

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION FOR THE BLIND IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This paper examined entrepreneurship and education in relationship to the extent to which blind people have been empowered to achieve self-reliance. In doing this, the paper discussed salient issues bordering on the concept of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship education, and the blind; current practice in education of the blind; what ought to be in order to prepare the blind for entrepreneurship; strategies to achieve entrepreneurship in the blind persons in Nigeria; including the blind in entrepreneurship education; benefits of entrepreneurship education; and the way forward. In conclusion, the paper advanced that the ultimate purpose of any system of education is to help learners to aspire to a set of goals where opportunities for self-reliant, personal satisfaction and social contributions are made feasible; rather than to a theoretical ideal way of life. Finally, the paper suggested that vocational rehabilitation could be provided for blind people who are not capable of benefiting from formal entrepreneurship education.

Introduction

Work is the ultimate of any educational system. It is said to be central to a man's life; and to effectively get involved in it a number of preparations are made. These preparations start right from birth; and involve a number of factors that must combine to blend the career of an individual. Nevertheless, people usually project their views of themselves, their preferred life style and the world of work unto occupational tasks. To this end, counselors are usually sent to schools to assist students in making worthwhile career choices. Irrespective of this stride, the problems of unemployment still raise its ugly neck amongst persons with disabilities with reference to the blind in our society. Unemployment, as it may, cannot be attributed only to lack of adequate preparation for a choice of career, but much more on too much emphasis on paper qualification as well as lackadaisical attitudes on the part of stakeholders towards making learning interactive and learner centred. Invariably, education supposed to activate the resources or potentials within the learner (notwithstanding his or her status) for critical thinking and effectiveness. Regrettably, the current education system appears inadequate to prepare the blind to harness their potentials to the extent of becoming self-determined and self-reliant individuals.

This paper will therefore, consider entrepreneurship and education in relationship to the extent the blind people have been empowered to realize their potentials in the world of work. Specifically, this paper focuses its discourse on the concept of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship education, and the blind; current practice in education of the blind; what ought to be in order to prepare the blind for entrepreneurship; strategies to achieve entrepreneurship in the blind people in Nigeria; including the blind people in entrepreneurship education; benefits of entrepreneurship education; the way forward and conclusion.

The Concepts of Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship education and the Blind

- **Entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship comes from the word entrepreneur, which means one who undertakes. It is the art of being enterprising; that is the ability to be adventurous by undertaking some daring or difficult tasks especially in the business arena (Mangvwat, 2008). It is the willingness and ability of an individual to seek out investment opportunities,

establish and run an enterprise successfully. The enlightenment philosopher, John Locke (1632 – 1704) stresses that every human has a fortune in his own personality. From the entrepreneurship perspective; this means that the fortune of a human being is constituted of mental and materials resources. According to Ojala (2008), the mental resources include internal entrepreneurship, self-development, learning new things and ideas as an entrepreneur; while the material resources refer to external entrepreneurship (i.e. material values brought by entrepreneurship such as goods and money). It is a process that changes according to the changes in the surrounding society.

- **Entrepreneurship Education**

Entrepreneurship education refers to education and teaching given both in and outside the school. It means growing into entrepreneurship which in turn depicts external and internal entrepreneurship. It seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings. It is a distinctive aspect of education that focuses on the realization of opportunity (Wikipedia, 2009).

Okeke (2008) explains that entrepreneurship education prepares a potential entrepreneur (whether sighted or blind) and is characterized by emphasis on flexibility, creativity, problem-solving; and opportunities to anticipate and respond to change. Specifically, entrepreneurship education assists learners to learn that:

1. 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
2. Because businesses are always changing, workers have to find new ways to do a given jobs or new ways to do a given job better.

- **The Blind**

These are individuals whose sense of vision is defective with corresponding functional limitations in orientation and mobility skills, daily living activities and visual tasks resulting from their defective visual condition (Iroegbu, 2006). Abang (2005) described the blind child as one whose visual defect interferes with his optimal learning and achievement unless adaptations are made in the method of presenting learning experiences, the nature of the material used and/or in a learning environment. For educational purposes, Ozoji (2006) contends that a child is blind if his preferred mode of reading is braille or other means that do not involve sight.

Current Practice in Education of the Blind in Nigeria

Blind people receive their education under two broad curriculum designs – unique and regular curricula (Ozoji, 2006). While the unique curriculum contains subjects such as orientation and mobility, braille reading and writing, sensory training and daily living skills; the regular curriculum constitutes subjects normally offered in schools including English Language, Mathematics, Social Studies, etc. Nevertheless, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) mandates that teaching and learning activities involving the blind must be geared towards the realization of the national education objectives in them. After all, the objectives of education for exceptional children including the blind are to:

- (i) Give concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children their physical, sensory, mental, psychological or emotional disabilities notwithstanding.
- (ii) Provide 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) Provide 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) Design a diversified and appropriate curriculum for all the beneficiaries (FRN, 2004: 48).

Irrespective of the above educational objectives/policy specifications, it is commonplace that a lot of persons with disabilities (with particular reference to the blind) fail to attain self-reliance and independence after schooling. In the same vein, many of them receive the much desired formal education and vocational training but fail to secure employment in order to earn a living. Two main reasons are attributive for the aforementioned trends in the realization of the education goals for these categories of learners. First, the negative attitudes of most employers who see the blind as unproductive or incapable of functioning in job setting (Chukuka, 2008). Secondly, the current practice in educational provision (curriculum design), does not provide blind people with experiences that can empower them to be self-employed. The training they receive seem to limit them to be job seekers instead of job creators. Ayodele and Ogbonnaya (2005) posit that persons with disabilities are faced with enormous barriers to employment opportunities such as discrimination, exclusion from education and inability to access the environment. The implication therefore, is that they need to be prepared for economic independence right from school; because, they face the challenges of fending for themselves in the fast becoming individualistic and materialistic world.

Given the foregoing scenario, entrepreneurship education promises to be the viable alternative to overcome the problem of mass unemployment amongst persons with disabilities (with reference to the blind) in Nigeria. Because, entrepreneurship education emphasizes the training of the individual (sighted or blind) to realize his/her innate potentials and ability to harness them for self-sustenance and independence. It is an employment strategy that can lead to economic self-sufficiency for persons with disabilities (blind people inclusive). No doubt, self-employment will provide the blind and their families with the potential to create and manage businesses in which they function as the employers or bosses; rather than merely being employees.

What ought to be in order to prepare the Blind for Entrepreneurship

Through entrepreneurship education, young people including the blind, learn organizational skills – time management, leadership development and interpersonal skills; which are highly transferable skills sought by employers. However, it is imperative to note that the job of an entrepreneur is to design a business that can grow; employ many people; add value to its customers; be a responsible corporate citizen; and bring prosperity to all those that work on the business. In this regard, the kind of education that will give the blind people self-reliance is entrepreneurship education. This is because, entrepreneurship is the purposeful activity (including an integrated sequence of decisions) of an individual or group of associated individuals undertaken to initiate, maintain or aggrandize a profit-oriented business unit for production or distribution (Binta, 2006). This means that entrepreneurship is a skill that one must learn to engage in economic activities that could enable one to contribute to nation building.

Therefore, learners who are blind should be exposed to entrepreneurship education. In doing this, stakeholders should lay emphasis on the learners' individuality and not their disabilities or impairments. This implies that education for this category of learners must entail simple modification, adaptations, adjustments, innovations; and curriculum management as well as other resources and practices of regular schools in order to meet their special learning needs.

It is commonplace seeing majority of persons with disabilities on the street begging for alms; but we should not forget that begging is a matter of choice. There are still some who hate begging but lack people who can guide them on "how to fish rather than giving them fish". This calls for a change in the orientation of the society about persons with disabilities with reference to the blind. Again, the saying that 'information is knowledge and knowledge is power' holds for all humans including the blind. In this regard, they need professional assistance and information in selecting subjects and career before hand.

Choosing subjects without proper guidance usually brings dissatisfaction even when the required skills have been acquired. Ayannuga (2008) observed that some subjects and courses are usually imposed on young people by relatives, teachers or peer groups without necessary considerations. This situation has done more harm than good to so many people including the blind. Therefore, the services of the guidance counselors must be extended to blind people as well. They have some dormant potential that need to be discovered and nurtured; and the kind of education that would blossom entrepreneurship in them is one which sets specific learning objectives and takes cognizance of their differential needs. With these facts in mind, curriculum development and execution for blind people must be made flexible incorporating vocational and entrepreneurial skills.

Strategies to Achieve Entrepreneurship in the Blind People

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 blind people served in a programme. Before starting, the following issues must be strategically considered:

- i. The age of the prospective beneficiaries
- ii. Their interests and abilities
- iii. The time they have to devote to entrepreneurial activities
- iv. The available fiscal and human resources (i.e. community support, business support)
- v. The expertise of staff and what kind of training and support staff might need
- vi. The effect programme participation may have on youth supports and benefits
- vii. The availability of existing entrepreneurial programmes in the area
- viii. The support of the programme from organization's leadership, and
- ix. The intended outcomes of the programmes/activities.

Including the Blind in Entrepreneurship Education

In order to fully integrate persons with disabilities with reference to the blind in entrepreneurship education programmes, it is important to consider the following essential factors:

- **Accommodations**

Some blind Nigerians may need accommodations in order to maximize their ability to benefit from the programme. Accommodations in this context are changes made in a classroom, worksite, or assessment procedure that help blind people learn, work or receive services. The classroom, worksite or assessment procedure for the blind must therefore be designed to alleviate the effects of blindness so that the affected individual can perform effectively.

- **Financial Planning**

In the United States special financial planning considerations exist for people with disabilities who are Social Security benefit recipients planning a career path that involves small business ownership. Also, several work incentives are available to assist them in their efforts, including a Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) account. The stakeholders of educational services for persons with disabilities with reference to the blind Nigerians should borrow a leaf from the United States in this direction. They should be made to understand the impact of their small business efforts on their entitlement to cash and medical benefits.

- **The Education for All (EFA)**

The education for all campaign should not become 'education for all minus blind children'. If EFA in the case of the blind children is to become a reality, entrepreneurship education needs to be nurtured. Besides the accessibility factor, the nature of distribution of blind children too, demands inclusive entrepreneurship education.

- **Curriculum Considerations**

Curriculum entails activities that formally or informally go on between the school and the children. Doing entrepreneurship education requires that what is taught blind children is comprehensive enough to make them fit into the world of work after schooling.

- **Facilities and Equipment**

Educational environment for the blind child including the existing special schools should have good facilities to enhance free and easy accessibility by the child. The buildings should pose minimal hazards to the child; while architectural adaptation of the existing structures must have been taken care of. In specific terms, to include the blind child in entrepreneurship education, his learning environment should be customized to promote access to all significant facilities and equipment. No area of special needs education is as equipment intensive as the education of the blind (Iroegbu, 2006). These equipment include braille machine, low-vision aids, slate and stylus, thermoforming machine, braille embosser (Computer brailing machine), typewriter, talking calculator, and so forth. Irrespective of the fact that they are usually expensive and normally imported, they are indispensable factors in the inclusion of blind people in entrepreneurship education. Extra funding sources, for instance, the Education Trust Fund (ETF) and World Bank may be explored to provide these equipment. Because the resource room of inclusive school should house these indispensable equipment to meet the learning needs of the blind children.

- **Technological Development**

It is no gainsaying that technology has become the culture of the average man today. Developments in technology have opened up many opportunities that were hitherto closed to blind fellows. Nworgu (1999) intimates that technology in special education aims at helping the overachievers and underachievers and those with physical problems attain an optimal level of functioning. Ozoji (2003) added that technology should free the child to be what he wants to be, to go where he wants to go and to actualize his potentials. Therefore, including the blind in entrepreneurship education requires that assistive and adaptive technologies are extensively employed in special education to enable them equalize their educational aspirations in the society.

- **The Role of Government**

All tiers of government should legislate and direct efforts towards educational provision in their various areas of jurisdiction. The National Policy on Education (2004) intimates that federal, state and local governments shall fund educational programmes within their areas of jurisdiction. There should therefore, be federal special education programmes, state special education programmes and local government special education programmes. Besides, government (in general) should expand its service scope to cover:

1. Pre-school counselling
2. Parent education
3. Grants in aid to special schools
4. Budget for special needs children should be per capita and channelled to wherever these children are being educated.
5. Review the employment of special teachers in the regular schools to collaborate with regular teachers.
6. Legislations that facilitate education of the children in the regular school.
7. Provide adequate funding for their education.
8. Attitude change towards policy formulation and implementation. The greatest threat to including the blind children is not always funds but attitudes. Government and the society need to change their attitudes towards the blind and their education.

Benefits of Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship 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 the blind) includes the following:

- i. Improved academic performance, school attendance, and educational attainment
- ii. Increased problem-solving and decision-making abilities
- iii. Improved interpersonal relationships, teamwork, money management and public speaking skills
- iv. Job readiness
- v. Enhanced social psychological development (self-esteem, ego development, self-efficacy); and
- vi. Perceived improved 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:

- i. Interest in attending college increased 32 percent
- ii. Occupational aspirations increased 44 percent
- iii. Independent reading increased 4 percent
- iv. Leadership behaviour increased 8.5 percent
- v. Belief that attaining one's goals is within one's control (locus of control) increased, and
- vi. Alumni (99 percent) recommended NFTE programmes
(*Internet material*)

Research regarding the impact of entrepreneurship education on youth with disabilities shows the following benefits:

- **Opportunity for work based experience**

Work experience is for youth with disabilities during high school, both paid and unpaid, help them 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, youth with disabilities 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 mentors both with and without disabilities can assist the youth 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 importance entrepreneurship skills which are useful in any work place. For youth with disabilities, learning about financial planning, including knowledge about available work incentives; is critical for building entrepreneurs with disabilities who are currently receiving cash benefits from the Supplemental Security Income Programme (SSIP).

It is therefore, imperative from the foregoing that entrepreneurship is the key driver of our economy. Wealth and a higher majority of jobs are created by small businesses started by entrepreneurial minded individuals, many of whom go onto 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 a local, national and global scale.

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.

The Ways Forward

- i. Entrepreneurship education for the blind requires attitude change towards their employment on the part of employers of labour.
- ii. They (the blind) should be exposed like their sighted counterparts to entrepreneurial trainings/experiences that could empower them to become self-reliant.
- iii. Persons with disabilities (with reference to the blind) should be adequately prepared for economic independence right from school through entrepreneurship education.
- iv. They should not be discriminated against in any educational programme or training that would prepare them to become entrepreneurial minded individuals.
- v. Persons with disabilities with reference to the blind should have freedom to select/choose their subjects/courses.
- vi. The curriculum design for the blind should be modified or adapted to include entrepreneurial activities that would foster a robust entrepreneurial culture in this category of persons.
- vii. The blind fellows should be made to look or think beyond their limitations; and to see themselves as capable of competing favourably with their sighted counterparts given the enabling environment.

Conclusion

The basic purpose of any system of education is to help learners (sighted or blind inclusive) not to aspire to a theoretical ideal way of life but to a set of goals where opportunities for self-reliant, personal satisfaction and social contributions are made feasible. Entrepreneurship education can lead to the creation of a strong pipeline of informed and prepared entrepreneurial minded blind people in Nigeria. However, vocational rehabilitation can be advanced as a viable option for blind people who are not able to benefit from formal entrepreneurship education instead of taking to street begging.

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