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THEATRE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE MANAGEMENT OF GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The number of graduates being produced by tertiary institutions in Nigeria has increased tremendously. Therefore, the need to create job opportunities for the Nigerian youths underscores the emergence of entrepreneurial skills acquisition programmes which the Federal Government of Nigeria adopted as measures of intervention for the promotion of entrepreneurship and youth empowerment. However, enough consideration has not been given to the exploration of theatre or performing arts entrepreneurial opportunities in the said government measures of intervention. Through the deductive and interview techniques, this paper identifies forty entrepreneurial potentials inherent in the performing arts which Nigerian youths cum graduates of theatre or performing arts can explore in their quest to be self-reliant and contribute to the economic development of Nigeria. This paper concludes that there is need to create enabling environment for young entrepreneurs not only through the establishment of empowerment programmes but also to encourage, prioritise, patronise, finance and recognise the significance of young entrepreneur to the development of a nation. Furthermore, the Federal Government of Nigeria should incorporate entrepreneurial potentials of the Performing Arts into its empowerment programmes.

Keywords: Theatre, Management, Entrepreneurship, Economic Recession, Graduate and Unemployment.

Introduction

Unemployment is one of the cankerworms which has eaten deep into the world human existence and ravaging, particularly, the development of nations in Africa. There is no doubt that, this has degenerated into vices with resultant effects on national development. The continuous existence of unemployment has resulted into various vices such as psychological trauma, prostitution, armed robbery, internet scam and domestic violence among others which constitute menace to the Nigerian society. Akinawo (2013) comments that “the country also suffers disenchantment and frustration by young people, who are resorting to vices which are targeted at the very society that alienates them. Lack of employment makes crime attractive to Nigerian youth”. However, it is ironical that some graduates of Nigerian universities, polytechnics and colleges of

education, continue waiting for a white collar jobs which are not sufficiently available. Unemployment has done huge damages to the development of the Nigerian nation. This is because unemployment encourages intercontinental drift which eventually undermines manpower development in Nigeria. It has also encouraged brain drain among Nigerian youths. The effects of this, is the recurring loss of lives which Nigerian youths experienced in their quest to cross illegally to advanced countries through the desert regions of Africa. Unemployment has been categorized by Dawson (1996) into frictional unemployment, seasonal unemployment and cyclical unemployment. To him, frictional unemployment implies a voluntary withdrawal of an individual or group from jobs for a period of time. This may occur for different reasons.

According to Dawson (1996), “workers may change jobs to escape sexual harassment or to follow a spouse or friend who has changed job or address. Both sexes may quit following the appointment of a hated boss and seek another job”. Seasonal unemployment, on the other hand, falls within the climatic or natural interruption of the smooth flow of work or business. A lot of business activities fall within this realm and so a temporary stoppage of the work at hand occurs. Dawson further explains that this category of unemployment occurs as a result of change in weather condition. The category of workers who can be found here are farmers, fishermen, construction workers etc. The third category is the cyclical unemployment which is usually caused by consistent occurrence of up and down in the economic activities. Generally speaking, this phenomenon persists as a result of economic depression or recessions. Olusoji (2014) also observes that:

The Nigerian economy (from 2000 to 2014) is currently undergoing a serious time of depression. The depression is manifest in many ways- lack of employment for the teeming youths which consists of graduates, many businesses are either relocating to other countries where there is a conducive economic environment for them to operate or are folding up.

Therefore, the most common unemployment in Nigeria and some other parts of the world today is graduate unemployment which is the concern of this paper. The National Bureau of Statistics’ (2016) analysis of the rate of unemployed persons in Nigeria states that:

In the Q2 2016, the labour force population (i.e those within the working age population willing, able and actively looking for work) increased to 79.9 million from 78.5 million in Q1 2016, representing an increase of 1.78% in the labour force during the quarter. This means 1.39 million persons from the economically active population entered the labour force, that is individuals that were able, willing and actively looking for work.

Consequently, the Federal Government of Nigeria has established some agencies and devised various measures in terms of poverty alleviation programmes to curb the menace of unemployment in Nigeria. There were poverty alleviation and entrepreneurial programmes which the Federal Government has used as a measure of intervention. These measures include establishment of National Directorate of Employment, National Youth Employment and Vocational Skills Development Programmes, Small Scale Industries and Graduate Employment Programme, Agricultural Sector Employment Programme, Better Life for Rural Women, Family Support Programme, Sure-P, You win among others (Akinnawo, 2013). However, these measures of intervention achieved minimal success as the rate of unemployment graduate in Nigeria continues to soar on yearly basis. This paper, thus, examines the entrepreneurial potentials inherent in the performing arts profession with the hope that if these potentials are fully tapped by the theatre graduates, it can solve graduate unemployment in Nigeria.

Perspectives on Theatre Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

The impact of the Performing Arts as a branch in the humanities has been felt and still being felt by the people of Nigeria. Over time, a lot of performing arts troupes have made remarkable impacts in the ways in which their troupes were managed and the ways they delivered their services. From the period of Alarinjo, Yoruba Traditional Travelling Theatre, to the emergence of popular and the literary theatres, performing arts has been a profession that can be reckoned with in terms of general acceptability especially in stage performances, home video and musical entertainments. The contributions of people like Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Moses Olaiya, Jimoh Aliu, Lere Paimo Wole Soyinka, Olu Obafemi, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Ayo Akinwale, Kola Oyewo, Israel Eboh, Bunmi Davis, Sola Fosudo, Steve James, Dayo Liadi among others, cannot be over-emphasised in the promotion and development of performing arts in Nigeria. However, there are arguments regarding whether theatre business is economically viable in Nigeria or not. Akinwale (2001) notes that:

In Jide Malomo's study of resident theatre companies in Nigeria, he also stated clearly that the theatre is not an economically viable venture in Nigeria. According to him, the only truly commercial theatre that emerges in Nigeria was the Unibadan Performing Company, which recorded an income gap of 41 to 54 percent. In an interview with Bode Sowande, he claimed that his own repertory theatre is economically viable.

Akinwale, therefore, concludes that two major positions exist with the theatrical scene in Nigeria. The first position is that of non-viability of theatre business in Nigeria and the second is the viability of theatre business in Nigeria. Similarly, Ododo (2014) affirms that:

Nigerian performing arts practitioners, have somewhat tried and still trying to make commercial sense out of their practice. Apart from very few cases, many of these practitioners have increasingly found it difficult to sustain themselves through their arts due to harrowing economic difficulties and other associated problems like ill-articulated government patronage, dwindling corporate sponsorship, rising debt bills, changing lifestyles among audience and increased competition from other more accessible and less expensive forms of entertainments.

It is evident that performing arts in Nigeria faced and still facing a lot of challenges especially due to the advent of home video and loss of interest by the people to patronise live theatre because of insecurity. However, our position in this regards is that performing arts is like any other business which can be affected by competition, improved technology and customer's taste. A true and highly skilled and committed artist or owner of a performing troupe can survive the ordeal even in an economically depressed nation. Umukoro (2007) corroborates that "whether in the professional or education theatre, the business of theatre is to sustain itself through the application of sound business ideals". This assertion shares a theoretical support from Fosudo (2014) that:

The theatre is validly an idea, and ideas can be packaged and transformed into valuable services which can be provided to satisfy the needs of a segment of the consuming public. The business activity of a theatre organisation entails its product which could be the *physical productions referred to as "central experience"*, or they could be additional or ancillary service which may include rental of space and other company equipment such as light, sound system, and *video recordings, which are all described as "extended experience"*.

The argument came into existence as a result of the state of the Nigerian economy, political situations and the negative impacts of the home video on the live theatre. For these arguments to be the thing of the past, it is imperative for the theatre entrepreneurs to improve themselves and see theatre business like any other businesses that need entrepreneurial spirits for it to grow. This is because "music and other arts (Theatre, Dance, Fine and Applied Arts etc) are some of the major sources of income and sustenance in the economy of some advanced countries of the world" (Olusoji, 2014).

Entrepreneurship in the Performing Arts

Entrepreneurship is the taking of risk in any business venture. It is the act of taking all the functions of uncertainty, risk bearing, coordination of productive resources, innovation and the provision of technical know-how for an enterprise. Entrepreneurship can be commercial in nature, any establishment which operates solely for profit making. Entrepreneurship can also be technically oriented with emphasis on innovation and invention. More so, entrepreneurship can involve art related field such as Theatre, Choreography, Music, Creative Design etc.

Having defined entrepreneurship, it is imperative to discuss who an entrepreneur is. An entrepreneur is a person who creates jobs (Trump and Kiyosaki, 2011). Donald Trump and Robert Kiyosaki are prominent and successful entrepreneurs who have failed several times in their attempt to create jobs for the unemployed. In their book entitled *Midas Touch*, Trump and Kiyosaki (2011) observe that “the entrepreneur’s ability to dream, win, lose, and win again is often called entrepreneurship, from everyone else in business it is also what separates those who can be entrepreneurs”. Defining the concept of entrepreneur, Longnecker, Moore, Petty and Palich (2008) are of the opinion that “entrepreneurs are frequently thought to be individuals who discover market needs and launch new firms to meet those needs. They are risk takers who provide an impetus for change, innovation, and progress in economic life”. They are problem solvers. Entrepreneurs solve problem for people at a profit (Eker, 2005). Therefore, an entrepreneur is somebody or group of people who organise, manage and assume the risks of a business.

For a performing arts business to thrive in the midst of adversity, economic depression and political instability as the case in some parts of Sub-Sahara Africa, a theatre entrepreneur should be visionary, courageous and creative. A theatre entrepreneur must possess the ability to withstand criticism of any sort and delay gratification. A theatre entrepreneur should be able to find opportunities where other people could not and importantly, he must act despite all obstacles, difficulties or doubt. This is because “no man is ever whipped, until he quits in his mind” (Napoleon, 1983).

Napoleon’s observation indicates that whatever business a man ventures in, he needs adequate planning and re-planning. Therefore, the plan of a theatre entrepreneur must be practical and realisable. Adequate planning is a major ingredient for the establishment and management of theatre or theatre related businesses in Nigeria. Similarly, Kiyosaki (2000) shares his experience that “you build a business because it is exciting, it is challenging, and it will require all of you to make it successful”. From Kiyosaki’s experience, it is evident that running a successful theatre and theatre related businesses requires entrepreneurial spirit. It is that spirit of commitment, dedication, persistence, perseverance, patience and vision. The theatre entrepreneur needs to build and re-build his spirit in order to continue staying in the business. This is because the challenges posed to theatre as a business especially during this era of home video, can only be overcome with a strong entrepreneurial spirit. Furthermore, Esuh (2014) perceives entrepreneurship in the arts field as:

One of the world's most dynamics emerging economic sectors in the most recent times with a lot of potentials to be exploited, it is yet to be identified and treated like any other area of entrepreneurship such as agriprenurship, technoprenurship, socialprenurship, infoprenurship and politicalprenurship.

Esuh (2014) further highlights that entrepreneurship in the arts includes painting, dancing, choreography, comedy and entertainment. While we agreed with Esuh's perception that entrepreneurship in the arts is not well exploited, however, entrepreneurship in the arts or arts related field is more encompassing. This is because Performing Arts is a discipline in which a lot of entrepreneurial potentials are inherent. No wonder, Adeoye (2014) points out that "in Nigeria today, we have over thirty universities that theatre, performing, dramatic and creative arts courses are being offered". Over the years, the Performing Arts Department, University of Ilorin and the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State offer courses at undergraduate levels which aid the development of entrepreneurial skills for students after graduation.

These courses teach students to be self-reliant and self-empowered. For instance, there are courses such as PFA 110 Theatre for Development, PFA 111 Fundamentals of Music and Choral Studies, PFA 125 Rudiment of Dance, PFA 126 Dance Studies, PFA 225 Basic Choreography, PFA 238 Technical Theatre, PFA 237 Acting Skills and Techniques, PFA 239 Introduction to Radio and Television, PFA 240 Play Directing, PFA 303 Performing Arts and the Media, PFA 307 Theatre Administration and Management, PFA 330 Dramatic Theory and Criticism, PFA 335 Performing Arts and Tourism, PFA 339 Advanced Studies in Costume and Make-up, PFA 426 Professional Dance Practice, PFA 433 Playwrights Workshop, PFA 436 Theatre Directing for the Screen offers at the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin. Similarly, the Department of the Theatre and Media Arts, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti offers courses such as TMA 108 Introduction to Acting, TMA 110 Practical Production Workshop, TMA 408 Advance Techniques in Directing, TMA 410 Practical Directing Project, TMA 434 Practical Solo Acting Project, etc.

From these courses, performing arts students can discover specialised areas in which they can explore as entrepreneurs after graduation. For the purpose of clarification, this writer has identified the under listed entrepreneurial potentials in the performing arts. There are two sources to this discovery. First, we discovered through the contents of some selected courses offered in the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin. Secondly, we discovered through our interactions with some graduates of the department who disclosed the type of job they went into after graduation. In view of this development, we have identified forty (40) entrepreneurial potentials in the performing arts for upcoming entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurial Potentials in the Performing Arts

Artistes Management	Artist Training	Dancers	Dance Teacher
Make-up Artist	Film Director	Interior Decorator	Actor/Actress
Song writer/Composer	Playwright	Critics	Community Theatre Consultant
Advertising Agents	Freelance Reporter	Newspaper/Magazine Publisher	Painter
Lighting Equipment Rental	Costume Rental	Master of Ceremony (MC)	Stand up Comedian
Show Organiser	Event Management/ Planning	Marketing Consultant	Radio/Television Presenter
Camera Man	Video Editor	Disc Jockey (DJ)	Musician/Singer
Music Studio Operator/Owner	Choreographer	Theatre Props Rental	Costume Designer
Fashion Designer	Theatre/Dance Troupe Owner	Music Promoter	Arts Gallery Operator
Tourist/Excursion Agent	Set Designer	Children Theatre Trainer	Drummer

Evolving Entrepreneurial Spirit

For a successful take off and sustenance in business as an entrepreneur, it is pertinent to develop entrepreneurial spirit. This can be developed through desire and persistence. In Napoleon's view, "persistence is a state of mind, therefore it can be cultivated. Like all states of mind, persistence is based upon definite causes" (Napoleon, 1983). Napoleon went further to classify the following under persistence; definite of purpose, desire, self-reliance, definite of plans, accurate knowledge, cooperation, will-power and habit. An entrepreneur must develop interest in his chosen area and also develop a business plan which will be a guide for proper execution of his plan. He needs to master basic skills and possesses specialised knowledge about his field of interest. Similarly, he must possess a will power and he must be optimistic in order to sustain his presence in entrepreneurial world. These are required fundamental elements that an entrepreneur needs to incorporate into his/her life to be able to stay longer and withstand challenges which are common to young entrepreneurs. These fundamental elements are applicable to all business endeavours including the performing arts.

Conclusion

It is noteworthy to further emphasize that entrepreneurship is important in the development of a nation. This is because entrepreneurship and youth empowerment can aid poverty alleviation among Nigerians. The developed countries are at the current stage of development due to innovation, advancement in technical know-how and the creation of enabling environment for entrepreneurship to thrive. Nigeria as a nation which is undergoing the period of economic recession needs to improve in the creation of enabling environment for the development of entrepreneurial skills acquisitions not only through the establishment of empowerment programmes but also encourage, prioritise, patronise, finance and recognise the young entrepreneur's contribution to national development. Entrepreneurship can be explored in almost all human endeavours such as engineering, sciences, medicine, agriculture and arts and humanities.

For the performing arts discipline, we have unveiled in this paper, forty entrepreneurial potentials inherent in the performing arts. Therefore, graduates of Nigerian tertiary institutions can explore various entrepreneurial opportunities listed. Some of these entrepreneurial opportunities require little or no capital to set up. For example, a graduate who wants to explore painting, master of ceremony (MC), show organiser, children theatre trainer, may need little or no capital to start. It is also important to state that majority of young entrepreneurs in Nigeria complain of unavailability of startup capital. This is an impediment that can be overcome if wealthy Nigerians become angel or venture capitalists to take part in the dreams of young entrepreneurs. Furthermore, this challenge of finance can be minimised through the establishment of investment club among the Nigerian youths.

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