

Innovations

Poverty alleviation through skills development and entrepreneurship education: A panacea for sustainable development

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Abstract

This study investigated the importance of skills development and entrepreneurship education as a panacea to poverty alleviation for sustainable development. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and was based on the theory of human capital development. The constructed survey instrument was pilot tested using test-retest and the data were analysed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a reliability index of 0.82 was obtained. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. One of the major findings which emerged from the study was that: respondents had a strong belief that through exposure to entrepreneurship education, graduates are enabled to be creative and innovative and that this will help them to be self-reliant and ultimately move away from the shackles of poverty. It was, therefore, recommended that government should ensure that the regulatory bodies of tertiary Institutions such as the National University Commission (NUC) should facilitate full implementation of entrepreneurship education as a substantial part of every programme.

Keywords: 1.Poverty Alleviation, 2.Skills development, 3.Entrepreneurship Education, 4.Sustainable Development.

1.1 Introduction

Poverty is a global phenomenon which threatens the survival of mankind. Efforts at seeking solutions to the cankerworm are made both at domestic and international levels. This informed the United Nations in December 1992, to declare October 17 as the date for the international day for the eradication of poverty. In line with the spirit of these declarations, initiatives were taken by the government domestically and internationally to carry out programmes to alleviate poverty.

World Vision (2018) reported that the international poverty line is currently set at \$1.90 a day, which is the universal standard for measuring global poverty. And 736 million people live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$1.90 a day. Also, 1.3 billion people in 104 developing countries, which accounts for 74 percent of the world's population, live in multidimensional poverty, according to a 2018 survey by the United Nation Development

Programme. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the United Nations to end extreme poverty by 2030 is unlikely to be met.

A World Poverty Clock (2018) study reveals Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the most extreme poor people in the world. India has a population that is seven times that of Nigeria. The 86.9 million Nigerians now living in extreme poverty account for almost 50% of their estimated 180 million population. But having large swathes of people still living in extreme poverty is an Africa-wide problem. Of those countries in the top ten, only Ethiopia must be on track to meet the United Nations' SDG to end extreme poverty by 2030. Outside the top ten, only Ghana and Mauritania are also on track with the SDG target. Indeed, of the 15 countries across the world where extreme poverty is rising per World Poverty Clock data, 13 are currently in Africa. As a consequence, the mission to end extreme poverty globally is already at risk. By July 2018, 83 million people would have been lifted out of extreme poverty since January 2016 but the number is 37 million people fewer than the required to meet the 2030 target.

Poverty alleviation programs can also aim to eliminate economic or non-economic poverty. Some of the common methods used to alleviate poverty are education, economic development and income redistribution. Poverty alleviation efforts may also be aimed at removing social and legal barriers to income growth among the poor (Ugwoegbueta, 2010). Among the efforts used to address poverty by successive governments including the establishment of the Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Better Life/ Family Support Programme (BLP/FSP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Petroleum (Special) Trust Fund (PTF), Poverty Alleviation Programme of the 1999 civilian administration and others, but there seems to be persistent poverty. All the programmes mentioned above collapsed and in no way did not satisfy the government objectives for which they were established (Ezemoyih, 2010).

However, poverty alleviation during this economic crisis should be backed by skills development and entrepreneurship education. It has been suggested that entrepreneurship education, which is designed with the objectives of training the youths in various business strategies to acquire the needed entrepreneurship skills and as such have sustainable economic development, through employment opportunities is a good panacea to poverty alleviation (Ezemoyih, 2010).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Poverty alleviation has continued to occupy a centre stage in the development agenda of various nations all over the world. The strategies for achieving the goal have tended to depend on the perceived extent of poverty, the vision for its reduction and the human and material resources at the disposal of each country. The incidence of poverty in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (of which Delta State is part) has been on a steady increase for about the last three decades. The region is characterized by a high level of poverty, unemployment and frustration among the Niger Delta people (Aneozengetal, 2011).

Before 1970 in Nigeria, high levels of poverty, unemployment and youth restiveness problems were virtually nonexistent. This is so because those who graduated from school were few. They were easily absorbed into available job vacancies in the country. Since the 1990s, things greatly changed as available jobs were no longer enough for the teeming youths graduating yearly from the various institutions both within and outside the country. The challenge, therefore, is overwhelming for the global community in general and Nigeria in particular. The problem of this study is to ascertain if skills development and entrepreneurship education can be considered strong strategies for poverty alleviation for sustainable development in Nigeria and other countries in the world.

1.3 Theoretical Background

This work is based on the following theoretical perspective of human capital theory. Based on the works of Schultz (1971), Sakamoto and Powers (1995), and Psacharopoulos and Wood Hall (1997), the human capital theory rests on the assumption that formal education is highly instrumental and even necessary to improve the

production capacity of a population. The rationality behind investment in human capital is based on one of the arguments that people must be encouraged to develop entirely new ideas, products, processes and methods through creative approaches that can reduce poverty. Countries such as Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan have achieved unprecedented rates of economic growth while making large investments in skills development and education (Nwahunanya, 2011). However, Nigeria's system of education has not had the expected positive growth impact on economic growth. However, one of such possibilities that could account for such results is that schooling provides few or no skills (Ayara, 2002; Ementa, 2013; Umunadi, 2014).

Thus, the theoretical framework of this work is focused on the fact that everybody must have functional education through the acquisition of life skills to reduce hardship. Entrepreneurship education opens the door for humans to acquire practical skills for self-reliance and nation development. Entrepreneurs identify an opportunity, mobilize money and manage skills and take calculated risks to open markets for new products, processes and services (Ighalo, 2011). It is the right time for future Nigerian entrepreneurs/youths to acquire entrepreneurship education to improve their standard of living and reduce hardship.

1.4 Purpose of the Study & Research Questions

This study has three purposes: 1) to investigate, from the perspective of the entrepreneurs, the relevance of skill development and entrepreneurship education in alleviating poverty; 2) to find out the extent to which skills development has helped to alleviate poverty through entrepreneurship; 3) to capture opinions of entrepreneurs on how entrepreneurship education helps to alleviate poverty for sustainable developments.

The following research questions guided this study:

- a. What is the relevance of skills development and entrepreneurship education to achieving poverty alleviation?
- b. What are the challenges facing skills development and entrepreneurship education to alleviating poverty?
- c. What are the strategies put in place to enhance skills development and entrepreneurship education to Alleviate poverty?

1.5 Significance

From a general perspective, this study is important because the provision of skills development and entrepreneurship education is a priority of the nation for sustainable development by providing findings that could be used to alleviate poverty. This study could contribute to the world of knowledge and practice, especially within the context of Nigeria.

Furthermore, having entrepreneurs appraise skills development and entrepreneurship education, will suggest a true reflection of the present state of the poverty level in the Niger Delta region, specifically Delta State.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Entrepreneur, Entrepreneurship, and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Education

The word entrepreneur comes from the French word *entreprendre*, which means to undertake. Entrepreneurs are defined based on their backgrounds or disciplines. Indeed, the concept of entrepreneur has not gotten a generally acceptable definition. In almost all the definitions, there is an agreement that he is somebody with a kind of behaviour that includes:

- Initiative taking
- The organizing of social and economic mechanisms to practical account
- The acceptance of risk or failure

Entrepreneurs are found in all professions like education, medicine, research, law, architecture, engineering etc. The following concept of entrepreneurship emerged to include all forms of entrepreneurial activity: “Entrepreneurship is the process of creating something new with value by devoting the needed time and energy, taking on the accompanying financial, psychological and social risks, and gaining the resulting monetary and personal satisfaction and independence rewards. (Hisrich & Peter, 2002:P.6)

Furthermore, Venter et al (2015) view entrepreneurship as a creative act and an innovation. It is all about creating something that did not previously exist. Innovation is the specific tool of entrepreneurship by which entrepreneurs exploit change as an opportunity for different business services (Venter et al, 2015).

Thus, entrepreneurship education is defined by Consortium for Entrepreneurship Training (2004), as a purposeful intervention by an educator in the life of the learner to impact entrepreneurial qualities and skills to enable the learner to survive in the world of business. UNESCO (2008), further explained that the definitions of entrepreneurship education in developed countries focus on creativity, innovation and thinking “outside the box”, while in developing countries, it is a way to develop a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship and self-employment.

2.2 Concept of Poverty and Poverty Alleviation

Poverty as a concept varies in form and means different things to different people depending on their environment, circumstances and needs. For this paper, poverty would be taken to mean lacking in various forms including lack of income and productive resources adequate for sustainable livelihood, lack of access to education, increased morbidity, inadequate or no housing, homelessness, and lack of participation in the decision-making process, malnutrition among others. Given its multi-dimensional nature, poverty has been perceived in different ways. Poverty can be seen as a reflection of conspicuous defects in the economy as demonstrated by mass pauperization of the working and professional class including artisans, mass unemployment and poor welfare services. In such a state the means of achieving minimum subsistence, health education and comfort are absent (CBN, 1999).

Poverty alleviation is any process which seeks to reduce the level of poverty in a community, or amongst a group of people or countries. It needs equal access to economic opportunities that encourage sustainable livelihood and basic social services as well as specific measures to facilitate access to those opportunities and services.

2.3 Skills Development and Entrepreneurship Education as a Tool for Poverty Alleviation

Skills development and entrepreneurship education are considered a strong strategies for poverty alleviation. It fulfils a primary role in preparing the youths for their future. In line with this, the United Nations in 2015 declared 17 sustainable development goals to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, which include those related to poverty, prosperity, quality education, inequality etc.

By implication, therefore, sustainable development is closely linked with human development or capacity building which implies skills development and entrepreneurship education.

Skills development and entrepreneurship according to Kotelnikov (2012) are the key to adopt to ensure that individuals are empowered to lower the unemployment level. When graduates set up a small business with the application of knowledge acquired through entrepreneurship education, it ensures prosperity and competitiveness. The business environment is also quite unpredictable because there are a lot of variables to examine. The variables may include issues and expectations of different interest groups which can influence a business, an industry and even a total market. Due to these unforeseen variables, entrepreneurship education can relate meaningfully to the goals of sustainable and national development by linking the world of knowledge acquisition in the universities to the society at large.

However, graduates from the university who have been properly trained and equipped with competencies and skills such as ICT for self-reliance will be able to face future and emergent challenges in the increasingly globalized competitive society through the upward trajectory of sustainable self-employment which is resilient to external shocks.

Thus, the nature, relevance and appropriateness of entrepreneurship education cannot be overemphasized. Some issues need to be addressed for an action to achieve sustainable development goals (2016 – 2030). In Nigeria, the level of awareness about entrepreneurship seems to be very low. This is attributed to a lack of entrepreneurship education which is one of the major crucial factors leading to unemployment in most countries of the world. The absence of a functional entrepreneurship education curriculum and teaching methodology is an impediment to sustainable development which if not checked will continue to incite and increase the incidence of unemployment and poverty among the Nigerian populace (Olodi, 2000; Inegbenebor, 2005; Shi hui, 2008).

Tertiary institutions and particularly universities have a role to play in preparing the youth for the world of self-reliance. By the end of 2007, there were over two hundred programmes across the entire universities and these academic programmes lack relevance, hence the quality of programmes offered in Nigeria universities give no acknowledgement that the skills and knowledge may prove directly useful to students after school as self-employment that may alleviate poverty (Okebukola, 2005; Forsman, 2018).

Furthermore, the development of entrepreneurship education in Europe started in the 2000s. It focused on the understanding of the essence of entrepreneurship. However, in comparison to the USA, the education system of the European states in this field is not developed at such a high level. Only the largest and the most progressive universities can afford to educate themselves about entrepreneurship education. This problem is also typical for domestic education as well: entrepreneurship education programmes are rather rare in Russian universities. The content of such programs is mainly theoretical (Pihkala & Lahi Kainen, 2018).

Furthermore, Kiiru & Mburu (2006) posit that whether a household in either survival or opportunity-driven entrepreneurship, real income improvements will be realized depending on whether the following preconditions are met. First, there must be some entrepreneurship capability within the household, second, there must be at least some reasonable infrastructure facilitating easy inter-village and inter-shopping centre movements to improve the local market for goods and services. These two are the greatest push factors of rural development through entrepreneurship. These two factors need to be reinforced by conscious policy actions to improve the demand for goods and services among the vulnerable poor who cannot directly benefit from market-oriented intervention policies.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey approach. Data for the study was generated from an opinion poll from a sample of 100 entrepreneurs (respondents) randomly obtained from a population of 1005 entrepreneurs. This consisted of 65 entrepreneurs in the urban areas and 35 entrepreneurs in rural areas of Delta State, Niger Delta Region, Nigeria respectively.

A structured questionnaire consisting of twenty-four (24) items was used for data collection. The questionnaire contained items divided into 3 sections according to the research questions that were investigated. The questionnaires were designed using the 4-points Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree with weighted mean scores of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The items in the instrument were subjected to face and content validation by two experts from the faculty of education. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained with Cronbach Alpha and it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82.

Mean and Standard Deviation were the statistical tools used for answering the research questions while a t-test was used for testing the hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance. Mean scores below 3.5 were interpreted as Disagree and above 3.5 as Agree.

4.1 Results

The results of the study are presented as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the relevance of skills development /entrepreneurship education to achieving poverty alleviation?

All items in Table 1 below have a mean score above 3.5 showing that all items are important for alleviating poverty for sustainable development. That is, skills development and entrepreneurship education are panaceas in achieving sustainable development goals (2016 - 2030).

Table 1: Presentation of summary of all the responses to questionnaire items related to research question 1.

Item no.	Statement	\bar{X}	S.D	Decision
1.	The graduate of entrepreneurship education acquires good decision-making abilities that could make him/her successful in society.	4.13	1.14	Agreed
2.	The graduate is well informed about a particular career he/she could start as a chief executive.	4.25	1.03	Agreed
3.	Engaging in productivity through the transfer of practical skills that are not in the school curricula.	3.50	1.3	Agreed
4.	Encouraging the use of information and communication technologies for the acquisition of useful knowledge and informed decision-making.	4.16	.98	Agreed
5.	The graduates of entrepreneurship education come out as positive thinkers.	4.20	1.13	Agreed
6.	It inculcates in the graduates the management skills needed for a successful enterprise.	3.87	1.24	Agreed
7.	Facilitating improve improved access by people to appropriate vocational and technical education.	3.62	1.17	Agreed
8.	Government free skills acquisition programmes provide platforms for others to be trained at a reduced cost.	3.54	1.34	Agreed

Research Question 2: What are the challenges facing skills development and entrepreneurship education to alleviating poverty?

From Table 2 below, the low mean score of 2.78 indicates that entrepreneurs disagreed in their opinions that poor recognition of certificates issued from apprenticeship training schemes is not a challenge faced by entrepreneurs in Delta State. However, the high mean scores ranging from 3.55 to 4.12 respectively indicate challenges facing skills development and entrepreneurship education for poverty alleviation in Delta State, in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

Table 2: Presentation of summary of all the responses to questionnaire items related to research question 2.

Item no.	Statement	\bar{X}	S.D	Decision
1.	The necessary drive to become an entrepreneur is not there as a result of the emphasis placed on mineral resources e.g oil by the Nigerian populace and even the government.	3.62	1.24	Agreed
2.	Inadequate infrastructural facilities like good roads, electricity, access to information, etc	3.55	1.12	Agreed
3.	Lack of equipment to open workshops in completion of training.	4.00	1.03	Agreed
4.	Poor concept of entrepreneurship education	3.71	1.10	Agreed
5.	None availability of lecturers/training personnel	3.66	1.02	Agreed
6.	Lack of support from financial institutions like banks, government agencies and non-governmental organizations.	4.12	.92	Agreed
7.	Poor recognition of certificate issued from apprenticeship training scheme.	2.78	1.39	Disagreed
8.	Absent entrepreneurship centres for skills development	3.81	1.38	Agreed

Research Question 3: What are the strategies put in place to enhance skills development and entrepreneurship education to Alleviate poverty?

From Table 3 below, the high mean scores ranging from 3.54- to 4.48 respectively indicate that the entrepreneurs agreed that the listed seven strategies can alleviate poverty for sustainable development. However, only one low mean score of 2.78 was obtained. This indicates that entrepreneurs disagreed with their opinions that building ICT centres for encouraging youth training is not very relevant as a strategy to alleviate poverty in Delta State of Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

Table 3: Presents suggestions by entrepreneurs to improve skills development and entrepreneurship education for poverty alleviation

Item no.	Strategy	\bar{X}	S.D	Decision
1.	Providing incentives and support for entrepreneurs to engage in business establishments by granting loans	4.48	.63	Agreed
2.	Developing concrete policy on entrepreneurship education in the National Policy on Education	3.65	1.81	Agreed
3.	Employing experienced entrepreneurial/skills development staff in our institution of learning, graduates are enabled to be creative and innovative.	3.54	1.34	Agreed
4.	Establishing support system including market outlet for products and more efficient rural-urban transport system to facilitate fast movement of products.	4.34	0.74	Agreed
5.	Building ICT centres to encourage the training of our youths.	2.78	1.39	Disagreed
6.	Establishing entrepreneurship clubs at all levels of education.	4.20	1.13	Agreed
7.	Equipping entrepreneurship centres with facilities and power to operate facilities.	4.13	.65	Agreed
8.	Encouraging the participation of people in entrepreneurship initiatives aimed at poverty alleviation.	3.84	.84	Agreed

4.2 Discussion

The rate of poverty plaguing the Nigerian people has become a topical issue in recent times because more than 70% of the population lives below the poverty line. Since independence, the federal government had introduced a lot of poverty alleviation programmes but unfortunately, these programmes have yielded no results. However, the findings of this study have shown that entrepreneurs have a strong belief that skills development and entrepreneurship education will be beneficial to people in terms of poverty alleviation. The identified benefits range from being employers of labour to positive thinkers, acquiring knowledge of information and communication technologies for the acquisition of useful skills, and being good decision-makers and controllers of enterprises. The graduates will also come out with management skills needed for a successful enterprise, creative thinking and develop their abilities for successful living in the society, etc. The above findings confirmed the opinions of Suleiman(2006); Venter et al (2015). They posited that entrepreneurship skills, knowledge and support, increase the likelihood of entrepreneurship as a viable career option that can boost self-confidence, self-worth and business knowledge, thus helping in alleviating poverty for sustainable development.

The study also identified possible challenges faced by entrepreneurs in their determination to embrace the entrepreneurship education concept despite the huge benefits accrued to being an entrepreneur. The study also reveals that the absence of entrepreneurship centres, inadequate facilities at entrepreneurship centres, lack of facilities to open workshops in completion of training, lack of funds etc are constraints to skills development and entrepreneurship education in sustainable poverty alleviation in Delta State.

This finding agrees with the views of Ugwoegbu (2010) and Ementa (2013) who posited that skills development and entrepreneurship training in Nigeria is defective having no practical orientation. They believe that a visit to most of our schools and entrepreneurship centres reveals a glaring picture of complete dilapidated classroom structures and study equipment.

This study also identified numerous strategies consisting of a series of purposive acts and measures (of entrepreneurship training) in place to address poverty problems. One of such strategies is fostering ICT employment through entrepreneurship. That is why; successful entrepreneurship education which entails ICT can become the key factor in the development of qualified workers who will be able to position themselves as competitive workers in the international labour market (World Bank Group, 2016).

The result of this research work also emphasizes the need for more participation of people in entrepreneurship programs aimed at poverty alleviation and the establishment of entrepreneurship clubs in schools. Though entrepreneurship may be taught at all levels of education, the entrepreneurship skills the people possess are inadequate for entrepreneurship (Agbamu, 2005).

According to Tactila (2010), entrepreneurial skills are learned via pragmatic real-life development projects. Furthermore, the study also established that there should be incentives and support for entrepreneurs to encourage them in starting their businesses. Thus, Ezemoyih (2010); Inegbenebor(2005); Azubike (2006); Hofer and Potter (2006); concluded that entrepreneurs should be supported financially but there must be policies which will govern our financial activities like lending, loans and grants to avoid economic crisis. Such lending should be supervised and business activities monitored.

5.1 Conclusion

Poverty is a serious problem in Nigeria, which stems from unemployment, or low productivity and the attendant low income of the employed ones. The Federal Government's effort to alleviate poverty can be meaningful if the measures for poverty reduction can be identified such as entrepreneurship development. In addition, if the public fund involved in the government efforts are channelled in appropriate directions.

Conclusively, having entrepreneurial ability means that one is developed knowledge, skills and the right attitudes for success in business enterprise. Many nations that have developed entrepreneurial education have developed very fast. This has greatly helped in the solution to economic, societal and unemployment problems of countries that have embraced the policy of entrepreneurship development. The qualitative production of skills and entrepreneurship education graduates would indeed aid the reduction of unemployment and poverty and consequently assist in achieving the sustainable development goals.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made after a careful look at the results of the study.

1. The various educational institutions should try to make their curricula to be entrepreneurial activity-friendly and all levels of education must have entrepreneurial education courses for learners and also establish entrepreneurship clubs.
2. To fight poverty and unemployment through entrepreneurship training, graduates must be skilful in information technology. Since the digital economy significantly influences the poverty rate. (World Bank Group, 2016).
3. Government should establish more training centres throughout the federations so that periodically training programmes can be organised for entrepreneurs and prospective ones.
4. Government should ensure that the regulatory bodies of tertiary Institutions such as the National University Commission (NUC) should facilitate the full implementation of entrepreneurship education as a substantial part of every programme.
5. Government should establish more job creation offices in each of the states in Nigeria. Such as the one established by the Delta State Government. Where Youths are been trained and supported to establish their businesses.

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