

An HEdPERF Assessment of Marketing, Tourism and Entrepreneurship Education and Graduate Unemployment in Osun State Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship drives both industrial and economic development globally. This is particularly true for marketing and tourism in emerging markets. Evidently, marketing/tourism graduates and entrepreneurs (MTGE) stand better chances in these markets. But MTGEs are yet to profitably and effectively scale the unemployment huddles in Nigeria. This study attempts a qualitative adaptation of Abdullah's (2006) HEdPERF and Sultan and Wong's (2011) core quality dimensions to understand why MTGEs are still unable to scale the unemployment huddles. The study posits first that the current perceptions of Marketing, tourism and entrepreneurship education (MTEE) are rather mistaken; MTEE perceptions and expectations are incongruent. Secondly, current attempts are synonymous with learning to walk before crawling. Thirdly, there are largely mismatches between taught skills and actual market demand. Urgent steps like diligent stock taking, conscientiously imbibing relevant vocations and skills at early learning ages, change in mind set and keenly supervised capacity building programmes for teachers/trainers are suggested. Above all, complete overhaul of the Nigerian entrepreneurship education curricula is deemed prudent. Thus do we submit that we may sow good seeds of MTEE on fertile land and move away from the entrapment of a mono-product economy.

Keywords: Marketing, tourism, entrepreneurship education, HEdPERF, graduate (un)employment.

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1. Introduction

The world is facing a grievous job crisis. It is thus no mere fallacy that Nigerian graduates are largely unemployed. This is especially alarming when we factor-in the realities of the post 2015 recession (or Buharinomics) into the all too regular inconsistencies of underdevelopment. And this, really, is putting it mildly especially because the unemployment figures are quite oscillating; 55.9% between 2006 – 2008 (Ojeifo, 2012); 80% in 2009, (Amuseghan and Tayo-Olajubutu, 2009) and, 12.2% in 2013. Put in perspective, youth unemployment in Nigeria ranks quite high amongst the developing economies of the world. Rather than improve, realities show a further southward movement. This is in spite of numerous policies and programmes to get youth profitably engaged. And numerous questions have the situation provoked. Researchers and proletarians have been interested in this question for quite some time now. Academic search for possible causes and ways out are also long standing and has become especially spirited in recent times. ^[1,2,3,4,5,6]

These high degrees of interest and concerns are indeed not unexpected. Unemployment has been found to relate directly to poverty and food security (Oriola, 2009); peace, security and sustainable development (Bamidele, 2012); education, national development and the "world of work" (Folayan, 2006 cited in Adeyeye, Aina & Ige 2012; Esu, 2015). ^[7]

Indeed the education-(un)employment connection is by no means any abstraction. From Greece to Sparta; England to Nigeria, education remains key tool through which society ensures its continuity. Formal or otherwise, education serves to equip the learner with requisite knowledge and skills for better integration into and contribution to society (Fafunwa, 1974 and Adeyeye, Aina and Ige 2012). This perhaps explains why education is readily connected to sustainable development. Education – and particularly technical and vocational education and training TVET – has been found very relevant in addressing the challenges of underdevelopment identified earlier including environmental conservation and sustainable development (Karmel and Rice, 2011; Oseni, Ehikioya, and Ali-Momoh, 2011; Yusuff and Soyemi, 2012). In truth, global trends attest to the fact that "economic and social developments are increasingly driven by the advancement and application of knowledge" (Saint, Hartnett and Strassner, 2003, p. 1; Adeyemo, Ogunleye, Oke and Adenle 2010, p. 99). What is more, the UN has declared the period 2005 through to 2014 as Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

It is on record however that education has not served its intended purposes in Nigeria and most LDCs (Salmi, 2006; Adeyemo, Ogunleye, Oke and Adenle, 2010). Education in most of these places is ill-designed and

executed likewise. Yashim (2013) blames this broadly on the failure of the curriculum. And perhaps taking Yashim (2013) seriously and heeding Cortese's (2003) earlier advice, much effort by educational planners and facilitators in recent times are directed at the review of education curricula in Nigeria. ^[8,9,10]

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND DELINEATION OF STUDY OBJECTIVES

A key motivation for this study is the reality that with well over a decade of entrepreneurship education, the statistics on unemployed graduates is nearly as high as the number of entrepreneurship education graduates. Gladly, much of the recent curricula review efforts in Nigeria have focused on broadly incorporating entrepreneurship education. But sadly, entrepreneurship education is yet unable to even draw the road map let alone begin the journey towards sustainable development in Nigeria. In many places, what we call entrepreneurship education is largely skill acquisition (Arogundade, 2011). A trip around institutions purportedly incorporating entrepreneurship education show that most of these skill acquisition programmes are poorly schemed, hastily arranged and expectedly, all such improperly acquired skills end up dumped, abandoned and forgotten. Evidently and given current trends, education and entrepreneurship education are yet to yield desired results in the LDCs. These are all not unconnected to the reality that Nigeria is yet unable to decisively draw a veritable connection amongst educational policies, industrialization and employment policies. The country is equally unable to properly incorporate entrepreneurship education into formal education as evidenced in the various curricula in Nigeria (Aladekomo, 2004). ^[1,12,13,14,15]

Another justification for this study at this time derives from dearth of research measuring performance of Entrepreneurship Education using HEDPERF or any such scales in the category. In fact, there seems to be a complete gap in research measuring the actual performance of Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria. Most studies have only gone as far as extoling the inclusion of entrepreneurship education in HE curriculum. With a focus on marketing, tourism and entrepreneurship education (MTEE), it is contended in this study that entrepreneurship education is currently misconstrued as something like a magic wand or passcode that banishes poverty or open employment gateways simply by waving it. ^[16,17,18,19,20]

This study therefore took a pragmatic look at why MTEE may be failing to deliver in Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative methodology, it juxtaposed Abdullah's (2006) HEDPERF with Sultan and Wong's (2011) core dimensions of service quality to assess quality performance of HE services delivery and MTEE graduates' employability in Southwest Nigeria. It equally attempted an assessment of the perception and expectations of MTEE students' and graduates' and their post exposure realities. The premises here are that education constitutes a service. Teaching and knowledge impartation constitute service delivery. Educational providers and facilitators are the service delivery personnel. The higher institutions are the servicescapes. And the students/graduates are the service customers. ^[21,22,23,24]

3. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Marketing, Tourism and Entrepreneurship Education (MTEE): The Nigerian Narrative

The earliest literary effort at defining entrepreneurship is widely credited to Say's (1845) "act of combining factors

of production"). It is however instructive to note that all modern academic definitions rely on Schumpeter's (1934) "creating new combinations' (in markets, supplies, products, processes, or organization)" (Carton, Hofer and Meeks, 1998, p. 3). For the purpose of the current study, the authors rely heavily on the definition adopted by the Centennial Global Business Summit (2011, cited in Akubuilu, 2012) where entrepreneurship is depicted as "the pursuit of opportunities, regardless of resources one controls." Much reliance is also on the summit's view of effective educational reform as a mechanism for addressing "the root causes of problems via disruptive innovation of entrepreneurship" (Akubuilu, 2012, p. 120). Further, we also rely on Sima, Bordânc and Sima's (2015) clarification of tourism entrepreneurship as tertiary economic activity concerned with the production of tourism services including "relaxation, resting, work capacity improvement [and] broadening the cultural horizon". The place of marketing in all these is the fact that all parties in this narrative – the students, the tourist, the entrepreneur – all seek the lucrative satisfaction of identified need which is what marketing is all about. The connection between the education and entrepreneurship is underpinned in the reality that the traits and process to sustain the latter are entrenched and harnessed through the former. As is abundantly recorded in the earlier cited literature and a vast array of others, entrepreneurship education (EE) represents a key system through which the knowledge, attitude and skills for self-reliance, job creation, economic relevance and meaningful and independent living are attainable. So when we regard the entrepreneurs as social actors (as is popularly coined) who possess productive traits, or participate in the productive entrepreneurial engagements, we will be unfair to ignore education which, whether formal or otherwise, imparts and nurtures the requisite useful learning. This perhaps explains why the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2009) sees education for entrepreneurship as attempts at inculcating skills and attributes like creative thinking; team spirit; risk and uncertainty management. According to them entrepreneurship "starts in education, runs through research to business" and is premised largely on the need for a changed mind set. Ultimately, if well-channeled, entrepreneurship education should result in acquisition of key (or core) skills; development of personal and social skills; and skills relating to business start-up or financial literacy. ^[25,26,27,28,29,30]

This perhaps necessitated the review of educational curricula in Nigeria to incorporate entrepreneurship into education. These curricula review is not peculiar to Nigeria. It is trendy in many places including Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region (Randheer, 2015). The general intent is not unconnected to the need to equip graduates with learning that makes them more of job creators than seekers. To this end, much entrepreneurial knowledge, skill and motivation are introduced for entrepreneurial success in a variety of endeavours (Ojeifo, 2012). Even basic education curriculum is not left out in the review agenda and the motive is not farfetched. According to Obioma (2013) for example, the goal of the review of basic education curriculum in Nigeria is aimed at achieving human capital development. ^[31,32,33,34]

Without a doubt, entrepreneurship is now entrenched in most (if not all) education curricula in Nigeria. And some studies (including Ekpoh and Edet, 2011) also report that graduates are grabbing the opportunities with warm open hands. But whereas numerous statistics abound and commentators seem not to agree on definitive figures, there is no doubting the fact that a substantial percentage of Nigerian youth are yet “either not productively engaged or unemployed” with the implication that many are either not putting learnt entrepreneurship skill into productive use (due perhaps to poor impartation) or are largely in the informal sector and are yet to be captured in the narratives (Kolawole, 2012). The case for marketing and tourism education are quite uninteresting. Most of the global narratives on shifting from heavy reliance on oil have almost always schemed marketing and tourism into the priority list. A more recent example in Nigeria is former President Jonathan’s subsidy re-investment and empowerment programme (SURE-P). SURE-P is envisioned to equip young Nigerians with skills in three broad areas including vocation/technical skills, life skills and entrepreneurship with hospitality and tourism as part of the eight key areas of focus. Others include Agribusiness; ICT/Telecoms; Creative Art; Marine; Oil and Gas; Mass housing/Construction, Artisans and Mechanical Fabrication/Woodwork (Oleabhie, Oleabhie and Ariya, 2015).^[34,35,36,37]

Again, Esu’s (2015) assessment of Nigeria’s tourism potentials vis-à-vis global realities shows that tourism resources in Nigeria are more spatially distributed than oil and can herald the much needed socio-economic development that we crave especially as oil is fast losing its grip in global markets. Specifically, the author envision tourism benefiting Nigeria economically (additional revenue, jobs, economic diversification and for supports cottage ventures); culturally (patronage of local arts, festivals and customs, encourage cultural exchanges); socially (supportive enhanced infrastructure/amenities) and environmentally (natural, cultural and industrial conservation and preservation). This is perhaps why the Buhari administration has unflinchingly reiterated the need for Nigeria to explore her tourism potentials as a viable alternative to oil. A global reality ignored here however is that tourism thrives with marketing. No one will know about a resort facility except concerted efforts are made to create awareness and project its attraction. It is posited in this study that a main clog in the wheel of attaining desired success with MTEE in Nigeria is the existence of perceptual gaps between what MTEE are and can do as against what they are currently believed to be and are doing (or not). To put this in perspective, we therefore, in the following sections explore some existing service quality measurement scales.^[38,39,40,41]

4.SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, HEDPERF and the MTEE service customers

Services are quite peculiar market offerings and unsurprisingly, service delivery continues to go through a seemingly unending innovation. As such, assessing quality of service can be quite a task. This is especially because services have high consumer involvement and “higher levels of performance lead to higher evaluations” (Grönroos, 1984, p. 37; Dadfar, Brege and Ebadzadeh Semnani, 2013; Chen and Huang, 2013; Chang and Hsieh, 2013). Along with

involvement is the element of co-creation in service delivery. In most service encounters, both the service provider and service customer are present and equally contribute to what is offered and what is received. What is more, the 21st century consumers are savvy, dynamic, and critical of their choices; they consume in groups and are thus becoming more powerful and fairly unpredictable (Cova, Badot & Bucci, 2006; Bartholomew, 2012).^[42,43,44]

These realities are more pronounced with Higher Educational (HE) services. HE is a fast growing and globalized service industry and widely acknowledged as yet another atypical discourse within the service delivery narratives (Faganel, 2010). HE services are value-based and value is quite a divergent construct that can influence perception, satisfaction and loyalty (Mekić and Mekić, 2016). As such, what constitutes quality service can be rather subjective and relative to what individual stakeholders seek from service encounters particularly as rendered through the HE system (Sultan and Tarafder, 2007). Further, HE services are largely intangible, heterogeneous, perishable and are produced and consumed simultaneously. It is thus not baseless to opine that when students enroll in HE institutions, they seek to contribute to - as well as benefit from - qualitative teaching and learning that make them competent to face world of work challenges through the attainment of such goal of self-reliance and productive economic relevance. This explains why a number of HE service providers use atmosphere, automation, location and employee empowerment as well as differential pricing (among others) to create the memorable experiences that give HE service consumers something to hold onto and equally look forward to (West et al, 2010). This is the background to quality for any service including MTEE services. MTEE delivery is seen here as professional services and students’ expectations and experiences can be likened to those of long-stay lodgers in a hotel or immigrants seeking legal aid.

As earlier observed, HE services are particularly multidimensional and can hardly be easily assessed by only one indicator. This perhaps explains the colloquial research interest in HE service and measurement of its delivery and quality. What is more, the service industries are playing an increasingly important role in the economy of many nations (Ahmed, Lulin and Bajwa, 2016). In today’s world of global competition, rendering quality service is a key for success in HE sector, and many experts concur that the most powerful competitive trend currently shaping marketing and business strategy is service quality (Abdullah, 2006)

Little wonder then that assessing quality of service has continued to attract attention of researchers for well over three decades. In the beginning was SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al. 1985, 1988). SERVQUAL is a measure of service quality which evolved from PZB’s Gaps model. It was premised on the definition of service quality as the difference between customer expectations and perceptions of delivery. Then along came SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Contending the expectations-perception narrative, these authors evolved a performance-only model. SERVPERF employs the unweighted perception components of SERVQUAL arguing that service quality is more of attitude than an expectation construct (Sultan and Tarafder, 2007).

Both SERVQUAL and SERVPERF have proven to be quite veritable in assessing the quality of service in general academic narratives (Randheer, 2015). Both have equally been adapted to a number of specific contexts including hospitality (LODQUAL, Getty and Thompson, 1994 LODGSERVE, Knutson et al, 1991), retail (RSQS, Dabholkar et al., 1996), winery (SQ WINE, Evangelos Christou and Athina Nella, 1999), hospitals (SQ HOSPITALS, Donald J. Shemwell and Ugur Yavas(1999), online shopping (ES-QUAL, A. Parasuraman, Valarie A. Zeithaml, Arvind Malhotra, 2005) and banking (BANQUAL-R metric, Evangelos Tsoukatos, Evmorfia Mastrojianni, 2010). With the HE sector yet out of the picture and owing to the rather narrow perspective of these adaptations mentioned above, it was imperative that an HE sector specific scale was developed.

More specifically, Randheer (2015) argues that assessing the quality of HE services in the past have completely ignored students, the brand ambassadors. Again, there was also observable neglect – in the previous models - of the non-academic narratives in students' education encounters. Then eventually came along HEDPERF (Higher Education Performance) scale (Abdullah, 2006). The current study is yet another adaptation of the HEDPERF dimensions like that of Randheer's (2015) CUL-HEDPERF.

5.METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative approach to the ongoing discourse on HE service delivery. This is deemed a right way to go because a more pragmatic inquest is considered needful to add both depth and context to the ongoing discourse on HEDPERF (Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook, 2007; Brown, Varley and Pal, 2009; Sultan and Wong, 2011 and Obermeit, 2012). Facilitated discussions, depth and focus group interviews were further considered prudent in our efforts to understand the realities of MTEE service delivery and graduate unemployment in Nigeria.

A total of nineteen (19) facilitated discussions and focus group interviews were conducted between June 2014 and June 2017. It compared responses from eighty-two (82) respondents (recruited largely through snowballing) including nine (9) teachers, twenty-seven (27) students and forty-six (46) graduates of MTEE from across Polytechnics and Universities in South-West Nigeria.

Juxtaposing Abdullah's (2006) dimensions (non-academic, academic, reputation, access, programmes issues and understanding) with Sultan and Wong's (2011) core dimensions (academic, administrative and facilities service quality), a total of 35 questions were drafted and used as the interview guide. This was divided into three sections: A (teacher respondents, 8 questions), B (student, 10 questions) and C (graduate respondents, 17 questions). During the course of the interviews, some of the questions changed form and direction as dictated by the flow of discourses. Data obtained were analysed through content analysis and contextual collage of headwords/keywords and themes were drawn out of the responses to identify commonly expressed opinions and views.

6.FINDINGS

It is instructive to note that the key themes in the respondents' narratives align more with Sultan and Wong's

(2011) dimensions (i.e. academic, administrative and facilities service quality). Interestingly, respondents largely agree that there is a seeming disconnect between education and the world of work. Majority are in HE for reasons other than learning as envisioned in the curriculum. They equally think that the educational curriculum is inadequate – in its current form – to impart the necessary entrepreneurial skills for sustainable life after school.

"...my dad thinks people will not respect me as the manager of his sawmill if I'm not educated so that's why I'm studying Biz Admin... when I should be learning something like timber technology"

"I can make more than my average lecturer's salary in a single sure bet than most of my lecturers ... the best cars on my own campus belonged to smart students"

"I'm studying computer science to be a programmer/hacker but none of my teachers know what I already know even before coming to school. It's not even in the curriculum, imagine that."

"My uncle is a pharmacist. That's why I'm studied SLT but now, I wish I had chosen a different course."

"... the system was too formal and not usually handled by professionals... time tables and academic calendars were often too tight ... we learnt a lot but I really can't say I've learnt anything."

Further, most HE students (and their teachers) see entrepreneurship education as one of the courses they need to pass rather than one from which to acquire useful learning. Their expectations do not in most cases defer from those from other courses like Use of English or General Mathematics or shorthand.

"I usually don't worry about such electives, all I need is 40, that's all."

There was also the issue of learners' choices and preferences as compared with what skills and vocations are on the menu.

"I'm a tailor already, what's my business with chickens and maggots? If they give me money and all the time I've spent going to that farm, I'll surprise all of them"

"... how can a whole me, a graduate be doing tie and dye? Can you imagine after all the years I've spent in school to come and end up as a tailor or caterer?"

Little wonder then that majority of MTEE graduates, especially those exposed to entrepreneurship education still crave contentment in opening doors for guest at hotels and in cottage guest houses. This is hardly a surprise especially as previous studies like that of Coster and Adekoya (2010) and Barani and Kumar (2013) have shown that students and graduates alike may not really be in entrepreneurship for the learning after all.

One of the questions inquired 'how many students actually were studying their courses of choice'. Only a handful answered in the affirmative. Majority had to settle for whatever they could get. When asked why,

"Does it matter? I have friends who studied engineering who are now making good money working in banks. It's not what you know my friend but who you know"

Findings also indicate that the body language of the management and non-academic staff regarding entrepreneurship is anything but encouraging. Starting at classification and registration, entrepreneurship courses are mostly either electives or low credit bearing and most non-academic staffs are unable to offer useful guidance on which electives to combine and for what future goal(s).

Further, findings also lent credence to (Ifedili, and Ofoegbu, 2011; Ojeifo, 2012) on the lack of infrastructure for impartation and acquisition of entrepreneurship skills.

"Our labs are more or less galleries of old and obsolete equipment"

"What can anyone do without electricity?"

"We travel a distance of close to five kilometers (to and fro) everyday only to see maggots and how they are produced. So I will graduate to raise maggots"

Major findings in this study reveal that huge perceptual gaps do exist between students' and HE providers' expectations of quality and actual entrepreneurship education delivery/experiences. Findings equally show that the entrepreneurship education discourse in Nigeria is yet to attain its true essence; it is yet not engaging as it ought to be; it is largely monotonous and soliloquous.

Little wonder then that even graduates presumed to have been equipped with entrepreneurship education are unable to discover any venture more lucrative than job hunting. Most Nigerian students come to entrepreneurship education encounters with little or quite wrong mindsets and expectations and expectedly, they leave with wrong perceptions.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings in this current study are quite disparate with previous studies that simply sing praises of entrepreneurship education. Without a doubt, the need for entrepreneurship education – particularly in marketing and tourism – in the 21st century Nigeria is most critical and consistent with aspirations of moving away from a mono product economy. The HE system is quite veritable in driving these aspirations and the injection of entrepreneurship education is indeed a way to go. Entrepreneurs largely thrive on skills and vocational knowledge but there is quite noticeable disdain towards technical and vocational education in Nigeria; it is only deemed for the less cerebral folks. MTEE students' expectations and perceptions differ widely from those of the HE services providers in Southwest Nigeria. Gone were those days when there was dignity in labour; the proliferation of very many get-rich-quick options made sure of this.

Again, regulated and monitored access to technical and vocational skills and knowledge occur rather too late in the educational encounter to be useful. This is not the case in highly industrialized and advanced economies like Norway, Australia and Japan where exposure to vocational and skills learning begin quite early in the educational encounter. Consequently, such early and sustained exposures inculcate in students entrepreneurial mindset for patronizing vocational and skill centred learning.

Further, too much emphasis is placed on classroom rhetorics to allow for constructive integration with the world of work. Key stakeholders like non-academic personnel, artisans, practitioners and other professionals are largely excluded in the design and implantation of HE curriculum in Southwest Nigeria. There is also a dearth of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) infrastructure within the academia to make any useful learning take place. The incessant industrial actions in our educational sectors again further clog the wheel.

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