

Foreign Education, Entrepreneurship and Skills Development in Nigeria: Implications for Accounting Education

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Abstract

Each year, many Nigerian students travel abroad to study different courses such as engineering, medicine, business and accounting. This paper uses data obtained from the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) on African students in the UK to assess the cause of the increasing number of Nigerian students, compare to other African students, studying business courses in the UK. The paper makes recommendations on how the skill contents of courses in Nigerian universities can be improved.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship; Abroad; Skills, Business; Accounting

Introduction

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Nigeria sends the most students overseas of any country on the African continent after Morocco. It was estimated that over 39,000 Nigerian students were studying at various universities abroad though many believe that this figure may be considerable higher (ICEF Monitor, 2014).

Scholarships to foreign universities are one way Nigerian students are able to receive the quality education they need. Adelusu observes that there are about 50,000 scholarships a year for Nigerian students wanting to study abroad. Most scholarships are offered by different agencies of the government both at the federal and regional/state levels – especially in oil-rich Nigerian states. Many of these scholarships are targeted to key labour market areas for which Nigeria needs talented graduates – engineering, for example, especially as it relates to chemical and petroleum technologies. These same fields, as well as medicine and IT, are in general the most popular among Nigerian students looking for foreign degrees.

As exciting as the demand for foreign university places among Nigerian students is in some ways, it is also a result of a domestic education system under stress. The poor quality of education available to most and the level of inaccessibility of quality education to millions of Nigerians is so problematic that Nigerian employers are having trouble finding qualified workers. This has been described as a major factor in a huge youth unemployment rate. This is further corroborated by a recent report by the British Council on employability in four Africa countries finds that the unemployment rate is as high as 23.1% for Nigerian graduates with first degrees. That report adds that with the partial exception of South Africa, other African countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya) lack strong information on the labour market, on transitions from university to work, and on the link between disciplinary area and employment prospects.

Beyond problems at the tertiary education level, there are also serious issues within Nigeria's secondary school system. In 2013, only 44% of high-school-aged Nigerians were enrolled in school which is 21 percentage points below the global average. This explains the low levels of youth literacy in the country. Enrolment rates, particularly among girls, are low in the north of the country [1].

Entrepreneurship involves acquisition of useful skills and ideas that are necessary for self-reliance and job creation. It is a vehicle through which a sustainable economy can evolve and be created. Most studies agree that entrepreneurial skills can be achieved through qualitative

education which is provided in tertiary education [2,3]. Such qualitative training enhances the employability skills of the recipients; and prepares the individuals for the labour market. Qualitative education as described by the UNICEF is a holistic education and includes how teachers and administrators use inputs to frame meaningful learning experiences for students. It surpasses education quality based on system inputs such as infrastructure and student - lecturer ratio, or curricular contents.

Regrettably, the level of qualitative education provided in Nigeria has been very low in comparison with countries of similar economic status both within and outside the African continent. According to the latest university ranking by Webometric, only nine Nigerian public funded universities: Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, and University of Ilorin are ranked among the top 100 qualitative universities in Africa. Countries such as South Africa and Egypt continue to lead in the league table of quality universities in Africa. Such a low ranking and attainment in the public tertiary institutions implies that the quality of entrepreneurship education provided by the institutions is low [4].

The perceived low quality of university education in Nigeria has created huge appetite for migration abroad for foreign education. Since the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills is to a great extent affected by the quality of education received by an individual, it is therefore understandable why the number of Nigerian students travelling abroad to study has become quite significant. In this paper, we argue that the perceived low quality of entrepreneurial education delivered by public tertiary institutions in Nigeria, has led to the significant proportion of Nigerian students travelling abroad to acquire foreign education. Our paper focuses on the trend of Nigerians travelling abroad to study degree courses particularly in the United Kingdom (UK) and compares how the trend in foreign certificates has affected entrepreneurial skill

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development in the country. It also addresses how this trend can be tackled.

Interestingly, foreign universities are alert to making necessary adjustments to accommodate international students. Studies have shown that international students enjoy learning styles in which they are familiar with, and that gradually adopting what they know while introducing them to a new learning method ensure successful outcome in their learning [5,6]. Cradon et al. advocate appropriate curriculum design to attract and retain international students [7].

The paper makes significant contribution to foreign education and skill development literature by analysing data obtained from the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and making a statistical comparison of the proportion of Nigerians against other African nationals studying business courses in the UK. Our study focuses on the period after the return to democratic rule in Nigeria when migration to the UK and other western countries became quite easy for majority of Nigerians who can afford international fees. The rest of the paper is organised as follows: section two is a brief but focused literature review on entrepreneurship education. Section three discusses the research questions and data while sections four and five are the discussion of findings. The last section is the recommendation and conclusion.

Literature

Most entrepreneurship studies agree that entrepreneurial skills can both be developed and acquired particularly in business schools. Courses such as business courses contents include entrepreneurship skills for self-development and development of business ideas [7-9]. To achieve this requires that the university curriculum must be well developed in line with best practices. The universities must develop programmes that are relevant to the industry and regularly upgrade the skill sets necessary to be relevant in the profession. Courses such as accounting must be streamlined to meet the requirement of professional bodies in the field. Saint, Hartnett and Strassner argue that the university programmes must be regularly reformed to bring entrepreneurship courses in line with international good practices. Such reforms should seek to promote mechanism for quality education [10].

For entrepreneurship education to be more effective, the desired result which is skill acquisition must be achieved. Maina [9] argues that qualitative education can only be achieved when the inputs produce the desired output. Such inputs include the students, teachers and facilities which are converted through the process of teaching and learning to achieve the desirable output of skill acquisition [9]. In accounting education, the entrepreneurship skills include accounting bookkeeping, filing and recording invoices and receipts, credit notes, preparing vouchers, trial balance, and maintaining assets records. By acquiring such useful skills, recipients are able to transform business concepts, grow and diversify an enterprise with positive results. A country with a flood of large entrepreneurial skills is certain to create and build industries and reduce unemployment [11].

Vesper and Gartner provide list of criteria for which the entrepreneurial skills content of world class universities are assessed. The contents include: new business start-ups, small business management, field projects/venturing consulting, venture plan writing, venture finance, family business, venture marketing, management of fast growing firms, creative thinking, franchise development, law for entrepreneurs, technology transfer, corporate venturing, business entry via acquisition, street smarts in business among others. Though the list is not exhaustive, it shows the level of qualitative skills required in providing and maintaining quality learning institutions [8].

The extent to which the Nigerian higher education institutions have developed the curriculum contents of degree programmes to accommodate the growing recognition and importance of entrepreneurial education has remained questionable [12]. The challenge of improving the curriculum framework of entrepreneurship education in the Nigeria educational system has remained largely unresolved. Higher education institutions (HEIs) must take appropriate measures at ensuring that the skill contents of entrepreneurial courses are appropriately enhanced. Akudolu recommends that higher education institutions should create awareness and be open to recognise entrepreneurial interests and capability [7]. There is no greater discipline where such entrepreneurial skills are well sought after more than in business and management courses. Data from the UK Higher Education and Statistic Agency indicate that business courses, particularly accounting are among the top 38.4% courses studied abroad by Nigerians. Accounting as an entrepreneurship course develops professional and consultancy skills that can make recipients to be independent. The increase in the number of persons seeking entrepreneurial skills abroad raises a fundamental question on whether foreign education deters entrepreneurship skills development in Nigeria particularly in accounting education. It also exposes the low content of entrepreneurship programmes in Nigerian HEIs [13].

Accounting programme offers important entrepreneurship skills relevant for running a business. Such skills include learning to record financial transactions and keeping proper accounting records. Accounting education also provides opportunity to recipients to progress to level of professional accountants. However, there have been arguments that the accounting curriculum needs to be receptive to the growing changes in the way businesses are managed. Thus, Albrecht and Sack suggest that the accounting should embrace a multidisciplinary dimension and to incorporate management, social, humanities and other technical skills in its curriculum [14].

Some countries such as US, UK and China have tailored the accounting curriculum in their business schools to reflect the entrepreneurial skill requirements of businesses. Thus, Nigerian HEIs must follow the trend in order to develop entrepreneurial skills in their young graduates. Burnett enlists analytical and critical thinking, written and oral communications, decision making, spread sheet software, windows and word processing software and internships among top entrepreneurial skills that must be included accounting in education curriculum [15,16].

Research Questions and Data

Data from the HESA shows that the number of Nigerian studying in the UK is on the rise. There are over 10,000 Nigerians per year who study at different higher education institutions in the UK [13]. These students are classified as foreign students and pay on average, tuition fee of nine thousand pounds, equivalent of about three million naira per annum. Most of these students acquire the relevant entrepreneurial skills but rarely return back to the country. They remain abroad to make a living. According to the Nigsearch UK report an independent Nigerian social media programme, 65% of Nigerians who came to the UK to study prior to 2013 did not return back home after the completion of your programmes [17].

There are thus some reasons to question whether foreign education has any effect on the development of entrepreneurship in Nigeria. To guide this inquiry, we pose the following research questions:

1. What is the ratio of Nigerian youths studying in the UK HEI in comparison with other Africa countries?

2. To what extent has foreign education affected entrepreneurship development in Nigeria?

We obtained data from the UK HESA for all African students studying in the UK between 2010-2013. To be included in the sample, the students must be classified as foreign students, paying international tuition fee¹ and studying in any UK HEI. Only business related courses are included in the sample as the focus of business studies is to convert students to entrepreneurs. Although there may be good argument to include non-business courses but these are deleted from the sample. The courses are classified under three major study areas: postgraduate research, postgraduate taught courses, undergraduate courses and other undergraduate programmes such as top-up degree courses. Our final sample of countries consists of 5-13, with Nigeria and South Africa featuring in all four categories.

Discussion of Findings

The number of Nigerians studying business courses in UK HEIs is high compared to other African countries. Table 1 shows the ratio of postgraduate students of Nigerian origin studying business courses to other African countries during the same period. These business courses have entrepreneurship skills contents e.g. business administration and management (Table 1).

The data is compiled from UK HESA and shows the top countries from Africa with the highest percentage of postgraduate research students studying in UK HEIs. In arriving at these numbers, countries with less than 0.5% consistently over the period of the study are not reported. Postgraduate research courses include masters by research, masters and doctor of philosophy.

To illustrate the huge difference between the number of Nigerians and those of other African countries studying abroad, Figure 1 shows the African countries and their number of students studying in the UK. There is a huge difference between the student numbers from Nigeria and other African countries.

The highest number of students enrolled on these courses largely

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013
Countries	%	%	%	%
Egypt	1.5	1.6	2.1	2.20
Ghana	1.1	1.1	1.0	0.97
Kenya	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.60
Libya	1.6	1.6	2.0	2.37
Nigeria	2.0	2.2	2.3	2.50
South Africa	1.0	1.1	1.0	0.98

Table 1: Percentage of postgraduate research students from African countries in the UK.

comes from Nigeria, Libya, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa.

The number of Nigerian students studying undergraduate programmes is higher than other major African countries. Table 2 shows the list of African countries and the percentage ratio of their students in the UK studying undergraduate programmes. Note that all these programmes contain elements of entrepreneurial skills. The population of Nigerian students constitutes over 11% of the African students' population. The second highest in the category is Kenya with just about 4% of their students constituting the total African students population. Whilst there is a decline in the number of other African students studying undergraduate courses, those of Nigeria continue to increase which may have a significant impact on entrepreneurial development in the country (Table 2).

The data is compiled from UK HESA and shows the top countries from Africa with the highest percentage of undergraduate students studying in UK HEIs. In arriving at these numbers, countries with less than 0.5% consistently over the period of the study are not reported. Undergraduate courses include bachelor degree programmes in business related courses.

The table shows an increase in the number of students from Nigeria. The percentage of Nigerians studying undergraduate programmes increased by over 10 percentage points between 2010-2013. Given the significance of undergraduate degree programme as a foundation for developing future entrepreneurial skills, such a consistent increase indicates that Nigeria loses huge number of youths abroad for courses that can be provided in indigenous institutions in the country. It also shows the huge appetite of Nigerian to acquire entrepreneurial skills which are important in creating and establishing their own businesses [13].

The chart in Figure 2 indicates that Nigeria is the top in the category of African countries with high number of students in business related courses. This is followed by countries such as Kenya, Mauritius, Zimbabwe and few others.

Figure shows that Nigeria has the highest percentage of Africans studying undergraduate programmes with entrepreneurial skills.

The data obtained from the HESA are compared with similar data from the UK Council of International Students Affairs (UKCISA) to ascertain the trend in foreign education in Nigeria. The result is shown in Table 3. It shows a geometric increase in the total number of Nigerian studying abroad during 2012/13 to 2014/15 academic sessions. We further ascertain that 38.4% of the students study accounting. This is interesting because of the pivotal role of accountants in economic development and self-dependence, which is a cardinal mission of entrepreneurship.

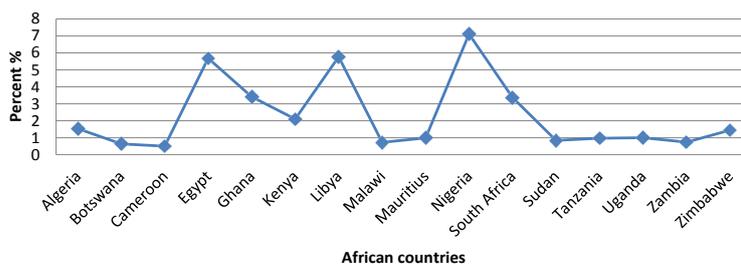


Figure 1: Depicting the number of Nigerians studying for postgraduate research courses versus other African countries.

¹International students pay an average of nine thousand pounds which is equivalent of three million naira.

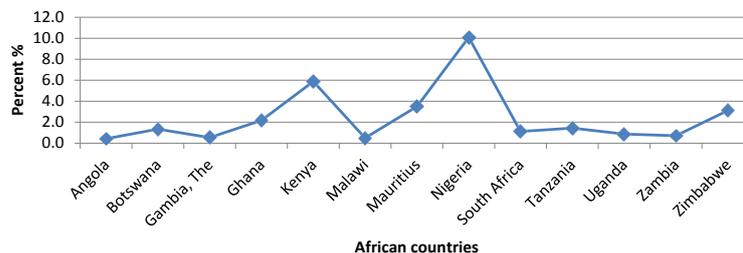


Figure 2: Trend in the number of undergraduate students from Nigeria compared to other African countries.

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013
Countries	%	%	%	%
Angola	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.60
Botswana	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.08
Gambia, The	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.51
Ghana	2.2	2.0	1.7	1.45
Kenya	5.9	5.3	4.6	3.97
Malawi	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.57
Mauritius	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.06
Nigeria	10.1	10.7	10.6	11.15
South Africa	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.20
Tanzania	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.12
Uganda	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.90
Zambia	0.7	0.9	0.7	0.77
Zimbabwe	3.1	3.3	3.1	2.67

Table 2: Percentage of Nigerian undergraduate/first degree students studying in the UK compared with other African.

Courses	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Management	6,810	6,848	6,610
Engineering/ IT	5,914	5,947	5,740
Law	4,659	3,964	3,827
Others	537	1,261	1,218
Total	17,920	18,020	17,395

Table 3: Number of Nigerians studying abroad.

The data are obtained from the UK Council for International Students Affairs. UKCISA is responsible

Conclusion and Recommendation

The data presented in the tables above indicate a geometric increase in the number of Nigerian students undertaking studies abroad in the UK. The curriculum of the programmes offered in several UK HEIs, offer skills to enable students either establish their own businesses or work in the industries. The challenge however is that many Nigerian universities are not properly equipped to provide need training to students. This could have a negative impact in the future when much needed manpower and entrepreneurial skills to rebuild and develop the economy of the country will be required.

Interestingly, a significant proportion of the students are sponsored by various government agencies. According to Coventry Telegraph, the Nigeria government are the highest sponsors of international students though students from India and China also have significant numbers of international students who are largely self-financed students. Government sponsorship of students abroad may be largely regarded as a laudable achievement; its negative impact on entrepreneurship development must be carefully considered [18]. Such development makes it hard to develop the local universities in Nigeria since much

of the funds are spent on foreign education abroad. In fact, Nigerians pay over US\$2billion annually on foreign universities. Such capital flights have negative effect on the development of universities, hence manpower in the country [1].

For now, it is good news that an increasing number of Nigerians are taking advantage of scholarships and/or greater family incomes to obtain quality education in other countries to overcome the capacity and quality issues in their own education system. A more permanent solution will be strengthen the national own education system. By this can be achieved partly by giving more attention to the education sector and strengthening the institutional structures, the government seems to be working towards this as shown by the 2014 and 2015 budgets which have over US\$6 billion dollars allocated to the education sector [19].

The increase in the number of students travelling abroad had initially been attributed to the parlous state of Nigerian universities such as frequency of industrial actions, paucity of funds, dilapidated state of infrastructure and the lack of manpower in the public universities. According to the World University News, for many stakeholders, the development could be attributed to the decay in the country's educational sector and the incessant strikes which had disrupted schools' calendar. There is also the challenge of lack of admission space. Each year about 1.5 million school leavers sit for compulsory entrance examinations into 150 public and private universities whose approved carrying capacity is 600,000 students [1].

Personal motivation is also a key consideration. For some, it is a means to enhance their career prospects at home; for others, a route to starting a new life abroad. In the first scenario, it does appear that the companies who offer top paying jobs in Nigeria have a preference for holders of foreign degree. Indeed, such companies regularly attend job fairs in Europe and North America, hunting for Nigerians who studied abroad, to come and work in Nigeria. This trend may well continue as more international firms are seeking investment opportunities in emerging economies such as Nigeria, as growth in the advanced economies remain slow. This can only motivate more individuals to seek that extra edge which will give them a fighting chance for the best jobs. UK institutions are better funded in comparison with Nigerian, and have better facilities and teaching methods to cater for the needs of each student. Schools in Nigeria can be at par with UK schools if only they are well funded and adequately equipped.

The programmes examines in this paper are business courses which are carefully structured to provide entrepreneurship skills to students. Nigerian HEIs could re-examine the curriculum contents of programmes offered so that they can cater for the needs of the youth particularly in entrepreneurship skills development. As suggested by Hills, universities should emphasise on small business development as well as sophisticated management practices in their curriculum [20].

Accounting education is among the significant entrepreneurial skills acquired in business schools. The recipients of the skills often progress to establish themselves as professional accountant and bookkeepers. A shortage of these skills in any country can have significant negative effect on the economy. It is therefore important that HEIs structure business courses to make it attractive for those who may wish to attain professionalism in accounting related careers. The essence of entrepreneurship is to be self-sufficient and capable of being employer of labour. Accounting education offers a veritable opportunity in creating various employments in tax, bookkeeping, financial reporting, auditing and several areas of entrepreneurship.

Given the trend in the number of students abroad for entrepreneurial studies, it will be interesting to extend this study to consider how higher education institutions (HEIs) in Nigeria can address any perceived anomaly in the curriculum structure and to enhance entrepreneurial skills.

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