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Decolonizing Entrepreneurship Education in Nigerian Higher Institutions: Implications for sustainable Creativity and Innovation in a Developing Economy

By

Dr. Elems-Ikwegbu Helen Ngozi[1], Dr. Osilem Okachiku-Agbaraeke[2]

[1,2]Department of Educational Foundations Faculty of Education River State University, Nigeria

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship education in Nigerian higher institutions has increasingly been recognized as a critical tool for addressing unemployment, fostering innovation, and promoting economic development. However, its current structure remains largely influenced by colonial legacies and Western-oriented models that often fail to reflect the socio-cultural and economic realities of Nigeria. This paper examines the need to decolonize entrepreneurship education as a strategy for enhancing sustainable creativity and innovation in a developing economy. It argues that the continued reliance on imported curricula limits students' ability to develop context-relevant entrepreneurial skills and undermines the potential of indigenous knowledge systems. The paper adopts a critical perspective with highlights on how decolonization can reposition entrepreneurship education to be more inclusive, practical, and culturally grounded. By integrating local knowledge, community-based practices, and experiential learning, higher institutions can better equip students to identify and solve real-life problems within their immediate environments. Such an approach not only promotes creativity but also supports sustainable innovation that aligns with local needs and resources. Furthermore, the paper identifies key challenges to decolonizing entrepreneurship education as institutional resistance, inadequate policy support, and limited capacity among educators. Despite these challenges, it maintains that meaningful reform is essential for achieving long-term economic transformation in Nigeria. The paper concludes that decolonizing entrepreneurship education is a necessary step towards building a generation of innovative, self-reliant graduates capable of contributing to sustainable national development.

Keywords: *Decolonization, Entrepreneurship Education, Sustainable Innovation, Creativity, Nigeria*

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship education has become a central component of higher education in Nigeria, particularly as a response to rising unemployment, economic instability, and the need for self-reliance among graduates. Nigerian universities and other tertiary institutions have increasingly integrated entrepreneurship courses into their curricula to equip students with the skills, knowledge, and mindset required for business creation and innovation (Nwokoye & Onuoha, 2018). Despite these efforts, concern persist regarding the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in fostering sustainable creativity and innovation, especially within the context of a developing economy. A major issue identified by scholars is the continued reliance on Western-oriented models of entrepreneurship that do not adequately reflect Nigeria's socio-cultural and economic realities (Acs, Szerb, & Lloyd, 2017).

The concept of decolonizing entrepreneurship education has therefore gained prominence as a framework for addressing these limitations. Decolonization in education involves the restructuring of curricula, pedagogies, and knowledge systems to reflect indigenous perspectives, local realities, and culturally relevant practices (Le Grange, 2016). In Nigerian context, this implies moving away from Eurocentric entrepreneurial theories and models that prioritize formal and large-scale business structures to embracing indigenous knowledge systems, informal sector dynamics, and community-based economic practices (Akinwale, 2018). Such a shift is necessary to make entrepreneurship education more responsive to the life experiences of students and the economic conditions within which they operate.

*Corresponding Author: **Dr. Elems-Ikwegbu Helen Ngozi.**

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Nigeria's economy is characterized by a large informal sector, high level of youth unemployment, and limited industrial development which demand innovative and context-specific entrepreneurial solutions (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). However, the prevailing entrepreneurship curriculum often emphasizes theoretical knowledge over practical engagement which limits students' ability to translate learning into viable business ventures (Olawale & Garwe, 2016). This disconnect between theory and practice underscores the need for a reorientation of entrepreneurship education that prioritizes experiential learning, problem-solving, and local relevance.

Decolonizing entrepreneurship education also has significant implications for sustainable creativity and innovation. Creativity that is rooted in local culture and resources is more likely to produce solutions that are sustainable and adaptable to the Nigerian environment (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). By incorporating indigenous knowledge, traditional skills, and community practices into entrepreneurship education, institutions can foster a form of innovation that is both culturally meaningful and economically viable. Furthermore, such an approach encourages students to view their immediate environment as a source of opportunity rather than limitation.

However, efforts to decolonize entrepreneurship education in Nigeria face several challenges such institutional resistance, lack of policy direction, inadequate funding, and limited capacity among educators to implement innovative teaching methods (Maringe & Sing, 2016). Globalisation pressures and the desire to align with international standards also contribute to the persistence of Western-centric curricula. These challenges highlight the complexity of transforming educational systems and the need for coordinated efforts among policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders.

Given these considerations, this paper examines the imperative of decolonizing entrepreneurship education in Nigerian higher institutions and its implications for sustainable creativity and innovation. It argues that meaningful reform is essential for equipping graduates with the skills and mindset necessary to drive economic development in a rapidly changing and competitive global environment.

Conceptual Clarifications

Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education refers to the structured process of equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies required to identify opportunities, create ventures, and manage businesses effectively. In higher institutions, it is designed to promote innovation, self-reliance, and economic participation among students (Neck & Greene, 2015). In Nigerian context, entrepreneurship education has been institutionalized as a compulsory component of tertiary education to address unemployment and stimulate economic growth (Nwokoye & Onuoha, 2018). However, scholars argue that its current implementation is often theoretical and disconnected from practical realities which limits its effectiveness in fostering real entrepreneurial capabilities (Olawale & Garwe, 2016). Effective entrepreneurship education should emphasize experiential learning, problem-solving, and the development of context-specific solutions that align with local economic conditions (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015).

Decolonization of Education

Decolonization of education involves the critical re-examination and restructuring of curricula, teaching methods, and knowledge systems to remove colonial biases and incorporate indigenous perspectives and local realities. It seeks to challenge the dominance of Western epistemologies and promote inclusive knowledge production that reflects diverse cultural experiences (Le Grange, 2016). In the context of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria, decolonization entails moving away from imported business models and theories that may not align with local socio-economic conditions and integrating indigenous knowledge systems, traditional practices, and community-based economic activities (Akinwale, 2018). This approach emphasizes relevance, cultural identity, and the empowerment of learners to engage meaningfully with their environment.

Sustainable Creativity

Sustainable creativity refers to the ability to generate innovative ideas and solutions that are not only original but also viable, contextually relevant, and capable of long-term impact. It involves the continuous application of creative thinking to address real-world challenges in ways that are environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). In a developing economy like Nigeria, sustainable creativity is essential for addressing pressing issues such as unemployment, poverty, and limited industrial development. Entrepreneurship education that incorporates local knowledge and resources can foster creativity that is grounded in reality and capable of producing lasting solutions (UNESCO, 2019).

Innovation in a Developing Economy

Innovation in a developing economy refers to the process of creating and applying new ideas, products, services, or processes that contribute to economic growth and social development within resource-constrained environments. Unlike in developed economies, innovation in developing contexts often focuses on adaptability, affordability, and the effective use of available resources (Acs et al., 2017). In Nigeria, innovation is closely linked to the informal sector where individuals frequently develop creative solutions to everyday challenges (Akinwale, 2018). However, the dominance of Western-oriented entrepreneurship education models may limit the recognition and development of such locally driven innovations. Decolonising entrepreneurship education can therefore enhance innovation by encouraging students to draw on indigenous knowledge, local opportunities, and community needs.

Developing Economy in Nigerian Context

A developing economy is characterized by low level of industrialization, income, and technological advancement with challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and

*Corresponding Author: **Dr. Elems-Ikwegbu Helen Ngozi.**
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infrastructural deficits. Nigeria, as a developing economy faces significant socio-economic challenges but also possesses abundant human and natural resources that can be harnessed for growth (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The role of entrepreneurship in such an economy is crucial because it drives job creation, wealth generation, and economic diversification. However, for entrepreneurship to be effective, education systems must align with local realities and equip learners with relevant skills and knowledge. This underscores the importance of decolonizing entrepreneurship education to support sustainable creativity and innovation tailored to Nigeria's unique developmental needs.

History of Entrepreneurship Education in Nigeria

The development of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria is closely tied to the country's broader educational and economic history, particularly its colonial legacy and post-independence reforms. During the colonial period, the Nigerian education system was primarily designed to produce clerks, administrators, and civil servants to serve the colonial administration with little emphasis on creativity, innovation, or self-employment (Fafunwa, 2018). This orientation persisted after independence because the formal education system continued to prioritize white-collar employment over vocational and entrepreneurial skills which limited the capacity of graduates to engage in productive enterprise (Akinwale, 2018).

Decades after independence, Nigeria experienced rapid population growth and increasing unemployment, especially among graduates of higher institutions. The inability of the formal sector to absorb the growing labour force highlighted the inadequacies of the existing education system and the need for a shift towards skills acquisition and self-reliance (Oviawe, 2016). This realization led to series of educational reforms aimed at promoting technical and vocational education which laid the foundation for the introduction of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian institutions (Okolie, Elom, & Igwe, 2019).

A significant milestone in the institutionalization of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria was the introduction of compulsory entrepreneurship courses in tertiary institutions by the National Universities Commission in 2006. This policy mandated all universities to integrate entrepreneurship studies into their curricula with the aim of equipping students with the skills needed for job creation and economic empowerment (Nwokoye & Onuoha, 2018). The initiative marked a shift from traditional academic training to a more practical and skills-oriented approaches that reflect global trends in education that emphasize innovation and enterprise development (Neck & Greene, 2015).

Despite this progress, the implementation of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria has been shaped by continued reliance on Western models and theoretical frameworks. Many programmes focus on conventional business planning and management theories that are often disconnected from the realities of Nigeria's informal and resource-constrained economy (Olawale & Garwe, 2016). As a result, graduates frequently lack the practical skills and contextual understanding needed to translate entrepreneurial knowledge into viable ventures (Okolie et al., 2019).

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need to reform entrepreneurship education to make it more relevant to local contexts. Scholars and policymakers have advocated for the integration of indigenous knowledge systems, experiential learning, and community-based approaches that reflect Nigeria's socio-economic realities (Akinwale, 2018; Oviawe, 2016). This shift aligns with broader calls for the decolonization of education which seeks to move away from Eurocentric models and promote culturally grounded and context-specific knowledge (Le Grange, 2016).

In all, the historical development of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria reflects a gradual transition from colonial, employment-oriented education to a more skills-based and enterprise-driven approach. However, the persistence of Western-oriented curricula and limited practical application continues to hinder its effectiveness. Addressing these challenges require a deliberate effort to decolonize entrepreneurship education and align it with the needs and realities of Nigeria's developing economy.

Need for Decolonising Entrepreneurship Education

The growing emphasis on entrepreneurship education in Nigerian higher institutions has not fully translated into meaningful economic outcomes, largely due to its continued reliance on Western-oriented frameworks that are often disconnected from local realities. This mismatch underscores the urgent need to decolonize entrepreneurship education by rethinking its content, pedagogy, and underlying assumptions. Decolonization seeks to make education more relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the socio-cultural and economic context of learners (Le Grange, 2016). In Nigeria, this involves integrating indigenous knowledge systems, local business practices, and community-based approaches into entrepreneurship curricula.

One of the primary reasons for decolonizing entrepreneurship education is the disconnect between formal education and the realities of the Nigerian economy. Nigeria's economy is largely driven by the informal sector where entrepreneurial activities are shaped by local knowledge, cultural practices, and resource constraints (Akinwale, 2018). However, existing curricula often emphasize formal business structures, corporate models, and Western case studies that do not reflect these realities (Olawale & Garwe, 2016). As a result, graduates may possess theoretical knowledge but lack the practical skills and contextual understanding needed to thrive in their immediate environment. Decolonizing the curriculum can bridge this gap by aligning educational content with local economic conditions.

Another critical need lies in the promotion of indigenous knowledge and cultural identity. Indigenous entrepreneurial practices such as apprenticeship systems, cooperative societies, and informal trade networks have historically sustained livelihoods in Nigerian communities (Okolie, Elom,

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& Igwe, 2019). However, these systems are often marginalized or overlooked in formal education. Decolonization seeks to validate and incorporate such knowledge in order to foster a sense of identity, relevance, and ownership among learners (Smith, 2015). This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also enhances students' ability to develop innovative solutions rooted in their cultural context.

Furthermore, decolonizing entrepreneurship education is essential for fostering sustainable creativity and innovation. Creativity that is grounded in local realities is more likely to produce solutions that are practical, affordable, and adaptable to the Nigerian environment (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). By encouraging students to draw on local resources, traditions, and community needs, a decolonized curriculum can stimulate context-specific innovation that contributes to long-term development. This is particularly important in a developing economy where resource constraints require innovative and sustainable approaches to problem-solving (Acs, Szerb, & Lloyd, 2017).

The need for decolonization is also driven by the limitations of traditional teaching methods which often prioritize rote learning and theoretical instruction over experiential and problem-based learning. Entrepreneurship, by its nature requires practical engagement, creativity, and critical thinking (Neck & Greene, 2015). A decolonized approach emphasizes hands-on learning, collaboration with local entrepreneurs, and real-world problem-solving which enhance students' entrepreneurial competencies and readiness for self-employment (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015).

Moreover, globalisation has intensified the pressure on developing countries to adopt standardized educational models at the expense of local relevance. While global perspectives are important, overdependence on external models can hinder the development of context-specific solutions (Maringe & Sing, 2016). Decolonizing entrepreneurship education allows Nigeria to balance global knowledge with local realities to ensure that graduates are both globally aware and locally competent.

Implications of Decolonizing Entrepreneurship Education

Decolonizing entrepreneurship education in Nigerian higher institutions carries far-reaching implications for sustainable creativity, innovation, and overall economic development. One major implication is the promotion of context-relevant knowledge and skills. By shifting from Western-centric models to locally grounded approaches, students are better equipped to understand and respond to the socio-economic realities of their environment. This alignment enhances their ability to identify viable business opportunities within local communities and develop solutions that are practical and sustainable (Akinwale, 2018; Le Grange, 2016).

Another important implication is the revitalization and integration of indigenous knowledge systems into formal education. Decolonization validates traditional entrepreneurial practices such as apprenticeship systems, cooperative enterprises, and informal trade networks which have historically sustained livelihoods in Nigeria (Okolie, Elom, & Igwe, 2019). Incorporating these practices into the curriculum not only preserves cultural heritage but also enriches students' learning experiences by providing alternative models of enterprise development. This fosters a sense of identity, ownership, and relevance among learners which is essential for meaningful engagement and innovation (Smith, 2015).

Decolonizing entrepreneurship education also enhances sustainable creativity and innovation. When students are encouraged to draw from their cultural backgrounds, local resources, and community needs, they are more likely to develop innovative solutions that are adaptable and environmentally sustainable (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Such creativity is particularly valuable in a developing economy like Nigeria where resource constraints require innovative approaches to problem-solving. By focusing on local challenges, decolonized education promotes grassroots innovation that can drive inclusive economic growth (Acs, Szerb, & Lloyd, 2017).

Furthermore, this approach has significant implications for graduate employability and job creation. A curriculum that emphasizes practical skills, experiential learning, and real-world problem-solving prepares students to become job creators rather than job seekers (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). This shift is crucial in addressing the high rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria because it empowers graduates to establish small and medium enterprises that contribute to economic diversification and development (Nwokoye & Onuoha, 2018).

Decolonization also encourages pedagogical transformation within higher institutions. Traditional teaching methods that rely heavily on theoretical instruction are replaced with more interactive and student-centred approaches such as project-based learning, community engagement, and collaboration with local entrepreneurs (Neck & Greene, 2015). These methods enhance critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills which are essential for entrepreneurial success.

However, the implications of decolonizing entrepreneurship education are not without challenges. It requires significant institutional reforms that include curriculum redesign, capacity building for educators, and supportive policy frameworks (Maringe & Sing, 2016). Additionally, there is a need to balance local relevance with global competitiveness by ensuring that students are equipped to operate both within and beyond their immediate environments.

Challenges of Decolonizing Entrepreneurship Education

Decolonizing entrepreneurship education in Nigerian higher institutions is necessary, yet confronted by complex process, multiple structural, institutional, and ideological challenges. One of the foremost challenges is resistance to change within academic institutions. Many universities are deeply rooted in traditional curricula that prioritize Western theories and models which make it difficult to introduce alternative and locally grounded approaches (Le Grange, 2016). Academic staff who were themselves trained within Eurocentric frameworks may lack the motivation or readiness to adopt

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new pedagogies that emphasize indigenous knowledge and experiential learning (Maringe & Sing, 2016).

Another significant challenge is the limited capacity and preparedness of educators to implement decolonized curricula. Effective decolonization requires teachers who are not only knowledgeable about entrepreneurship but also familiar with indigenous practices, community-based enterprises, and innovative teaching methods (Neck & Greene, 2015). However, many educators in Nigerian higher institutions lack adequate training in these areas which hinders the effective integration of local content into entrepreneurship education (Akinwale, 2018). This capacity gap is further compounded by insufficient professional development opportunities and limited exposure to best practices in decolonized education.

Institutional and policy constraints also pose major obstacles. Although entrepreneurship education has been made compulsory in Nigerian universities, there is often a lack of clear policy direction on how to incorporate decolonization into the curriculum (Nwokoye & Onuoha, 2018). Educational policies tend to emphasize standardization and alignment with global benchmarks which can conflict with efforts to localize content and teaching methods (Maringe & Sing, 2016). Additionally, bureaucratic processes within higher institutions can slow down curriculum reforms and limit innovation.

Funding and infrastructural limitations represent another critical challenge. Decolonizing entrepreneurship education often requires investment in new teaching resources, practical training facilities, and community-based learning initiatives. However, many Nigerian institutions face financial constraints that limit their ability to support such reforms (Okolie, Elom, & Igwe, 2019). Inadequate infrastructure including poorly equipped workshops and limited access to technology further restricts the implementation of experiential and practice-oriented learning.

Furthermore, the dominance of globalisation and Western knowledge systems continues to influence educational priorities. There is often a perception that Western models are superior or more prestigious which makes institutions to maintain the existing curricula in order to remain competitive internationally (Smith, 2015). This creates a tension between the need for global relevance and the desire for local authenticity which is a challenge to full embrace of decolonization.

Another challenge lies in the marginalisation and under-documentation of indigenous knowledge systems. Many local entrepreneurial practices are informal, undocumented, and transmitted orally which make them difficult to be incorporated into formal academic curricula (Akinwale, 2018). The lack of structured frameworks for integrating such knowledge limits its recognition and utilization in higher education.

To this end, while decolonizing entrepreneurship education offers significant potential for enhancing relevance and innovation, it is hindered by challenges such as institutional resistance, limited educator capacity, policy constraints, inadequate funding, globalisation pressures, and the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge. Addressing these challenges require coordinated efforts among policymakers, educators, and institutions to create an enabling environment for meaningful and sustainable reforms.

Conclusion

Decolonizing entrepreneurship education in Nigerian higher institutions is essential for making learning more relevant, practical, and responsive to the country's socio-economic realities. The continued reliance on foreign models has limited the ability of graduates to develop context-specific solutions which weaken the impact of entrepreneurship education on creativity, innovation, and economic development. By integrating indigenous knowledge, local practices, and experiential learning, institutions can better equip students with the skills needed to create sustainable ventures and address real-life challenges.

It is the position of this paper that decolonizing entrepreneurship education is not optional but necessary for fostering sustainable creativity and innovation in a developing economy like Nigeria. When properly implemented, it can transform students from job seekers into job creators and promote inclusive and locally driven development. Therefore, deliberate efforts must be made to reform curricula, strengthen institutional capacity, and align entrepreneurship education with the realities and opportunities within the Nigerian context.

Suggestions

1. Curriculum redesign: Revise entrepreneurship programmes to incorporate indigenous knowledge, local business practices, and community-based learning in order to ensure relevance to Nigeria's socio-economic context.
2. Experiential learning: Emphasize hands-on training, internships, and project-based activities that allow students to apply entrepreneurial concepts in real-world settings.
3. Capacity building for educators: Train lecturers and facilitators on locally grounded entrepreneurship approaches and innovative teaching methods to enhance delivery.
4. Policy support: Develop clear guidelines and institutional policies that encourage decolonization of curricula and support for innovation-focused programmes.
5. Collaboration with local entrepreneurs: Engage successful local entrepreneurs in mentorship programmes, workshops, and co-curricula initiatives to expose students to practical business experiences.
6. Resource allocation: Invest in infrastructure, technology, and community partnerships to support experiential and practical entrepreneurship learning.
7. Balancing global and local perspectives: While integrating local knowledge, ensure that students

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remain aware of global entrepreneurial trends to operate effectively both locally and internationally.

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