An Assessment of the performance of entrepreneurship and Flexible Skills Development Initiative in Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Lack of skills in youth and women is manifesting in chronic unemployment problem plaguing the Nigerian society. Also, graduates from tertiary institutions roam the streets in search of white-collar jobs without success. This has caused some of them great frustration, leading to their engaging in violent crime and other antisocial practices such as kidnapping, armed robbery and fraudulent practices, in the bid to survive. Therefore, women and the youth that have no formal education need quality skills for sustenance and livelihood. To curb unemployment of graduates and the state of insecurity that general unemployment has caused, some of the strategies adopted, introduced and being implemented by the Nigerian government is the teaching of Entrepreneurship Education in all tertiary institutions and the approval of National Vocational Qualification Framework (NVQF) for the informal sector. In line with these policies, for the formal sector, Entrepreneurship study has been taught in Auchi Polytechnic Auchi, since 2007, and Flexible Skills Development (FSD) since 2012. This study is thus an assessment of the performance of entrepreneurship and Flexible Skills Development initiative in Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State, Nigeria. It is established that entrepreneurship education, Flexible Skills Development (FSD) can increase access to affordable, flexible and quality skills acquisition. These strategies, if effectively implemented, will contribute greatly to curbing graduate unemployment, poverty and enhance economic empowerment and transformation of youth and women. Therefore, the paper recommends that all education stakeholders and head of educational institutions at all levels should encourage the effective implementation of the strategies. Also, quality of courses taught should be such that meet international standards. In addition, there is need for a synergy between the industries and vocational and technical institutions in Nigeria. This will enable the industries state the required type and quality of skills they desire to work in their industries. Furthermore, all stakeholders need to work effectively to proffer solution to the challenges of implementation of these strategies, so as to attain effective actualisation.

Keywords: Unemployment, entrepreneurship, Flexible Skills Development.
Introduction

Graduate unemployment is a grievous problem in Nigeria. It has led to many negative consequences such as socio-economic problems, mental stress, dissatisfaction and frustration cause young graduates to engage themselves in undesirable behaviours and practices such as kidnapping for a ransom, armed robbery, stealing and fraudulent practices. Young graduates roam the streets of Nigeria in search of white collar jobs without success. This has created a large pool of graduates that are unemployed. The cause of unemployment is lack of employable skills. Also, few jobs are available that will not meet the population of the graduates. In addition, the curricula in our institutions are not geared to the needs of the industry. Youth and women in the informal sectors lack skills for sustenance and a good livelihood. Therefore, in 2007, the growing unemployment problems in the formal and informal sector, prompted government to introduce a policy that all tertiary institutions in Nigeria should develop and implement a workable curriculum on entrepreneurship (Ojiefo, 2012; Aliu and Ibe, 2008). This entrepreneurship studies is encouraged to enhance sustainable development in Nigeria and to provide essential skills to those in the formal and informal sectors.

According to the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) (2013), the Nigerian Government has approved National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF) that has six levels. The NVQF is approved to be adopted by all public services and institutions. This framework is to certify and recognise vocations and skills in the informal sector and inculcate them into the scheme of government service, industry or self- employment scheme. In addition, the minister of Education Professor Rukayatu Ahmed Rufa’i stated that this framework will reduce over-reliance on paper qualifications. Furthermore, this will give an opportunity to those in the informal sector to empower themselves and contribute to national transformation and economic development. The six levels are as follows:

“NVQ Level Six would be the equivalent of Post Graduate Studies and NVQ Level Five would be equal to Higher National Diploma. NVQ Level Four would be equivalent to the National Diploma while NVQ Level Three would be the equivalent of Trade Test 1. NVQ Level Two will be equal to Trade Test Two and Level one will be equivalent to Trade Test Three”. The vision of the Nigerian Government in the Millennium development Goal (MDGs) by 20:20:20 is to develop learners that are able to think critically, with sustainable and lifelong skills that will enhance the confidence, livelihood of these learners, empower and transform the lives of learners with quality and relevant skills.

To implement Government policies on providing Skills to learners in the formal and informal sectors, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State, Nigeria, has commenced implementation of strategies to provide quality skills to those in these sectors. Auchi Polytechnic was founded in 1964 and located in Auchi Edo State South West, Nigeria. It is a technical and vocational institution. In Auchi Polytechnic, Nigeria, the theory and practice of entrepreneurship is a course taught to all students. Also, in Auchi Polytechnic Nigeria, a centre for Flexible Skills Development (FSD) has commenced imparting skills to those in the informal sector. These courses are easy to access, affordable and flexible for learners. The outcome of these strategies is that young graduates, women and those in the informal sector who study entrepreneurship and courses in the Flexible skills programme effectively can be empowered and innovative, have economic reward and satisfaction, the person may also have an entrepreneurial mind set, ability to think critically, have self-confidence and be equipped for self-employment.

A brief profile of unemployment in Nigeria

A society is affected when unemployment rate is high. In Nigeria, graduates roam the streets in search of white collar jobs or engage in criminal activities for sustenance. This was affirmed by Saint et al. (2003); Babatola (2010); and Oviawe, (2010) who reported that many graduates are wandering around the streets in search of jobs that do not exist. They further reported that this has led to few of them engaging in criminal acts. Also, they emphasized that the rate of unemployment in Nigeria economy is currently one of the highest in the world. According to Duze (2010) numerous economies in the world attribute their technological and industrial advancement to the establishment and implementation of entrepreneurship education.

Ojiefo (2012) in his studies discusses the importance for entrepreneurship education in Nigeria focused towards improving sustainable Development. Furthermore, he stated that the adoption by the
government through the Federal Ministry of Education to make entrepreneurship education a compulsory study for students in universities in Nigeria is viewed as a positive step in the right direction. In addition, he stated that Nigeria can therefore; join communities of nations that have tackled poverty through establishment of small scale businesses. Thus, entrepreneurs with small scale businesses should be encouraged in Nigeria.

Idogho and Ainabor (2011) investigated the extent to which the entrepreneurship education introduced in tertiary institutions in Nigeria as Government initiatives, has imparted in students. The study thus, concluded that the teaching of entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions had made significant impact on the students. It thus recommends an increase in the instruction for entrepreneurship education in Nigeria’s tertiary technical institutions. Therefore, all institutions in Nigeria should effectively implement entrepreneurship education.

According to Duze (2010) the Nigerian Government should make grants available for funding entrepreneurship education. Thus, funding of these strategies by government and other agencies will enhance effective implementation.

**Entrepreneurship Education in Auchi Polytechnic.**

“Entrepreneurship education is learning directed towards developing in young people those skills competences, understanding and attributes which equip them to be innovative and to identify, create, initiate, and successfully manage personal or community business and work opportunities, including working for themselves” (Aliu, 2010).

The management of Auchi Polytechnic Auchi, Nigeria has a great passion to make entrepreneurship education a success and thereby, achieve the empowerment and transformation of learners both in the formal and informal sector. In line with the vision of the Federal Government of Nigeria, which proposed the teaching of entrepreneurship education in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria, Auchi Polytechnic established a Centre for Entrepreneurship Education Auchi Polytechnic (CEDAP) in 2007.

Entrepreneurship education in Auchi Polytechnic is activity based. All registered students and students from the centre for Flexible Skills Development (FSD) have easy and affordable access, to facilities and quality skill training at CEDAP. Furthermore, all ND and HND graduates from the morning and evening programmes of Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi Nigeria since 2007 have acquired one skill or the other from CEDAP. Some of these graduates have used these skills to set up small scale business in Nigeria. CEDAP also, provides mentoring services to some of the graduates from her institution.

The skills taught at this centre of entrepreneurship studies in Auchi Polytechnic are geared towards curbing unemployment, poverty, and for the learners to develop quality skills that will give them confidence, life-long, sustainable development and empowerment.

Some of the Skills taught at the “CEDAP Village” are as follow: Poultry farming; Fish pond farming; Snail farming; Goat farming; Grass-cutter farming; Fashion and design; hair dressing/hair barbing; Construction of local cooking pots (Agele); Cake and Bread production; Carpentry; ICT/information Technology; Tie and dye; soap and cream production, metal storage tank and others. See Appendix 1 to 6.

Resource persons and facilitators are available in the “CEDAP Village” to teach the students different skills. Facilitators also teach the students the theoretical aspects of entrepreneurship and business. The items produced by students are exhibited and sold at the end of every semester. Currently, more workshops are being constructed at the centre. The centre for entrepreneurship has textbooks produced by Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, which facilitators utilize to teach the students. Some of the books are:

- Introduction to Entrepreneurship
- Practical Entrepreneurship
- Elements of Entrepreneurship and
- Entrepreneurship Development.
To evaluating the students, participation in practical skills is done using a log book provided to
students for continuous assessment. Also, a multiple choice examination is taken by all students at
the end of each semester. The final assessment is done in the ratio of 40% practical assessment and
60% semester examination for the formal learners. However for the students from the centre for FSD,
they are evaluated based on a given checklist and the ability to demonstrate that the learner can
produce a satisfactory product independently.

With these achievements by Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Nigeria, CEDAP has been made one of the
accredited entrepreneurship incubation centres for all Polytechnics in the South-South Zone of
Nigeria, comprising six states.

Challenges to effective implementation of entrepreneurship programme
Auchi Polytechnic implemented entrepreneurship studies effectively since 2007. However, the
following challenges are experienced:

- Some of the challenges experienced by CEDAP are high cost of skill acquisition
  facilities and operating cost.
- Lack of regular electricity supply.
- Lack of adequate internet facility.
- Lack of enough skill acquisition equipment.
- Students having the notion that white-collared job are more prestigious than
  vocational or skilled jobs.
- Inadequate funds to expand CEDAP facilities to accommodate more learners both in
  the formal and informal sectors.

Suggestions for improvement
1. Monitoring and evaluation of graduates from CEDAP to access the viability and
   sustainability of the Skills acquired by these graduates.
2. Sourcing for grants to provide more facilities in the “CEDAP Village”
3. Commercialisation of CEDAP products and services.
4. Trainings for facilitators, lectures and resource persons.
5. To expand the facilities in CEDAP Village to accommodate more learners.
6. To build a modern exhibition centre or show room for CEDAP products.
7. Construction of more workshops in CEDAP Village.

Flexible Skills Development in Auchi Polytechnic
The centre for Flexible Skills Development (FSD) was created in Auchi Polytechnic in September,
2012. The Centre is located at the Philipa Idogho Campus of Auchi Polytechnic. The main aim of
creating the FSD programme is to make education and skill acquisition accessible, flexible and
affordable to everyone, especially those in the informal sector. Also, to help disadvantaged groups
especially women to acquire knowledge and Skills for self -reliance, employment and self-
actualisation. This can assist the Nigerian Government to control youth restiveness reduce social
unrest and crime plaguing our society. This will also assist in women empowerment and the
development of the nation.

Flexible Skills Development (FSD) and blended learning was created by the Common Wealth of
Learning (COL) in 2010. This commenced with 10 Technical, Vocational and Training Institutions in
Africa. Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi Nigeria, is one of such institutions. The aim was for these institutions
to change their mode of instruction to learners from the traditional mode of teaching to a flexible mode
of teaching, using Open Education Resources (OER), discussion forum and media technology
example eLearning. Also quality employable skills are to be imparted to learners. For the FSD
programme for example, production of curricula for different courses is still on-going. While for the
entrepreneurship studies The NBTE entrepreneurship curricula are utilised.

Current status of FSD in Auchi Polytechnic
Some course curricula have been developed by FSD with assistance from Common Wealth of
Learning (COL) and Community Learning Network (CLN) members on Invest Africa group on CLN.
Due to awareness created by this centre, the following courses have commenced from June 2013, as shown in table 1.

**Table 1: Showing course currently commenced by centre for FSD Auchi Polytechnic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Duration of programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Word Processing</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fabric Construction</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Electronic Communication</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Computer Systems</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fashion Accessories</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Poultry Farming</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fabric Colouration</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The centre has created easy access and awareness around Auchi by going round for visitation and distributing the flyers produced by the centre. Furthermore, the centre for FSD has made these courses flexible to the learners by allowing the learners to plan a flexible time table for instruction. In addition the centre for FSD collaborates with the CEDAP and other departments in the Polytechnic to provide the necessary quality instruction to learners in the programme.

**Development process**

In order to develop and consolidate FSD initiative, it is necessary to:

- Identify and develop course curricula for new programmes according to the needs of the community.
- Identify and liaise with organisations outside Auchi Polytechnic that could be used as skill acquisition centres in the communities around Auchi.
- Develop radio and television programmes to advertise the FSD programme and provide self-instruction to distance learners.
- Create online self-instructional courses for the learner.

**Challenges to effective operation of FSD**

- Insufficient current data on skills available in the Technical and Vocational Institutes and in the non-formal sector.
- Lack of efficient internet network.
- Lack of regular electric power supply in Nigeria.

**Summary and Conclusion**

With the existence of about 50 Polytechnics and Monotechnics and 150 Universities in Nigeria (Ojiefo, 2012), the use of entrepreneurship and FSD in skills acquisition to curb unemployment in the formal and informal sectors of Nigeria can be achieved. Furthermore, possible solutions to curbing of unemployment, poverty and youth restiveness in Nigeria can be achieved through an efficient and effective development of these strategies (NVQF framework in Nigeria, quality entrepreneurship skills and flexible skills development implementation and blended learning). Skill acquisition through Entrepreneurship training and FSD, should be relevant to the interests and needs of the learner. Emphasis should be on skills improvement and competences instead of on certificates.

To curb youth and graduate unemployment and to empower women in Nigeria, new set of values and quality skills are needed. Some strategies implemented by institutions such as Auchi Polytechnic, are the formal teaching of entrepreneurship skills and Flexible Skills Development for the informal sector.
Therefore, like Auchi Polytechnic, all other stakeholders need to work effectively to find solution to the challenges and actualise these strategies to curb unemployment in Nigeria.

Recommendations

- To achieve national development and gainful employment in industries or establishing small scale businesses, the quality of courses taught to enhance these strategies should be such that meet international standards.
- Auchi Polytechnic FSD and the Centre for entrepreneurship studies should register with the NVQF Board. This will create a harmony in certificates issued by FSD in Auchi Polytechnic Nigeria and other Vocational and Technical Institutions in Nigeria.
- There is need for a synergy between the industries and vocational and technical institutions in Nigeria. This will enable the industries state the required type and quality of skills they desire to work in their industries.
- National Occupation Standards (Curriculum) should be adopted for the informal sector by the Government. This will enhance standards and proper evaluation of skills acquired by learners.
- Provision of funding opportunities to graduates from CEDAP and FSD to enable them set up small scale businesses. This will enhance the sustenance, empowerment and transformation of youth and children.
References


Appendices:

Appendix 1: Showing students in practical sessions at the barbing and hair dressing salons at CEDAP village.

Source: Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi (2013).

Appendix 2: Showing students in CEDAP workshops baking cake, bread, and sewing clothes.

Source: Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi (2013).
**Appendix 3:** Showing Poultry farming at CEDAP

**Source:** Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi (2012)

![Image of chickens and eggs]

**Appendix 4:** Showing pictures of fish and grass-cutter farming at “CEDAP village”.

**Source:** Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi (2012)

![Image of fish and grass-cutters]
Appendix 5: Showing pictures of Egele (local Pots) made by students at “CEDAP village”.

Source: Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi (2012).

Appendix 6a and b: Showing pictures of office workshop and office accommodation in “CEDAP village”.

Source: Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi (2012).