

CREATIVITY AND INVENTIONS IN YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: THE ROLE OF FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION TO THE TARGET GROUP.

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Abstract

Unemployment as in the sphere of human existence has continued to be a source of concern to both developed and developing countries of the world. Youth empowerment enhances the economic strength of the country which is also a contributing factor of influence that enables them to participate in the decision making which directly or indirectly affect their lives and total wellbeing. Invariably, for youth to contribute and enhance their self-worth, income, immediate family and the society. This paper therefore looks into the concept of creativity and invention and the role of functional education as applied to youth empowerment. It discusses the efforts so far made in empowering Nigerian youths and skill acquisition, economic importance of empowering Nigerian youths, strategies for empowering youth, and the challenges of empowering Nigerian youth with functional education programmes. The paper concludes with recommendations on the topics of discussion.

Keywords – Creativity, Invention, Youth Empowerment, Functional education programmes. Skills acquisition.

Youth in Nigeria is said to be limited by age and thus those within the youthful age are categorized to be within Age 7-30, age 12-30, age 18-20. It has been agreed as a matter of convenience that 30 which features in the *National*

Youth Corpse Decree, is the limiting age for youth in Nigeria Arazu, C (2008), Egboh, E.A., Obi, M.A.O., Okeke, M.I. and Eme, O.I. (2009). Those above the age of 30 maximum, according to the National Youth Policy for Nigeria, may

be accepted to play the roles of youth leaders, youth organizers, youth animators, etc. The National Youth Council of Nigeria got this clause enshrined in the youth policy for Nigeria.

Nigerian youth are one of the most talented in terms of innovation and self reliance for economic growth putting into consideration the number of grandaunts from its various institution of learning who are making endless efforts at making a living despite the insufficiency for white collar jobs in the country and this skills make them to be potential job creators and not seekers if giving the enabling environment.

Creativity is the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new, whether a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form. Wyckoff (1991) defines creativity as new and useful. Creativity is the act of seeing things that everyone around sees while making connections that no one else has made. Creativity is moving from the known to the unknown. Culture exerts a negative force on creativity according to Pearce (1974), however, "were it not for creativity, culture itself would not be created."

Drucker (1985) argued that innovation is the tool of

entrepreneurship. In addition, both innovation and entrepreneurship demand creativity. Creativity is a process by which a symbolic domain in the culture is changed. New songs, new ideas, new machines are what creativity is about Mihaly (1997).

The Concept Of Creativity And Invention

Creative outcomes seldom emerge in an instant: a recognized process is involved, even if it appears to be rather chaotic. It begins with recognition of a problem or anticipation of an opportunity, and then, through understanding the situation and reflecting on the issues, new linkages are contemplated and possibly new combinations of components are made from this emerge visible solutions or possibilities that are subjected to valuation, which may be continuous with judgment being suspended while the search process is prolonged in pursuit of genuine newness. Entrepreneurs take bold creative steps but situations encourage creativity.

Creativity is, however, enhanced when people have some freedom, but not too much; high internal commitment to the task; but not too high a commitment; high proportion of intrinsic rewards, but some extrinsic rewards as well; some competition but not winner takes- all competition. Thompson (2001), opined that entrepreneurial activity depends on the process of innovation following creativity, not on creativity alone.

Importance of Creative Thinking

Creative thinking has various definitions. However, it is the art of generating solution to problems by the force of imagination and reasoning. It is an activity of the mind seeking to find answer to some of life's questions. In a dynamic and changing world, the challenges of man are also not static. They take on new forms and require a deep creative thinking approach (Okpara 2000).

It is necessary to know that we live in a thinker's world. It is therefore, not surprising to see that the men/women who are ahead are those who see ahead with the eyes of their mind. Men and women who have engaged their minds in resourceful thinking to generate idea and products, which stand the test of time.

Every idea is a product of thinking and every product is the manifestation of idea naked in a thinker's mind. These are people who see problems as opportunities to improve and do something new or something better, people who keep these two vital questions on their mind. "What can I do to make things better, or what can I do to make better things? This is the product of thinking.

In making things better, the goals are usually to improve productivity and efficiency, achieve the needed speed, enhance comfort and convenience, influence returns positively, and so much more. While in making better things, thinking can produce various alternatives leading to making better

things, thinking can produce various alternative leading to the evolution of a completely new idea, new production processes, or a total departure from the conventional. Whatever the goal, thinking is an indispensable tool in the life of all successful entrepreneurs.

Invention

An invention is a unique or **novel device**, method, composition or process. The invention process is a process within an overall **engineering** and product development process. It may be an improvement upon a machine or product, or a new process for creating an object or a result. An invention that achieves a completely unique function or result may be a radical breakthrough. Such works are novel and **not obvious to others skilled in the same field**. You may be taking a big step in success or failure.

Invention is often a **creative process**. An open and curious mind allows an inventor to see beyond what is known. Seeing a new possibility, connection, or relationship can spark an invention. Inventive thinking frequently involves combining concepts or elements from different realms that would not normally be put together. Sometimes inventors disregard the boundaries between distinctly separate territories or fields, (Wikipedia 2010) several concepts may be considered when thinking about invention.

The Role of Functional Education As Applied to Youth Empowerment.

The National Youth Policy (2001) saw the youths as the foundation of the society. Their energies, inventiveness, agility and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation; through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in socio-economic and political development; in the dreams and hopes of the youths, a nation finds her motivation; in their energies and enthusiasm, the nation builds her vitality and purpose; and with their aspirations, the future of the nation is assured (Anasi, 2010).

From the youth development policy statement, one can deduce that; peace, security, growth and development of a nation/society lie with the youths, the same way as the instability, disorderliness, violence and destructive tendencies also lie with the youths. The youths must be moulded, motivated and guided to imbibe and develop positive moral values that will be harnessed in achieving the desired peace, security, socio-economic and political development for the good of all and sundry. This is necessary because, according to Anasi (2010), the youths are the owners and leaders of tomorrow, they are the most active segment of the population, their numerical strength is greater than that of the aging population, and the major 'determiners' of peace and stability in the nation/ society. The extent of youth responsible role and conduct in the society is positively

correlated with development of a country.

The Economic Importance Of Empowering Nigerian Youth With Functional Education Programmes.

Ubah (2011) posits that Entrepreneurship Education will in addition to helping willing recipients to establish their own small-scale business or company after graduation, also help them to have the knowledge of how entrepreneurial firms operate. It will enable them to acquire the skill for innovation, creativity and opportunity recognition which are very essential for anyone entering the market. They will also learn the skills that are necessary for the various and changing challenges they will face in their lifetime. Ubah suggests that in addition to these, entrepreneurship education will be useful in:

- Enhancement of economic growth for the individual and the nation.
- Poverty alleviation.
- The solving of the problem of youth restiveness, cultism, armed robbery, vandalization of oil pipelines among others.
- Reducing of the issue of kidnapping and insecurity of life and property.
- Minimizing of human trafficking and prostitution.
- The reduction of the level of unemployment and
- The increase of income per capita.

Entrepreneurship education thus assumed importance against the background of poverty, widespread unemployment and the need to shift the attention of the citizenry away from white collar jobs and government patronage. It will be recalled that the earlier generations of educated Nigerians saw government employment as the ultimate, and most citizens (educated or otherwise) have learned to look up to government for the provision of even the basic necessities of life. This “Big Brother” role of government, however, is unsustainable in the light of emerging global realities. The trend in the world is for more compact governments which are able to channel higher percentages of national earnings to capital rather than recurrent expenditure. Contrary to this popular developmental philosophy of governance, Nigeria for a long time adopted a patronizing, paternalistic and consumerist philosophy of governance where recurrent government expenditure in Nigeria is often in excess of 70% of the national budget. To reverse this ugly trend, government has made known its intention to promote private enterprise and to stimulate the entrepreneurial spirit in Nigerians.

The Strategies To Empower Youth With Functional Education Programmes.

The world of business is facing increasing pressure on a variety of ways. They are faced with the challenges to release new-products, find market, while

distributing and servicing their customers efficiently. These challenges have equally prompted the need for them to examine how they function. The bureaucratic approach to business currently employed by the developing world have been found not to be effective, instead, creative ways of responding that will move the entrepreneurs towards the idea age that has characterized the world of business is the in-thing. This challenge therefore of utilizing ideas has made many companies to turn to creativity training. Creativity is defined as the ability to develop ideas that are unique, useful and worthy of elaboration. It involves the use of ideas (working on ideas) until something comes out of it. Creativity is the ability to solve problems, fashion products, and define new questions in a particular cultural setting. This implies that what is considered creative in one setting may be a regular occurrence in another. The key word to creativity therefore is “insight” which emphasizes the might or ability to see a new thing (Woolfolk, 1998). The question then is, will people with insight automatically become creative? The answer is that the possession of creative ability ensures that an individual might exhibit creative behaviour to a noteworthy degree. However, the individual’s motivation, temperamental traits and willingness to learn will also count. It also includes the urge to engage in new things, tendency to favour or not to favour objects, self-confidence and willingness to take risks. These are all contributing factors that

determine who will exhibit creativity (Onu, 2006). Training in creativity can help the individual view problems from different perspective. It is also useful in generating unique solution (Vangundy, 1992). The need for training in creativity can be explained based on recent technological advances, short production cycles, global trade possibilities and fluctuating labour force. The link between creativity and problem-solving skills are therefore strong. Creativity will ensure that the individual is involved in initiating new projects, create opportunities while solving problems. Knowledge of creativity will also ensure that the individual learns to produce practical solutions to newly defined initiatives. These and other things are what creative problem-solving in the realm of creativity encourage. In getting creative people to work together, heterogeneous mix of preferred creative process style outperform teams with homogeneous mix in innovative work (Vangundy, 1992). This means that in entrepreneurship, getting people who are implementers, generators, optimizers and conceptualizers work with like minds will give a better result than mixing all forms of creative individuals in a group. This obvious mix-match of creativity traits may be contributory to the obvious failures witnessed by many establishments in Nigeria. In a creative and competitive world of entrepreneurship, the drive is to deliver creative and innovative wares. These innovations that add values to human welfare result in a better resource

utilization. The creative process, a complicated process, involves the ability to generalize, evaluate, design, trouble shoot, make decisions, create, modify, simplify, synthesize, hypothesize, learn new skills and memorize while utilizing various forms of higher order cognitive processes. The individual's ability to solve problems creatively therefore is dependent on his/her ability to utilize knowledge required to solve specific problems (Onu, 2006). These abilities can be classified by the type of problems to be solved and the strategies (that must be structured) to be utilized in solving the problems. Problem-solving cannot be divulged from creativity. The process of thinking, finding fact, seeking ideas and solution are processes involved in creativity. In creative problem-solving, ideas are generated; solutions found and evaluated so as to select best ideas. The sum total must be for the purposes of doing business. Linking entrepreneurship with creative problem-solving therefore make the entrepreneur a "system thinker", one who intuits, an inventor, with an entrepreneurial mindset (Eno-Obong, 2006). The entrepreneurial mindset sees needs, problems and challenges as opportunities. He/she comes up with innovative ways to deal with the challenges, utilizes and consolidates opportunities. He/she is equally an optimist, a strategist, one who is confident and hardworking. He/she is never afraid of failure.

The Challenges of Empowering Nigerian Youth With Functional Education Programmes.

There are several factors that hinder entrepreneurship education in Nigeria. They include:

- Poor knowledge based on the subject matter and low spirit of dedication to duty
- Unavailability of fund
- Insensitivity of government to enterprise creation and expansion strategy
- Non-inclusion of entrepreneurship programme in the school curricula
- Poor societal attitude to Technical and Vocational Education development
- Inadequate facilities and equipment for teaching and learning
- Poor plan and execution of processes of action
- Isolated pro-pockets of ineffective programmes and management incompetencies (Oviawe and Ekhoobiye, 2008).

Recommendations on Further Improvement on Youth Empowerment through Functional Education in Nigeria.

The Federal government should evolve a national culture of entrepreneurship by supporting, training and rewarding self-reliant graduates across the tertiary levels in Nigeria. This approach would help foster among

students offering entrepreneurship innovation, invention and creativity.

In order to enrich the curriculum of entrepreneurship, the tertiary institutions offering entrepreneurship education should organize periodic field trips, industrial tours to industrialized nations, mentorship programme, hosting of exhibitions/fairs, coaching/grooming, seminars/conferences/workshops and exchange programmes in order to inspire undergraduate students and learners to imbibe entrepreneurial traits.

Sequel to prescription (b) above, there is the need for periodic review and assessment of the contents of the entrepreneurship education curricula. The school curriculum should be pragmatic, that is, inculcate in the undergraduate students practical enterprise-building skills which should be turned into viable business opportunities during and after graduations, thereby reducing youth unemployment in Nigeria. Entrepreneurship education thrives more when strengthened by University technology business incubation centers (TBICs). Nigerian Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education should therefore be actively involved in the creation of TICs for better and effective promotion of entrepreneurship education. This is the model in Brazil, Australia, USA and other economies. From prescription (d) above, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme should be refocused as a period for acquisition of Entrepreneurship skills and implementation of those skills

during the service year. After passing out, it is expected that the trainees will establish personal businesses. Massive awareness and sensitization are required in order to embed entrepreneurship culture in the higher institution systems and the larger society. With particular reference to the school systems, there is the need for culture of entrepreneurship education to be integrated into all academic courses of study in tertiary institutions and secondary schools. This singular initiative would re-orientate the Nigerian youth thereby changing their mindsets from job-seeking mentality to job-creating mindset. The government should refocus the Education Trust Fund (ETF), Petroleum Development Trust Fund (PTDF) and Federal Ministry of Education (FME) to earmark a substantial portion of their budget for funding public universities/polytechnics and colleges of education offering entrepreneurship education courses. The funding should cover training, research, infrastructural development and programmes for academic and administrative members of staff in charge of entrepreneurship education across the three levels of tertiary institutions.

The Vice Chancellors, Rectors and Provost overseeing the affairs of the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education respectively should ensure that course instructors/lecturers assigned to teach entrepreneurship education are specialists in the field. However, where there are difficulties in getting experts, non-specialist lecturers with relevant

background in academia should be engaged and sent for accelerated training within and outside Nigeria. Experts with practical experience in entrepreneurship from the industry could also be engaged on full or part-time arrangement.

The authorities of Nigerian higher institutions should explore the prospect of securing assistance and advisory services from government's support agencies for their graduates interested in establishing start-up businesses. The National Directorate for Employment (NDE), the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the Small Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN) are particularly relevant. The various governmental support agencies such as Federal Institute of Industrial Research, Oshodi (FIIRO), National Office for Technology Acquisition and Promotion (NOTAP), Raw Materials Research and Development Council (RMRDC) et cetera should align their statutory mandates with promotion of entrepreneurship education in the Nigerian higher institutions.

The various micro-finance banks should be alive to their obligations by providing the needed financial and advisory services to graduates and non-graduates that have passed through entrepreneurship education and who possess viable business plans and zeal of establishing innovative small-scale businesses.

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