aside to evaluate what effect the programme may have on the prospective participants. With this arrangement it would be feasible to determine success and/or failure of the programme in achieving the expected objectives in the life of its participants.

The availability of existing entrepreneurial programmes in the area: It would be wise for the programme to take its bearing from the existing entrepreneurial programmes. Probably, this could provide a leeway to ascertaining the propensity of new programmes in terms of success and/or failure. Therefore, references should always be made to the available entrepreneurial programmes (if any) so that the new ones will take off on good footings.

The support of the programme from organization's leadership: In order to ensure success in entrepreneurship education for persons with special needs, stakeholders should seek support from leading organizations (most especially the non-governmental or foreign organizations). In doing this, a wealth of knowledge and probably funds and equipment could no doubt be generated for the smooth take-off and of course, running of the programme in the Nigeria polity.

The intended outcomes of the programmes/activities.: Any programme of activities without intended outcomes are not the good ones. In this regard, any entrepreneurial programmes/activities meant for persons with special needs must specify its intended outcomes. It is from these outcomes that success or failure of the programme(s) could be assessed.

Benefits of Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education has been identified elsewhere as the key driver of our economy. In this regard, the benefits of entrepreneurship education cannot be overemphasized. Its impact on its beneficiaries (including persons with special needs) includes (1) Improved academic performance; school attendance; and educational attainment (2) Increased problem-solving and decision-making abilities; job readiness; and social psychological development and (3) improved interpersonal relationships; teamwork; money management and public speaking skills as well as health status (*Internet material*).

Ongoing research commissioned by the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of its programmes found that when youth participated in entrepreneurship programmes they have the following benefits:

- **Opportunity for work based experience:** Work experience is for youth with disabilities during high school to acquire jobs at higher wages after they graduate. Also, students who participate in occupational education and special education in integrated settings are more likely to be competitively employed than those who have not participated in such activities.
- **Opportunity to exercise leadership and develop interpersonal skills:** By launching a small business or school based enterprise, persons with special needs can lead and experience different roles. In addition, they learn to communicate their ideas and influence other activities effectively through the development of self advocacy and conflict resolution skills. Moreover, they learn how to become team players, and to engage in problem-solving and critical thinking - skills valued highly by employers in the competitive work place of the 21st century. Mentors, including peers with or without disabilities can assist persons with special needs in developing these competences.
- **Opportunity to develop planning, financial literacy, and money management skills:** The ability to set goals and to manage time, money and other resources are important entrepreneurship skills, which are useful in any work place. For persons with special needs, learning about financial planning, including knowledge about available work incentives; is critical for building entrepreneurs with disabilities or exceptionalities who are currently receiving cash benefits from the Supplemental Security Income Programme (SSIP) (Mugu & Iroegbu, 2009).

It is therefore, imperative from the foregoing that wealth and a higher majority of jobs are created by small businesses started by entrepreneurial minded individuals, many of whom go on to create big businesses. People exposed to entrepreneurship frequently expressed that they have more opportunities to exercise creative freedoms, higher self-esteem, and an overall greater sense of control over their own lives (Ojala, 2008). Consequently, many experienced business people, political leaders, economists, and educators believe that fostering a robust entrepreneurial culture will maximize individual and collective economies and social success on local, national and global scales.

Again, entrepreneurship education is a lifelong process starting as early as elementary school and progressing through all levels of education, including adult education. The standards and their supporting performance indicators are a framework for teachers to use in building appropriate objectives, learning activities, and assessment for their target audience.

Conclusion

Given entrepreneurship's potential to support economic growth and social cohesion, the policy goal of Nigerian educational system should be tilted towards developing a culture of entrepreneurial thinking in all learners including those with special needs. The entrepreneurial response in all its ramifications must give institutions of learning better means for redefining their research activities to include more useful professional knowledge; to move more flexibly over time from one programme emphasis to another; and finally build an organizational identity and focused entrepreneurs through entrepreneurship education.

Successful entrepreneurial activity should by nature be 'demand-driven' as it is a reaction to a given market demand. In Jomtien 1990, great emphasis was laid on partnership in education requiring an alliance of education, family, business and government leaders working to fully address the education needs and challenges of work and life in the 21st century. Developing entrepreneurial skills will enhance workplace productivity and career options for persons with special needs. Consequently, our education systems should seek to develop the right skills needed to develop entrepreneurial attitudes among young people including those with special needs. Persons with special needs seeking for work and entering the workforce need to be prepared for the responsibilities that accompany entrepreneurship, employment and career development. Because, they have variety of abilities and talents which if properly developed will improve their human dignity. Nevertheless, some areas that may boost their entrepreneurial thinking have been suggested for inclusion in their school curriculum as complements to the existing ones. These areas have been itemized below including:

- Rural handicraft and environmental beautification training
- Fabrication of products and participation in small scale business
- Painting and decorating
- Social entrepreneurship involving the creation of charitable organizations that will seek for supports from both national and international organizations.
- Production of special needs education related materials and equipment such as wheelchairs, calipers, prostheses, crutches, mobility cane, tailor frame, educational toys, hearing aids, etc.
- Training persons with special needs on cultivation of tree nurseries, and
- Other formal and informal entrepreneurial/vocational trainings relevant to the individual and societal needs.

Finally, when enlisting persons with special needs for entrepreneurial/vocational training programmes suggested above, the nature and degree of their disability, interest and aptitude, residence, etc. must be taken into cognizance to make for effectiveness and functionality.

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