

# CHALLENGES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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## **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on challenges of entrepreneurship education for persons with disabilities with particular reference to Nigerian experience. Entrepreneurship education for persons with disabilities is conceptually defined for the purpose of clarification. The benefits and the state of entrepreneurship education are presented. Some challenges of entrepreneurship education for persons with disabilities in Nigeria are examined. They include instructional methods, physical and psycho – social barriers. It is observed that entrepreneurship education in most Nigerian institutions of learning is offered at an introductory level. It is only when persons with disabilities are involved and included in entrepreneurship education that their potential value can be realised for their economic empowerment and that of the nation.*

## **Introduction**

Nigerians with or without disabilities from personal experience and historical perspectives, are an enterprising people. They are engaged in diverse traditional and modern forms of small and medium scale economic activities for their survival. These include weaving, dyeing, leather works, commercial and agricultural production. For instance, Ozoji (2003) recalled one individual with visual impairment in Rivers State made raffia articles, grated cassava for garri processing, and pounded boiled palm fruits in a large canoe -shaped mortar in the fifties.

Today, with the improvement in science and technology, persons with disabilities are performing appreciably in different fields of human endeavour with the help of assistive devices. Some of them are graduates of tertiary institutions; others are trained in vocational centres. But with increase in graduate unemployment and the challenge in labour market, there is the need to make entrepreneurship education functional and inclusive in our tertiary institutions of learning. This will enable persons with disabilities have the option of becoming employees, self employed or even as employers of labour.

Entrepreneurship education seeks to provide students with knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurship in a variety of settings. It is aimed at preparing and equipping the individual with saleable skills which could be used to manage his own business or that of other persons. This will invariably reduce poverty level, increase employment generation opportunities, hence reducing Rural – Urban migration among person with and without disabilities.

An individual with a disability according to Emeration (2008), refers to a person with a physical or mental impairment who is significantly restricted in his or her ability to perform daily living activities either "continuously or periodically for extended periods" and, as a result of these restrictions, requires assistance with daily living activities. In spite of the stated objectives of entrepreneurship education above, persons with disabilities are faced with diverse challenges in the course of receiving instruction in entrepreneurship education

classrooms. These challenges include; physical/attitudinal barriers, instructional, material and facilities.

The paper therefore, examined the challenges of entrepreneurship education for persons with disabilities by addressing certain issues. They include: concepts, benefits, strategies for best practices and challenges of entrepreneurship education for persons with disabilities in Nigeria.

### **The Concept of Entrepreneurship Education**

There are many definitions of entrepreneurship education. However, they seem to address the same issue. Entrepreneurship Education seeks to provide students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurship in a variety of settings (European Union Commission, 2008). This implies entrepreneurship education for survival under any setting. Similarly, Emeration (2008) described entrepreneurship education as that which deals with those attitudes and skills that are necessary for the individual to respond to his environment in the process of conserving, starting and managing a business enterprise. This is further emphasized by Oduwaiye (2005) that entrepreneurship education prepares the individual to be properly equipped to acquire saleable skills which could be used to manage his own business or that of other persons.

Entrepreneurship Education, therefore, could be described as the education which assists students to develop positive attitudes, innovation and skills for self reliance. From the forgoing, it is expected entrepreneurship education in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria equips students with the desired knowledge and skills to run their enterprise or manage another person's enterprise. But the prevailing circumstances in our institutions do not equip students especially those with disabilities with the desired practical knowledge and skills to enable them benefit from course.

### **Benefits of Entrepreneurship Education**

There are many benefits students can get from entrepreneurial education in general. They include: Increased entrepreneurial activity; greater diversity in entrepreneurship; more entrepreneurial successes; better motivation for completion of formal education; increased business population; improved creative and critical thinking.

By encouraging persons with disabilities through the provision of adequate entrepreneurship education, it will be a viable career path for them. Entrepreneurship education will not only expand the pool of potential entrepreneurs with disabilities but also will help trigger a wider interest in and support for those of them seeking to start and grow new companies (Hart 2003 p.250). Some of them will pick career path in shop keeping, vocational and technical jobs and some will be employed to manage other people's enterprises.

Similarly, entrepreneurship education will allow a wider diversity of groups of persons with disability to learn skills and develop networks to successfully engage in entrepreneurial activities. Young (1997) argues that if entrepreneurship is taught effectively to persons with disabilities, it will generate more and better entrepreneurs and increase entrepreneurial success rates. This is seen in people like Barrister Ayuba Gufwan who has some physical challenges, yet owns and directs the Beautiful Gates Initiative of Jos. This is an organization that has employed persons with and without disabilities.

Furthermore, entrepreneurship education serves as an effective means to engage persons with disabilities while on training to contribute to economic development and sustain their communities by involving them in the economic activities of the society (Aspen Institute 2008). In this case, entrepreneurship education programs will appeal to persons with disabilities and will reduce incidence of school dropouts among them as they participate in economic activities. It will also expose persons with disabilities to lifelong learning and the 21st-century business skills (Fiet 2001 and Gibb 2002) as well as the practical application of

business management competencies (Young 1997). The more persons with disabilities are exposed to those skills, the more opportunities will be available to them to live more productive lives. Since entrepreneurship education puts greater emphasis on improving the cognitive abilities of students generally, persons with disabilities in particular will improve their creativity, opportunity recognition, and critical thinking through best practice,

### **Strategies for Best Practice in Entrepreneurship Education**

In order to achieve viable entrepreneurship education that will enhance sustainable development in Nigeria, the following strategies according to Ayodele (2006) will help to alleviate the problem of entrepreneurship education in the country. They include; genuine school work based learning incorporated in some studies as part of the national economic development strategies. Similarly, the development of apprenticeship scheme; mobilizing public and private funds to create a small venture capital funds is another strategy.

Others strategies include: the establishment of enterprises where students identify potential business, plan, create and operate small business using the school as mini-incubators; provide small business schools where interested students and community members can participate; develop entrepreneur internship programmes matching students with locally successful entrepreneurs with clearly established education programmes. Furthermore, collaboration and networking will enhance the establishment of an enterprise college, which aims at fostering best practices in entrepreneurship education for both students with or without disabilities.

### **Challenges of Entrepreneurship Education for Persons with Disabilities**

Persons with Disabilities particularly students are faced with a number of challenges. One of them is related to entrepreneurship education as taught in higher institutions of learning. In Nigeria, entrepreneurship education is a recent development which is taught as a prerequisite course under general studies. All students with or without disabilities are expected to offer (take) the course in their second year.

From personal observation and complains from students with disabilities, they are faced with a number of challenges. These include; curriculum content; instructional method, material and facilities; teachers attitude; learning environment/setting; attitude of employers to persons with disabilities and lack of financial facilities.

### **Curriculum Content**

Entrepreneurship Education in most of our institution is not in-depth and mainly an overview of the principles and practice under regular settings. There is no room for field or industrial experience as stated in the strategies for best practice which says that student (persons with disabilities) will be given some form of genuine school work based learning and also provide entrepreneur internship programmes which will match them with successful entrepreneurs who are established. In addition, students with disabilities are faced with the issue of curriculum adaptation where the curriculum does not make provisions for specialized contents that will serve their special needs areas.

### **Instructional method, materials and facilities**

Another challenge persons with disabilities are faced with is the issue of instruction. Akpan, Ntukidem, Ekpiken & Etor (2009) in their study reported that academic program for persons with disabilities could be well structured in educational institutions but the poor nature of delivery could render it fruitless. For instance, the absence of sign language interpreters makes learning difficult for students with hearing impairment. In the same vein, Ogu (2008) submits that inadequate infrastructures for persons with disabilities and poor maintenance of their school facilities are seriously affecting their teaching and learning. This

poses a serious challenge to them in the school system most especially in the absence of assistive technology devices and services, to meliorate their learning problems.

### **Teachers and Other Students' Attitude**

It is obvious that not all teachers may be knowledgeable on issues related to persons with disabilities but on a general note, they are expected to ensure conducive psychosocial climate in the education of persons with disabilities in their institutions. It is disheartening to note in most institutions of learning students with disabilities are left at the mercy of friends, course mates and a few teachers. Obanya (2010) observes that teachers should have the requisite attitude as well as the aptitude for teaching persons with disabilities, in addition to their area of specialisation. This makes entrepreneurship education more inclusive in nature as students with disabilities are taken care of. Furthermore, persons with disabilities need environmental accommodations and modifications to enable them learn effectively in the school. It is observed that our laboratories, workshops and classrooms are constructed without considering their plight and challenges. Consequently, they do not usually benefit adequately and smoothly from such teaching.

### **Attitude of Employers to Persons with Disabilities**

Persons with disabilities are faced with difficulties gaining appropriate employment and advancement in employment experience even when they are qualified. This is because employers have a poor attitude and disposition towards them and their capabilities. This may be due to lack of contact with such students during internship and field experience to enable such employers see student's capabilities and potentials. In the view, Scherich (1998) observed that employer's attitude to persons with disabilities is a serious limitation to job access and advancement and has affected a good number of persons with disabilities as a result, sending them to the streets for begging.

### **Lack of Financial Facilities**

The issue of poor funding of educational institutions has been of major concern to the various stakeholders in the education sector. Omole (2009) opined that adequate funding of the education sector would solve other problems in the sector as well as other sectors of the economy. In particular, educating persons with disabilities is capital intensive in nature in terms of infrastructure and facilities. They also face the same problem of lack of funds after graduation. Loan facilities and other financial facilities that can help persons with disabilities to start on their own are difficult to come by and where possible, the conditions are unfavourable. Even with government measures of poverty alleviation like National Directorate for Employment (NDE) loan schemes, and other youth empowerment schemes, there has been poor representation of persons with disabilities in these schemes and as a result some of them are discouraged to further their education or even establish their own businesses.

### **Conclusion**

Entrepreneurship education if properly pursued, no doubt has short and long term benefits for persons with or without disabilities and the nation at large. It will serve as a means for the economic improvement and diversification of the economy through creativity and innovations. However, where persons who are potentially creative but are faced with physical, mental or sensory challenges, are not discovered, motivated and functionally educated, the nation will be losing the contributions of great minds like Thomas Edison, Bill Gates, Pythagoras, Galileo, Stevie Wonder, Albert Einstein and Leonardo de Vinci. The relevance of entrepreneurship education can no longer be over emphasized on the part of persons with disabilities.

Consequently, for entrepreneurship education in Nigeria to yield the desired results for persons with disabilities, global practice and inclusiveness; review of course content to include field work for practical experience; improvement in the acquisition and use of assistive technology devices; provision of sign language interpreters and removal of physical and psycho – social barriers, are suggested as the way forward.

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