

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF SKILL ACQUISITION IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

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Abstract

The prevailing economic conditions have compelled many youths and students to look for courses/programmes that would ensure their future on the face of unemployment. Skill acquisition in Business Education is imperative as it provides equal opportunities for youths and adults to become employable and maintain their employable status regardless of the economic and social change that inevitably affects them. Some of the skills acquired through Business Education are communication, technical and managerial skills and these skills further empowered them economically, politically, and educationally. Skills acquisition in Business Education is impeded with inadequate facilities, funding, undefined career paths etc. The paper therefore recommends that adequate funding and equipment, training and retraining of business teachers should be provided. Conclusively, in order to acquire the right kind of skills, stakeholders, government, private, parents, etc. should help to provide adequate funds of Business Education.

Introduction

The fulcrum of the policies of the government, which are dictated by the prevailing economic situation particularly widespread unemployment of able-bodied men and women who have graduated from schools, is to empower the people with requisite skills and knowledge that would enable them to be self-employed and at the same time become employers of labour.

This has engendered the setting of various vocational and skills acquisition centres

where the people could be further trained on skills related vocations. The Government is not unmindful of the dire consequences of not empowering the people to be useful to themselves and the society at large, hence the new drive towards skills acquisition and the vocational related programmes. (Olawole, 2007)

In today's knowledge-based economy, part of an overall youth empowerment process would be developing sustainable skills in young people. It has become increasingly difficult for young people to find work — partly because there are not enough jobs and partly because the young do not have the skills that are in demand in the labour market. Currently, too few young people are given opportunities to improve their skills in areas that will enhance their employability (Goamoh, 2004).

The acquisition of relevant skills is a tool of increasing and boosting the productive power-base of the nation. Skill acquisition is the process of possessing effective and ready knowledge in developing one's aptitude and ability in a particular field (Okoro, 2008). Skills acquisition programme is meant for self-reliance which is available in most of the country.

Business Education is primarily education for skill acquisition, vocation and competency based. Osuala (1992) in Fadare (2007) sees Business Education as a training system that encourages the beneficiary in acquiring skills that fit into the world of work. In addition Aina (2002) states that Business Education encompasses knowledge, attributes, skills and competency needed by all citizens in order to effectively manage their personal

business and economic systems to ensure continuous earning of reasonable income.

The availability of vocational skills training constitutes a vital component in national strategy for achieving mass literacy (Edukugbo, 2005 in Okoro, 2008). But Nigeria, due to insatiable desire of western education which take young people through secondary to tertiary institutions in a bid to have degree and certificates in University, Polytechnics and colleges of education overlook skill acquisition. According to UNESCO less than 1 % of secondary education has oriented towards technical and vocational education. Business Education which is a part of Vocational Education seems to have been under-funded and unequipped. Some of the workshops lack tools and machines for practice, trained and qualified teachers are insufficient, the buildings derelicts and the enabling environment required for service delivery are not provided. (Atakpa, 2007 in Okoro 2008), Amarwee (2004), Okoro and Iyeye (2004). These constraints seems to retard skill acquisition in business education service, the programme cannot be taught effectively to enable the students acquire the relevant skills the programme offers.

This paper intends to look at the following:

- Concept of Business Education
- Skills needed by Business Educators
- Problems of skill acquisition in Business Education
- Prospects of skill acquisition in Business Education

Recommendations shall be proffered at the end of the write-up.

Concept of Business Education

Business Education is a major component of Vocation Education, which the National Policy of Education (1977, revised in 1981) emphasized. It is a medium by which

people can acquire office and business skills. All vocational programmes, of which Business Education is a subset, are designed to build in the individual different skills and knowledge that would enable them to have means of livelihood.

Business Education is an educational programme that equips an individual with functional and saleable skills; knowledge and attitude/value that would enable him operate in the environment he finds. It helps the individual to be self-reliant and becomes a job creator not a job seeker. (Njoku, 2007). Business Education is an integral part of the educational System of any nation. Aina (2002), citing Eni (1987) wrote that Business Education represents a broad and diverse discipline that is included in all types of educational delivery systems - elementary, secondary and post secondary. Oborah (2005) outlined the wide spectrum of disciplines covered by Business Education as accounting, business studies/management, marketing, Office Technology and Management, Computer Education and business teacher programmes.

Business Education serves the dual role of equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills to effectively participate in socio-economic activities as producers on one hand and consumers on the other (Osuala 1989) in Esenwafor (2007).

In contribution, Ihimekpen, (2002) stated that the goal of business education is to produce manpower with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes for harnessing other resources and bringing them into cooperative relationship to serve society. Njoku (2007) outlines the objectives of Business Education as:

- To empower the individual with desirable skills, knowledge and value to perform specific functions, so as to become self-reliant.
- To help appreciate the world around human and contribute maximally to the social and economic development of his nation

- To empower the individual in such a way that the individual develop his intellectual capability that would help him to make informed decisions in all spheres of life.
- To help the individual become a judicious spender and develop proper values for the achievement of healthy living and growth of the nation.
- To understand the political framework of a nation so as to contribute to national economy and development.

Business education enables the individual to attain an acceptable level of business abilities and understanding. The prevailing economic conditions have compelled many youths and students to look for courses/programmes that would secure their future on the face of the prevailing hopelessness. Business education prepares and equips the people for employment and participation in the business world.

Anyaduha (1987) in Esene (2007) reports that all citizens of this great country need business education in order to function effectively in the society irrespective of their occupations in life.

Skills Needed by Business Educators

Business Education impacts skills on the ability to harness and combine production factors. Because the programme emphasizes skill and acquisition for gainful employment in a developing economy like Nigeria, the skills needed by business educators are outlined by Obadailki (2004) as follows:

- 1. Communication Skill:** This skill is very vital in any organizational set-up and they are as follows:
 - ❖ Use modern communication gadgets such as mobile and cellular phone, internet, fax, telephone etc.

- ❖ Have good accent to give clear explanations and directive
- ❖ Compose clear and concise written instructions etc.

2. Managerial Skill: For an organization to be successful-both human and material resources must be well harnessed to achieve the organization's goals and this involves:

- ❖ Set appropriate proprieties on work to be performed
- ❖ Manage time and task effectively
- ❖ Analyze data independently and present it in formats using computer etc.

3. Supervisory Skills: Other skills revolve round supervisory skills because human beings dislike work and work must be done. The following skills will suffice.

- ❖ Utilize motivational techniques with employees
- ❖ Schedule, supervise and evaluate Functions.
- ❖ Review procedures and implement necessary changes
- ❖ Organize and implement training plans etc.

4. Interpersonal Skills or Human

Relations Skills: Human relation is an important pivot that is most needed in an organization. These skills are as follows:

- ❖ Coping with work pressure
- ❖ Acceptance of constructive criticism
- ❖ Loyalty
- ❖ Attentive listening etc.

5. Technical Skills: This is otherwise known as employable skill(s) because this is first entry requirement and is acquired in schools. This skill can be improved upon by reading trade journals, part-time studies, exhibition and symposium etc. These skills are:

- ❖ Acquired skill in one's discipline
- ❖ Competences in modern gadgets e.g. surfing the net, using e-mail, fax machines etc.

6. Entrepreneurial Skill:

Entrepreneurship is greatly concerned with harnessing other production factors of land, labour and capital. An entrepreneur must be skilful in the following:

- ❖ Choice in combining small materials, machines, money to produce at a minimum cost.
- ❖ Decision in what to produce from other alternatives available at a price taking into account customer's preference.
- ❖ Returns to be more profitable than the alternative available.
- ❖ The profitability of the venture (Adeyemi, 2006).

From the above discourse, it could be seen that for any business educator to be skilful, he needs to be exposed to an educational programme and the training given requires skill acquisition.

Problems of Skill Acquisition in Business Education

Usman (1996) in Azubuiké (2006) asserted that business education is a practical course that needs to be taught practically in order to make the situation as real as possible but there are some impediments to this and they are as follows:

1. Inadequate Instructional Facilities:

Appropriate instructional facilities such as classrooms, stores, open land space for practical business activities, computers, modern gadgets in Accounting, internet facilities and other reaching equipment and materials to facilitate skill development activities are inadequately provided for training. Instruction materials e.g. multimedia projector etc. assists business teachers in transmitting organized knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes to learners within an

instructional situation directed towards learning and acquisition of skills for work, are lacking and where provided at all is grossly inadequate.

2. Inadequate/Incompetent/Facilitators/Teachers/Skills and Methods:

The National Policy on Education (1998) emphasised that, "no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers". In spite of this emphasis, Business educators are grossly inadequate today, both in quantity and quality. With the introduction of ICT-driven courses, there are a number of practical skills to be developed.

There are computer operation skills and classroom management skills which present an obstacle to a number of teachers. Teachers need the opportunity to interact and familiarize themselves with the technology, but sad to say, most teachers have not made out time to acquire this skill and the few that have done so are faced with challenges of not having a personal computer, internet not connected to their offices, lack of electricity during office hours. In many cases, as teachers develop the confidence and skills in personal computer use, they are then able to implement and support classroom applications (Obadailki & Agana, 2007).

3. Students' Attitudes towards Skill Acquisition:

Maduabuchi (2008) observed that teachers cannot simply prepare students for every situation they face, but that the technical/vocational education programme must give them the skills they can use to deal with the challenges they will encounter in life, in an ideal situation students ought to complement the efforts of the teacher to achieve required results. For example, in mastery of keyboard a student makes use of almost all the fingers' but some students prefer using two fingers thinking they can acquire speed in typing.

4. Undefined Career Path: Most business educators are for various personal reasons, not disposed to undertake any further training. The few who are ready to undertake further studies are challenged with few universities offering business education programme up to PhD level and these schools are scattered abroad. Business educators are faced with undefined career path by going into programmes that are readily available.

5. Inadequate Funding; Business Education programme especially Office Technology is capital intensive. The ICT-driven curriculum has made it even demanding, the deplorable state of education calls for increased funding to make meaningful efforts and towards the realization of business education objectives. Prospects of Skill Acquisition in Business Education

Having examined the objectives of Business Education, it is necessary to discuss some of the prospects of skill acquisition in Business education.

Business Education empowers the people:

- ❖ Economically
- ❖ Socially
- ❖ Politically
- ❖ Educationally

Economic Empowerment

Nigeria is greatly endowed with human and material resources. The judicious utilization of these resources has been the bane of our economic growth and development requires managerial skill. Business education will equip those who benefit from it with the managerial skill to harness available resources for equitable distribution but for judicious utilization and betterment of our people.

Oyedele (2000) said that business and a successful life are closely related. Business Education programme empowers the people with

the knowledge/understanding and skill in economics and its varied ramifications. Entrepreneurial skills imparted under Business Education will further empower the people such that after graduation they can explore the business and economic opportunities around them to become self-employed and create jobs even for other people.

Social Empowerment

Business Education has over the years remained one of the means of empowering and assisting the growing youths to be relevant and contribute their own quotas to the growth and sustenance of the society.

Everyone seeks relevance and recognition in the society. It is those who have something to offer the society that can actually be relevant and recognized; such people are the men and women who are imparted with skills and knowledge of business and office under business education programme.

Political Empowerment

The skills, abilities and knowledge that are imparted by Business Education enable the beneficiaries to exercise authority, rule and control over those who do not have them and also direct and control public affairs. Business education confers political power on the people.

Educational Empowerment

With the knowledge and skills that Business Education gives, horizon of the individual has no bound. Oyodele (2002) state that education by adherence to all seven cardinal principles of education should contribute to the strength of the future by planning practical and realistic programmes today for those who will follow in our footsteps tomorrow. Business education remains the practical and realistic programme that empowers the people for the greater challenges tomorrow.

Conclusions

Business Education has great potentialities and wide utility as it makes the recipient to be economically self-reliant and thus has a positive impact on the economy as a whole. Therefore, qualitative production of Business Education graduates would abet many social vices plaguing the nation. In order to acquire the right kind of skills, the cooperation of all stakeholders which include government, parents, private sector, NGOs are needed to provide adequate funds for business education.

Recommendations

1. Government should act as a matter of top priority step up funding of technical/business education at all level of the delivery system.
2. Government should embark on aggressive training and retraining of business teachers and also adopt a framework and guidelines to strengthen and modernize the trainer's skill and method. Encourage the spirit of research creativity.
3. SIWES should be re-introduced into business education programmes. Students should be discouraged to work in government ministries rather in private business in order to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge needed in successful running of self-established ventures.
4. Business education courses should be practically oriented rather than theoretical based. In this wise, adequate training facilities should be provided for students' practices to give them their real life experiences as demanded of them in the present day business environment.
5. Business education programme is capital intensive and all stakeholders, government, at all levels, private

organizations and wealthy individuals should also assist in this regards.

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