

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION: A CATALYST IN ACCELERATING AGRI-BUSINESS ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper has examined the place of Entrepreneurship Education in accelerating Agri-business activities in Nigeria. The paper explained what Entrepreneurship Education is all about including its goals. A conceptual framework developed by Garba in 2010 was adapted and it was used in illustrating the series of stages/processes that eventually climax in business start-up (Agri-business). The concept of Agri-business and Agri-business activities were examined in detail with examples and instances. The three major components in Agri-business, namely, the production and distribution of farm inputs, the actual production and then the processing and distribution of farm produce were examined including the objectives of Agri-business. The roles of Entrepreneurship Education in accelerating Agri-businesses were examined and the paper therefore recommended that the government should make incentives available to Agri-business managers/farmers.

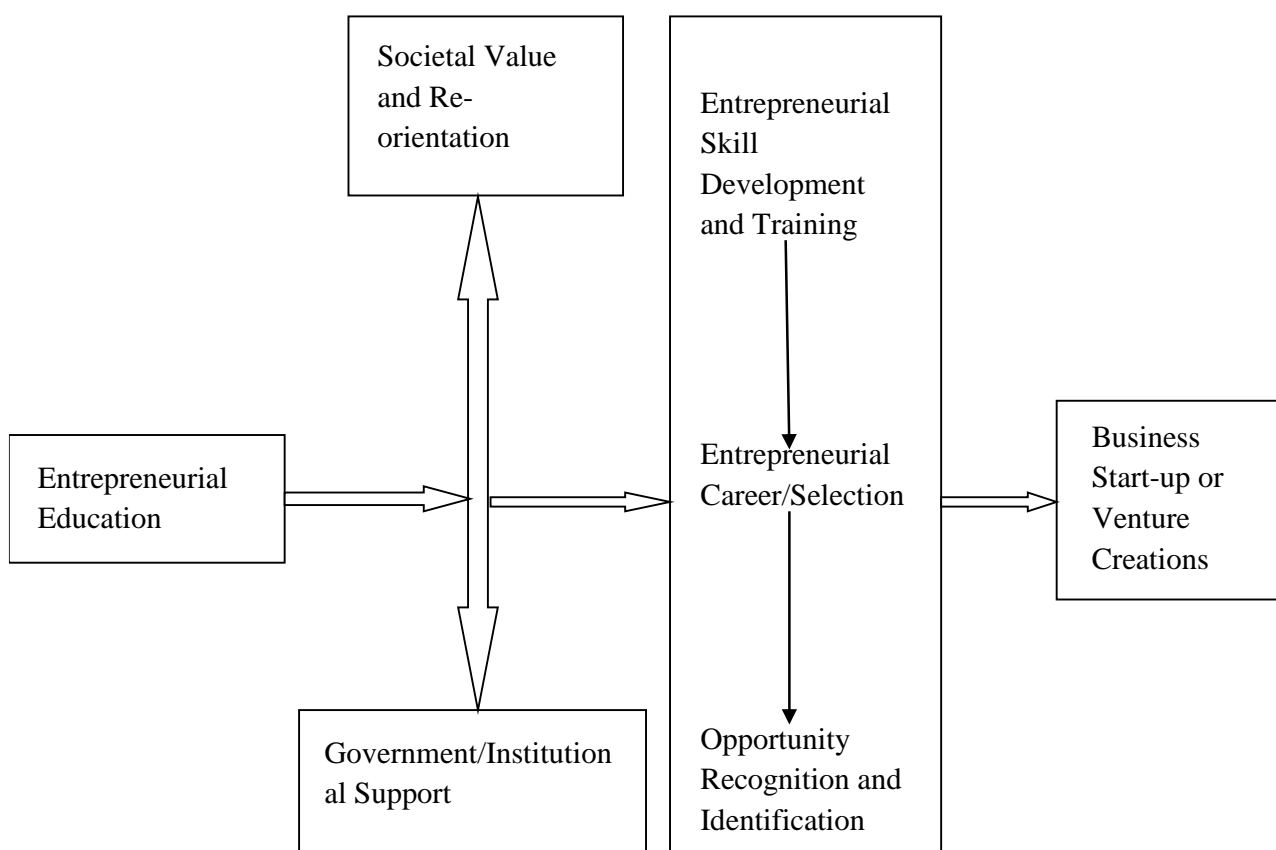
Introduction

Education remains the bedrock of any nation and a tool for transforming every sector of the economy towards realizing the goals of the nation. There has been outcry by various stakeholders on the need to making our educational sector fully functional by way of instilling in our graduates the requisite skills that will enable them to be employers of labour and wealth creators thereby reducing the emphasis on white collar jobs and 'paper' certification. It is this need that has informed the recent call for the inclusion of Entrepreneurship Education in tertiary Educational institutions in Nigeria. This kind of education is considered to be important especially in the area of equipping the trainees or students with the requisite entrepreneurial skills needed to create jobs and wealth in the nation (Akudolu, 2010; Ewhrudjakpor, 2008). The essence of Entrepreneurship Education is to build in the students entrepreneurship spirit and culture (Akpomi, 2009; Adejimola and Olufunmilayo, 2009). Emeraton (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. Entrepreneurship Education has emphasis on "education for self-employment" rather than "education for paid employment". This kind of education has become so important in Nigeria owing to the high level of hunger, poverty and unemployment coupled with its accompanying social vices, unrest and violence (Ekankumo and Kemebaradikumo, 2011). It is believed that this kind of education is capable of meaningfully engaging the individuals and making them more productive and useful to themselves and the country at large both at the moment and in the future.

The definition of Entrepreneurship Education given above no doubt exposes us to the nitty-gritty in the field of Entrepreneurship Education as it is capable of instilling in the students those skills that are needed to fully start and manage their businesses. Food remains one of the basic necessities that must be met by all, regardless of age, sex and social economic status and Agriculture is the key to realizing this goal. The need for students to be properly equipped with those competencies that are needed to start and

There are three major components in Agri-business, namely, the production and distribution of farm inputs, the actual production and then the processing and distribution of farm produce. The industrial components of Agri-business are referred to as agro industries. This is the core aspect of business. The content of Entrepreneurship Education curricula has emphasis on Agri-business both at the secondary and post-secondary (tertiary) institutions in Nigeria. Students are often placed in various groups depending on interest. They may be taught skills in fishery, snail rearing, piggery, etc. At the tertiary institutions, the students are made to compulsorily specialize in any of the skill-based area regardless of the discipline s/he is studying. While at the secondary school level, the students are expected to offer one entrepreneurial based subject (trade subject) like fishery, snail rearing or piggery upon which s/he will be examined in the final examinations conducted by the relevant examination bodies in the country. It is believed that upon successful completion of this programme, the students will be job creators and not job seekers.

This conceptual framework vividly depicts the essential variables that are worth considering in examining the concept of Entrepreneurship Education and it is used in illustrating the inter-related variables that eventually climax in business start-up or venture creation (That is, Agri-business formation). Below is the illustration of the conceptual framework:



Source: Adapted from Garba (2010)

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context as Agri-business. The model explicitly explains the various variables that are involved in Business start-up or Agri-business. Entrepreneurial Education which was informed as a result of the high unemployment level in the country is basically geared at ensuring that the recipients of the programme are equipped with the necessary competency required to establish Agri-business ventures. The primary goal of Entrepreneurial Education is to foster entrepreneurial spirit and culture among students and faculties (Akpomi, 2009; Ediagbonya, 2013; Imeokparia and Ediagbonya, 2013).

An important aspect of the model is societal value and re-orientation and government/institutional support. The emphasis here is on changing the orientation of the students/learners and instilling in them the spirit of starting up Agri-business. This will ensure debunking and unlearning the earlier belief of being employed rather than self-employment after schooling (Ojeaga and Owolabi, 2011; Garba, 2010). With the discovery of Crude oil in 1950s, the emphasis or value of the society was shifted from Agriculture to Crude oil. The introduction of Entrepreneurial Education is meant to re-orientate and refocus the value of the society. For the goals of this programme to be realized, the government and institutions have great roles to play. This may be in the form of financing, funding, designing curricula framework, monitoring and supervision.

Once these necessary re-orientations and supports have been provided, the next stage will be on concentrating on Entrepreneurial skill development and training as this is the core aspect of this model. The students/learners are exposed to various Agri-business activities like fishing, snail rearing, crop production, animal husbandry and the rendering of services like branding, packaging and advertising. Once students have been equipped or trained, there will be need for the students/learners to make choice of entrepreneurial career/selection. That is, specializing in a particular field or aspect. Having made a choice of career, there will be need for the students/learners or graduates as the case may be to recognize and identify opportunities in the area and this will eventually lead to the creation of Agri-business ventures.

Concept of Agri-business

Agri-business as a concept came into being in Harvard University in 1957. It was introduced in Philippines in early 1966, when the University of the Philippines offered an Agri-business Management (ABM) programme at the under-graduate level. In 1969, the first Advanced Agri-business management seminar was held in Manila (Beierlein, Schneeberger & Osburn, 2008).

The term Agri-business refers to the sum total of all operations involved in the manufacture and distribution of farm supplies, production activities on the farm, storage, processing and distribution of farm commodities and items made from them. It could also be described as the sum total of all operations and marketing of farm supplies and farm products for achieving the targeted objectives (Kumari and Reddy, 2013). From the above, it is obvious that Agri-business is all encompassing and the fulcrum of Agriculture. The proper understanding of the tenets of Agri-business will indeed bring about the much desired 'transformation agenda' of the Federal Government and this will in turn bring about increase in the National Income (N.I) and the overall economic development of the nation. Agri-business cuts across different sectors of the economy.

Agri-business basically involves three sectors and they are:

- Input sector;
- Farm sector; and
- Product sector.

Input Sector: the input sector deals with the supply of inputs required by the farmers for raising crops, livestock and other allied enterprises (Kumari and Reddy, 2013). These include seeds, fertilizers, chemicals, machinery and fuel. This sector is a foremost among all the sectors in Agri-business. It is this sector that actually ensures the continuous running of Agricultural activities in the country because when there are no inputs, there will be nothing to be processed or produced.

Farm Sector: the farm sector aims at producing crops, livestock and other products (Kumari & Reddy, 2013). This sector is at the intermediary between the input sector and the product sector. It could be described as the 'heart' of Agri-business because this is the stage where actual Agricultural production takes place. Most people tend to identify with this sector as the main Agricultural sector. Most of the

Entrepreneurship Education programmes in secondary and post-secondary institutions (tertiary institutions) tend to emphasize this aspect; and equip the students with the entrepreneurial skills needed to fully produce crops, livestock and other products.

Product Sector: it deals with various aspects like storage, processing and marketing of the finished products so as to meet the dynamic needs of the consumers (Kumari and Reddy, 2013). This sector is the final sector under consideration here and it involves the actual rendering of services. It is often emphasized that production is never completed until the goods produced get to the final consumers who have need for such goods. An individual that is into Agri-business has a primary motive of minimizing the cost of production and maximizing profit. Since this underlying motive is already there, the farmer will have to make conscious efforts to ensure that the consumers are aware of his/her products and how to possibly make the products available to the consumers on demand.

Agri-business Activities

The term Agri-business activities are used in describing the series of activities that are involved in the making, processing and distribution of Agricultural products to those who need them (Kumari and Reddy, 2013). The need to embracing Agri-business has become so important owing to the increasing level of unemployment in the country. The need to restructuring and changing the orientations of the citizens has equally strengthened the growth of Agri-business activities in Nigeria.

Agri-business activities often take the form of extracting raw materials from natural resources. The Agri-business activities in this category include: crop production, fishing lumbering, etc. Crop productions (farming) contribute greatly to the Nigerian economy either as a way of employing the citizens or ensuring regular supply of food; thereby checking the level of hunger and reducing food insecurity in the country. The Northern part of Nigeria for instance specializes in the following crops: groundnuts, tomatoes, beans, millets, etc. while the South specializes in the following crops: maize, yam, cassava, vegetable, palm fruit, etc. The variation in the crops produced is occasioned by the climatic differences in the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria. Fishing and lumbering are also integral aspect of Agri-business activities. Most of the people in the coastal areas are primarily engaged in fishing as a way of self-employment and food production. The rain forest zones in the country are often characterized with lumbering activities (that is, felling of trees and operations of saw mills).

Once these raw materials have been extracted by those concerned, the need to transforming them into finished or semi-finished products become very important and this is known as processing. There are firms or industries that specialize in transforming these raw materials. For instance, pineapples, oranges and similar fruits are transformed or processed into juices. Palm fruits are taken to oil mills and processed into palm oil. Other Agri-business activities at this stage include: branding and packaging. Branding is an Agri-business activity that is carried out to differentiate a particular product from other similar products in the market (Ijewere, 2005). For example, there is Okomu oil and Presco oil. The packaging of Agricultural products is another vital aspect of Agri-business activities. Packaging of products ensures safety and standardization of products.

The final phase of Agri-business activity involves the rendering of services. Some of these services include: transportation, communication, insurance, banking and finance, warehousing and advertising. Production is not complete until goods produced get to the final consumers. This makes transportation to be very important. There is need for a warehouse where raw materials (inputs) and Agricultural products (outputs) can be kept before they are needed or disposed/sold. It is an Agri-business activity like advertising that will ensure that the consumers get to know more about Agricultural products available. It is obvious that proper communication network will ensure smooth Agricultural production. The financial institutions are always there to provide financial services/assistance to interested persons towards promoting Agricultural production; while the insurance companies are always there to cover risks associated with Agricultural production like flooding, fire outbreak, burglary and theft.

Objectives of Agri-business

Agri-business just like any other business enterprises is primarily saddled with the responsibility of making profit. There is a driving force in any business enterprise. Apart from satisfying the unsatisfied needs and desires of the people, Agri-business managers strive very hard to ensure that there is high turnover which will translate to high profit. Other objectives of Agri-business as stated by Obayelu and Okojie (2013) include:

- Cost minimization;
- Maintenance of favourable financial ratios; and
- Homeostatis.

The Roles of Entrepreneurship Education in Accelerating Agri-business in Nigeria

Entrepreneurship Education which was introduced in 2006 in Nigeria plays significant roles in accelerating the activities of Agri-business. Some of these roles are briefly examined in this section.

Entrepreneurship Education curricula has been well structured to ensure that those offering the programme (students) are well-equipped with the necessary entrepreneurial skills that are needed to start and successfully manage Agri-businesses in Nigeria (Ewubare, 2010). Upon graduation from the programme, the graduates are able to establish various Agri-businesses like fishery, piggery, snail rearing, etc. and to also successfully manage them; thereby employing oneself and also creating more jobs.

Entrepreneurship Education ensures that students are trained or equipped in the production of certain farm inputs or products and not trying to learn everything. Students are often asked to write a feasibility study on what they intend to learn and possibly produce upon graduation (Agoha, 2011).

Entrepreneurship Education can greatly help in addressing the level of poverty in the country. The issue of poverty eradication has been a top priority of many governments and institutions, especially in developing countries where extreme poverty is conspicuous and has become pandemic (Akpomi, 2009; Chigbuson, 2011). Entrepreneurship Education plays a significant role in promoting Agri-business activity via the production of certain farm inputs and products which in turn reduces the level of poverty and hunger in the country. The entrepreneurial skills acquired are transferred into Agri-businesses and this then check poverty level and the much debated food shortage.

Conclusion

The need to having a viable Entrepreneurship Education programme which is capable of accelerating Agri-business activities in Nigeria has been examined in this paper. Based on the relevant literatures reviewed in this paper, it is imperative to note that Agri-business has a great role to play in job creation, reduction of poverty, checking food insecurity and ultimately boosting the economic growth and development of the country.

Recommendations

Based on the detailed examination of this paper, the following recommendations are therefore necessary:

- the government should provide incentives to Agri-business managers/farmers;
- graduates of Entrepreneurship Education should be given the needed encouragement to start their Agri-businesses;
- students offering Entrepreneurship Education should be properly exposed to practical skills involved in starting and managing Agri-businesses;
- the government should make loan facilities available and accessible to the graduates of the programme; and
- there should be proper collaborations between the institutions and Agri-businesses where the students can actually be exposed to world of work.
- agricultural extension services should be strengthened in the country in order for both urban and rural farmers to benefit from recent research findings; and
- there should be regular seminars or conferences organized in order to brainstorm on Agri-business activities.

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