

ACHIEVING THE GOALS OF BUSINESS EDUCATION IN THE ERA OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT): AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The challenges of change have become a way of life for business educators, practitioners and learners. One of the areas of change is the need to incorporate or integrate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into business education. This is necessary for business education to continue to play its vocational roles and achieve its goals of providing skills, competency, knowledge etc. to its beneficiaries. This paper therefore, examines the impact of ICT on business education. It also identifies problems that hinder the growth of business education and ICT. The paper also made appropriate recommendations which among others include provision of ICT infrastructures and equipment, in-service training of teachers, establishment of ICT centres in schools and localities and inclusion of ICT-related competency into business education curriculum. This is necessary now so that Nigeria will not be pushed out of the information highway.

Business education performs dual purposes which are providing education for and about business. Education for business entails vocational education which has to do with educational training programme through which recipients could fit into or be employed in four major occupational areas.

Okwuanaso and Nwazor (2000) identified the occupational areas to be:

1. Book-keeping and accounting jobs;
2. Clerical and general office jobs;
3. Stenographic and secretarial jobs;
4. Distributive and marketing jobs

On the other hand education about

business refers to any programme of studies or any education that offers information to consumers thereby guides, advises or educates them about the use of

money in various business situations. Such educational services are obtained from newspapers, internets, radio, television, magazines, telephone calls and messages, special business promotions and shows. Education about business also refers to processes that could benefit a professional of any kind in carrying out his work successfully.

Business education involves all types of education that makes someone to know, have skills, understand and modify his attitudes so as to do whatever is needed to be done in business transactions, dealings and situations, whether as a maker or user of goods and services. Business education therefore is education for and about business.

Osuala (1989) saw business education as that part of the field of education which deals with experiences both for specialized occupational uses and for general uses. It is a related and integral part of a total educational programme that deals with relationships, techniques, attitudes and knowledge necessary for an individual to understand the social institutions of business and successfully adjust to it. Business education touches all aspect of human endeavour especially when it has to do with rational production and consumption of goods and services.

At present, the benefits derivable from business education have been hampered by absence of integrated ICT programme that will stand the taste of time. It therefore becomes imperative to highlight areas of challenges in ICT and business education.

Definition of Concepts

(a) What is Business Education?

Business education has been defined variously by authors and authorities in the field of education. For instance, Nwosu (2000) stated that business education is a form of education which in addition to offering general education, is designed for vocational preparation in office and business related occupations. It is concerned with the development of skills and knowledge needed in order to enable an individual to function effectively. An obvious characteristic has been its devotion to offering education that is relevant to the world in which the recipient lives. It is the type of education that is generally regarded as important to the people, society and to the economy of the nation.

Afakpa (2000) saw business education as that area of education which concerns itself with the vocational and professional preparation for a career in business, teaching business subjects and also with information important for every citizenry and consumer in order that he may better understand and utilize his business and economic understanding. It is a broad area of knowledge which deals with the entire enterprise system which identifies and explains the role of business in a dynamic economy.

According to Njoku (2007), business education is an educational programme that equips an individual with functional and saleable skills, knowledge, aptitudes, attitudes/values that would enable him operates in the environment he finds himself. It helps the individual to be self-reliant and become a job creator instead of job seeker. The author listed the following as some of the goals/objectives of business education;

1. To empower the individual with desirable skills, knowledge and value to perform specific functions so as to become self-reliant
2. To help an individual appreciate the world around him and contribute maximally to the social and economic development of his nation.
3. To empower the individual in such a way that the individual will develop his intellectual capability that would help him to make informed decisions in all sphere of life.
4. To help the individual become a judicious spender and develop proper values for the achievement of healthy living and growth of the nation.
5. To understand the political framework of a nation so as to contribute to national economy and development.

Business education provides life-long education which is in consonance with Nigeria's education philosophy. However, the goals of business education will be better achieved when combined with ICT due to the present demand of today's office work.

(b) Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Popyk (1985) in Okereke and Ndinechi (2005) defined information and communication technology as any meaningful data or any fact or figure capable of providing knowledge. According to the authors, information which is used for decision-making is generally perceived as the data that have been processed into meaningful, useful and usable context. It involves the transmission and reception of intelligence or knowledge.

Information and communication technology is the scientific means and processes involved in obtaining, packaging and communicating information (Samba, 2001). Information itself is an amalgam of data, images, texts, documents, voices and many other items intelligently organized to make meaning. Also, information itself has the potential to notify, surprise, stimulates, reduce uncertainty, reveal available options, influence individuals and express feeling among other roles.

Information and communication technology has brought about globalization which is made possible by advancement in computing, electronics and telecommunications which has brought up a highly dynamic process of storing, processing, transmitting and presenting data and information.

The tool of information and communication technology has shifted from mere computer (word and data) processing to internet. Uzuegbu (2000) as reported by Onyemelukwe (2005) stated that the internet is basically a network of people and information linked together by telephone lines, which are connected to computers. Over

one million independent networks (public and private) are currently connected to form this vast global communications system.

Information and communication go hand in hand. Although information can always be communicated, yet not everything that is communicated is information. Communication becomes information only when data derived from it have been organized, analyzed and interpreted in such a way that they contain meaning beyond the individual facts and can be used in decision making, (Efiog, 2005).

Information technology on the other hand, is the technology that dramatically increases the ability to record, store, analyze and transmit information in ways that permit flexibility, accuracy, immediacy, geographic independence, volume and complexity. (Zubott, 1988 in Efiog, 2005).

Information and communication technology can be applied in all facets of human endeavour such as education, security, medicine, management, manufacturing, business, governance, banking, art and design, library, ecology, etc.

Impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on Business Education

There is no doubt that the world is witnessing tremendous advancement in the area of ICT. This is so because ICT has been accepted as an indispensable tool in all facets of life both at individual, organizational, national and international levels. It therefore follows that every individual, organization and indeed country must be part of this revolution in ICT otherwise; it will be left in the dark ages.

In business education, it is the opinion of practitioners and business educators that knowledge of ICT is indispensable in the modern world of work (Okereke and Ndinechi, 2005, and Adeyanju 2010).

The Impact of ICT on Business Education is Discussed Below.

1. The curriculum content of business education at every level has been modified to include aspects of ICT. For instance, students of business education at degree level now offer courses such as office information system, office technology, applied work processing and business machines. At NCE level, courses such as computer appreciation and computer application have been introduced.
2. Another impact of ICT on business education is the change in nature of office work and office machines. Office work now requires increasing understanding of the way computers link business to business and people to people and how the system work. Office work has become more and more computer-based with database and ICT at the centre of office systems. Office workers are connected through computer networking at either Local Area Network (LAN), Wide Area Network (WAN)

or/and International Network (Internet) levels to do office work such as; take orders from customers, stock monitoring, procure goods from suppliers, make or receive payment, etc.

3. Mode of instructional/teaching of business related course have also changed. Students of business education who are in higher classes now learn word processing instead of traditional manual typewriting. Students can also access the internet for information or even interact with their teachers.
4. In present time, ICT as applied in business education generally and business management in particular involves the use of networks, expert systems, and artificial intelligence in what has come to be known as electronic commerce (e-commerce) or electronic business (e-business). These facilitate the exchange of information, goods and services between companies or between companies and their customers or even between individuals.
5. With the introduction of ICT in business education, teaching is no more teacher-centered but activity/student centered. This is because students are now introduced to ICT-related subjects/courses and they can source information using the ICT facilities that are now available in schools and college. Teachers also can improve their knowledge via ICT.

Problems that Hinder the Growth of ICT and Business Education

A number of problems that hinder the growth of ICT and business education still abound in Nigeria. Some of these problems are discussed below: thus.

- (1) **Inadequate equipment and infrastructures:** This is one of the greatest problems that hinders the effective teaching and practice of business education and information and communication technology in Nigeria. In most cases, schools/colleges that offer ICT and business education-related courses lack adequate infrastructures and equipment such as computers and other laboratory equipment like word processors, transmitting units, scanning machines, microfilming machines, audio visual equipments, etc.
- (2) **Inadequate personnel in quality and number:** There is this problem of inadequate personnel in schools and colleges. Some of the personnel available are not well groomed in business education and ICT. One wonders how such people can teach properly knowing fully well that no one can give what he does not have. It therefore becomes impossible for learning to be ICT based.
- (3) **Scarcity of home authored textbooks and teaching materials:** This problem is obvious in schools and colleges. Students always find it difficult to get books on areas of accounting, commerce, computer application/appreciation, business

communication, information technology, etc. This no doubt, creates problems for teaching, learning and application of ICT in business education.

- (4) **Lack of curriculum experts:** This is a serious problem inhibiting the development of business education and ICT in Nigeria. Effiong (2005) stated that Nigeria lack curriculum experts in the various areas of business education and ICT. As a result, most curricula in business subjects are not based on Nigeria experiences but are replicas of curricula of other countries.
- (5) **Lack of adequate funding:** Most schools, colleges, and organizations cannot provide all that is required to teach and practice business education and ICT due to lack of fund. It is well known fact that ICT is capital-intensive and therefore, a lot of money is required to procure and maintain ICT equipment and materials for proper usage.
- (6) **Lack of steady power supply:** One of the greatest problem facing ICT in our schools in particular and the country in general is lack of steady power supply. Most of the ICT equipment, machines and materials require adequate and steady power supply to perform optimally. This problem has hindered in a great manner the success of ICT in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The relationship between ICT and business education is like that of mother and child. Therefore, one can hardly survive without the other. In other words, ICT and business education are inter-twined and complementary to each other.

While business education aims at preparing our youth for the world of work by helping them to develop the skills, attitudes, and knowledge that will make them succeed in there chosen business careers, ICT is required to bring about speed, accuracy, skill and competency in world of work. For this reason, it becomes imperative for business education curriculum to be reviewed so as to include studies in information and communication technology. This is necessary now more than ever before as our world of business is becoming a global village and it is only those that are well versed in the use of ICT that can compete effectively in the world of work.

Recommendations

The fact that ICT will revolutionize education in general and business education in particular is not in doubt. For this is to be achieved, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Government should take the problems of infrastructure and equipment in schools seriously. In fact, one of the greatest problems to be tacked as a matter of urgency is electric power problem. This is because ICT equipment is driven by electricity. Government should also tackle the issue of lack of ICT equipment in school head-on

by providing special intervention fund to schools to purchase these ICT equipment and materials.

2. A good number of well trained ICT and business education teachers should be recruited and remunerated well. Situations whereby teachers are paid peanuts are not good at all. Schools/colleges should also send ICT and business education teachers on in-service training to learn more on interactive online education in appropriate course.
3. Government should organize conferences through the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) to fashion out proper ICT based curriculum that will stand the taste of time. Teacher/lecturers of ICT and business education should be encouraged to write textbooks that has Nigeria background.
4. There is urgent need for government at all level to make fund available for teaching/learning ICT and business education. Adeyanju (2010), stated that to ensure accessibility of internet facilities, specific budgetary allocations must be made to institutions in order to facilitate accessibility. According to the author, the current one-track mind of traditional face-to-face teacher-student lecture method is likely to be minimized in the light of greater mastery and availability of the internet as a repository of much greater information than is available to even the most knowledgeable single lecturer.
5. There should be proper integration of ICT and business education. This means that ICT will be used not just as a course but as a medium of teaching/learning every course.

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