

GLOBAL CHALLENGES IN OFFICE/SECRETARIAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Office/Secretarial education has been of age and is now occupying its rightful place in the nation's economic development. It carries with it increased responsibility and the challenges have been how to make it more productive and functional so that its relevance would not sink in the ocean of constant changes experienced in our society. This paper took a critical look at the viability of office education in job creation and how the viability could be sustained and increased. The paper highlighted and discussed: the Concepts of important keywords, some current global challenges that have hampered the realization of the dreams of office education graduates in Nigeria. Such challenges highlighted among others are: lack of curriculum review/modification in office education programme for entrepreneurial skills, insecurity, poor and late payment of salaries of office education lecturers, recent financial melt-down, high cost of exchange rate, high cost of goods and services, production of low quality products, high rate of unemployment of office education graduates, lack of adequate and up-to-date equipment/instructional facilities by the government, use of unqualified lecturers due to lack of sufficient fund, high rate of corruption in education, miss-management/miss-appropriation of public funds, lack of sponsoring office education lecturers for national and international conferences and workshops among others. Conclusion and other useful recommendations were also highlighted which if implemented will move Office/Secretarial education forward to meet the challenges of technological advancement in the 21st century.

Key Words: Global, Challenges, Office Education, need for Office/Secretarial education, Secretary

The major goal of education is to prepare individuals to function as responsible competent community members. In any environment, one has to participate in a number of roles since there is more to life after school than

employability with changing trends in the world of today. Traditional academic programmes seem not to be meeting the social needs of individuals again as a result of the increase in technological advancement. Education must therefore provide them with the skills necessary to enter the world of work in which individuals can use their physical and mental energies to accomplish something productive.

The general realization that education is an indispensable medium of bringing development is no more in doubt; the wealth, strength, social and economic well being of any nation are measured in terms of its technological advancement and development. This in turn, is a direct result of the system and quality of its education.

The secretary is a confidence of the boss and of the organization as a whole. He or she is expected to be shoulder-to-shoulder with the boss rather than for an executive. The role played by today's secretary has changed considerably compared with what obtained in the past (Onasanya, 2007). Hence some organizations face stiff challenges in securing competent secretaries to work for them. Additional challenges is being added to the world of secretary and this is the leaning towards the production of secretarial/office education graduates that would be self-reliant and become employers of labour rather than job seekers.

Office education in Nigeria as good and rewarding as it is, has been hampered by many current challenges to be discussed in this paper, hence no dividend.

Webster (2008) defined an office as a building or place where the business of a commercial or industrial organization or professional person is transacted. He stated that office is a position of duty, trust or authority especially in the government, a corporate or society or the like. Agomuo (2005) described the office as a place where administration that is the management and handling of information takes place. Agomuo emphasized that an office is identified by its product. Emphatically, he maintained that the modern office has become a habitat of various computerized functions.

Comparing the new era office with the traditional office, Nwosu (2000) pointed out that the traditional office was devoid of computer and modern information technology, but described the new era office as the office which technology innovations have caused a drastic change in its nature, composition and roles. Agomuo (2012) noted that the present day office activities and application of technology automatically prove that we are virtually at the peak. There is the demand to project into what the office will be like in years ahead. This condition demands the developing of the appropriate and matching workforce. Ahukannah and Ugorji (2011) pointed out that while technology is solving an existing problem, it creates new ones which borders on the training of manpower to cope with its demands. Unless teachers training needs are given adequate attention, it may not be possible for them to adapt to the new demands of their job in the face of the technological blast, thus demand on the training of teachers.

Concepts of Global

Global simply means anything covering or affecting the whole world Hornby (2015).

Concept of Challenge

Challenge is a part of life; it is ever present in people's daily work routine, in their homes and in every other aspect of their lives. Sani (2016) defined challenge as a general term referring to things that are imbued with a sense of difficulty and victory. It means a new or difficult task that tests somebody's ability and skill (Hornby, 2015)

Concept of Business Education

Business education is the training of youths with saleable skills for success in business enterprise and office work (Omole, 2012). Sani (2016) opined that it is a training system which encourages the beneficiary to acquire skills that fits into the business world. In Nigeria, he further asserts that business education was introduced by private indigenous proprietors. Records of private business schools dated as far back as 1930s. The aim of establishing this school was to provide sound knowledge of business education and arouse the enthusiasm of youths in commerce.

Ibrahim (2016) similarly, defined the concept of business education as that aspect of the educational programme that provides the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes needed to perform in the business world as a producer and/or consumer of goods and services that business offers. Momoh (2008) in Abang (2012) identified four aspects of business education as namely: accounting education, office/secretarial education, commerce/distributive, education and cooperative education as the components of business education. In his opinion, accounting education prepares individuals with the necessary skills, knowledge and competences required in keeping books of account while office/secretarial education is all about office education, office planning, management and supervision adding that secretarial/office education provides learners with all the necessary typing skills, office skills and adequate knowledge of clerical and secretarial procedures. On the other hand, individuals who specializes in commerce/distributive education are to ensure that every product gets to the final consumers through various channels of distribution having been trained as sales representatives, wholesale and retail distributors etcetera while in cooperative education, individuals undergo training to develop skills, attitudes, knowledge and competencies in agro-allied vocations on product inspection, cooperative extension workers, cooperative secretaries and cooperative mobilization agents.

Objectives of Business Education

As earlier explained above, business education is an educational programme that prepares individuals for the world of work as employees or to be self-employed. Ibrahim (2016:2) stated the following as the objectives of business education:

1. To enable individuals explore and learn about the world of work and the relevant interest and business career areas of their choice.
2. To provide individuals with the necessary business occupational information related to the world of work.
3. To enable individuals acquire business skills in fields of their choice.
4. To enable individuals prepare for, choose, enter into and progress in business occupations of their choice.

Concept of Office/Secretarial Education

Osuala (2004) in Omole (2012) posited that office education is a vocational education programme for office careers through initial, refresher, and upgrading education.

According to Nnanna (1992) in Abang (2012), Office Education is the process of guiding and initiating the learner to acquire the necessary skills, facts, competences knowledge, habits and attitudes that will make them co-exist with others as useful and productive members of the society.

Abang (2012) points out that the department of office administration provides a comprehensive treatment of the tradition secretaries' skills and attempts to present a thorough study of current practices and trends in the office procedures and administration. This is designed to equip students to cope effectively with the challenges of rapid changes in a complex, sophisticated modern and technological society.

The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) Minimum Standards (2012) recognizes Business Education as a component of Vocational and Technical Education. Yet, Business Education programme in Colleges of Education consists of two components or options namely: Office education and Accounting education. This is the case of Business at NCE level. At degree level there are three options; office, accounting and distributive education. .

The polytechnic has a distinctive curriculum for its Secretarial studies/Administration and ditto few universities that mount the programme. In the latter category, the emphasis is on producing professional secretaries who would perfectly fit into the world of work while Business Education curriculum in Colleges of Education is geared at producing secretarial practitioners and educators. The philosophy and objectives of Office education is succinctly stated by NCCE (2012). The philosophy is to make the office education understand the concept and philosophy of the National Policy on Education as regards the place of office education in national development. It has the following objectives among others:

- To produce NCE business teachers who will be able to inculcate the vocational aspects of office education into the society.
- To produce NCE business teachers who will be involved in the much desired revolution of vocational development right from the primary and secondary schools.
- To equip students with necessary competencies so as to qualify them for a post-NCE programme in office education.
- To equip graduates with the right skills that will enable them to engage in a life of work in the office as well as for self-employment (NCCE, 2012:8).

As could be adjudged from the above objectives, Office education has dual goals via to produce secretarial practitioners and secretarial educators. Fafunwa (1971) in Abang (2009) argues that the goal of education and its approach and methods have differed according to place, people and nation. For example, while the Greeks believed that an educated man capable of the state leadership was one who was mentally and physically well-balanced, the Romans emphasized oratory and military training. In Europe, particularly in old England, the elites were the knights and priests, and in France, scholars represented the pinnacle of achievement; in Germany the patriots, in Russia it was the communist-scientists; while in old Africa where we belong, it was the victorious warriors; the brave hunter, the nobility and the diviner. Abang (2009) conceived of the educated man as one that could serve himself and his fellow citizens to his fullest capacity. In other words, an educated person is one whose experiences are so directed that he becomes a useful citizen. Office education is more or less synonymous with business education as pointed out earlier, of which Calhoun (1991) in Abang (2009) opined that it is interpreted variously. While others interpret its scope to include not only the jobs performed by office workers but also the functions of management and/or advancement in occupations which have to do with the office; some see it only as those occupations carried out in the office by office workers.

Various tertiary institutions now run programmes in office education and as a result, we now have graduate secretaries in various offices all over the country. This educational advancement has contributed to the increasing recognition of office education in the country.

Today, graduates of office education can now set up the following business all things being equal and in place to be self-reliant as stated by Ibrahim (2016:3):

- Establishment of Business Centres: this involves the acquisition of computers for production of documents, photocopiers for photocopying of documents, binding of documents, laminating of documents and scanners for scanning of documents.
- Establishment of private business schools for training professional secretaries, accounts staff, marketing/sales staff.

- Establishment of consultancy services outfits (for registration of businesses, recruitment and employing, writing and publishing of books in secretarial, accounting, marketing and administration fields).
- Organizing workshops and seminars for organization in recruitment activities.
- Buying and selling of office machines and equipment
- Establishing stationary shops
- Establishing retail outfits
- Sales promotion of all products of different establishments and advertising.
- GSM business: sales and repairs of handsets and related items.
- Provision of extra lessons to secondary school students at home, especially those preparing for external examination (WAEC, NECO, NABTEB).

Notable Development in Office/Secretarial Profession

Recent development in office education profession show that gone are the days when secretaries were regarded as just appendages to their bosses who sit behind typewriters. Today, secretaries, because of changes that have taken place in economic and technological environment, are expected to cope with all these changes (Onasanya, 1990 in Abang, 2010). He further observed that while the functions of various departments are totally different, some of the general duties of secretaries are identical no matter in which department he/she finds him/herself. Though secretaries of nowadays would not necessarily be expected to understand as much about the business in hand as executives, they are increasingly being expected to have some understanding of the significance and effective management of the correspondence, reports, meetings, conferences and instructions which normally pass through their hands.

In the area of information management, emphasis is now being laid on paperless office. In offices, computer database management is increasingly being used to organize and keep records. Secretaries are now being required to be able to operate computer using Dbase, Excel, Corel Draw and Word Processing packages such as Word Perfect, Ms Word, Ms Power Point, Adobe page maker and in particular the dexterity to use most of the application packages contained in Windows 2000 to windows 2010 respectively. Computer internet is now being used to send, search, and retrieve information from any part of the world with relative ease. Automation has now taken over the entire activities of organizations. Various electronic equipment such as Computer, Electronic typewriters, copiers, tele-printers, fax recorders, telephone with cellular, GSM/mobile attachments, electronic switch board, laminating machine, shredding machine, scanners and Dictaphones etc.

Critical Current Challenges of Office Education in Nigeria

As noted earlier, a nation can be said to be self-reliant which is one of the aims and objectives of office education, when employment opportunities abound and

economic development brings about employment opportunities and is usually one of the indices used to measure economic development.

a) Lack of curriculum review/modification in office education programme for entrepreneurial skills in colleges of education

Office education is the function and productive type of education as explained already in this paper and more efforts should be made to enhance its curriculum offering with a view to expanding the horizon of its employability. We can see that due to lack or insufficient funds made available to the curriculum planners and stake holders, the NCCE minimum standard (2002) and (2012) (vocation), which specified VTE 110, 220 and 310 with a view to imparting vocation/entrepreneurial skills on business students are not able to review it. This paper believes that this three-semester tutoring is not enough to impart the much needed vocational and entrepreneurial skills on the students. Just as Accounting, Shorthand and Typewriting are offered throughout the whole programme duration; likewise students should be made to offer vocational and entrepreneurial courses throughout the six-semester duration of NCE office education programme. The same should be made applicable to Business education at degree level. This will afford students specializing in office education to have in-depth knowledge of enterprises management, so as to build enough confidence in them and prepare them to stand alone and be job creators.

b) Insecurity challenges in Nigeria

The challenges of insecurity in Nigeria have been down heartening. Insecurity has paralyzed many activities in Nigeria especially in the North-east. The state of insecurity in Nigeria is becoming worrisome considering the high rate at which innocent people fall to the guns of criminals in the country. Few years ago, Nigerians were anxiously concerned on how the federal government can tackle the corrosive and caustic corruption, education, agriculture and power failure, but the recurring spate of hapless killing in the northern parts of Nigeria diverted the minds of Nigerians to make the federal government to concentrate on tackling security threats in the country.

c) Poor and late payment of salaries of office education lecturers

Lack of salary increase of teachers of office education and the recent delays in paying their meager salaries have made the morale of the teachers to be low in discharging their duties as regarding instructions to the students thereby hindering the students from acquiring the needed skills and competencies to match with new trends in the office and business world.

c) High cost of transportation:

Due to the fall in prices of crude oil in the world market, it affects prices of oil (fuel), which at the end of the day has posed high transport fare both for the students to go to school and teachers to go to work. High cost in transport fares of transporting raw materials and finished goods to where they are needed has brought about high cost of living making life unbearable for teachers and students which has hindered effective teaching and learning process of office education.

d) High prices of goods and services

Nigerians need not be informed that things are tough in the country. The toughness was reported by Adebayo (2016) who stated that the Minister of Finance, Adeosun confirmed that “things are tough but we are not ignorant; technically Nigeria is in recession”. To further buttress this statement, the National Bureau of Statistics (2016) stated that current price index used in measuring inflation in the country hit 16.5 percent, the highest in 11 years. In a related view, the international monetary fund asserted that Nigeria’s economy was projected to contrast this year.

As a result of the above, for an entrepreneur to make profit to pay salary of his employees and also sustain himself, he has to increase the prices of finished products and services in the market which invariably being paid for by the final users or consumers of such products or services.

e) High cost of exchange rate:

The recent rise in exchange rate in Nigeria is unbearable where, for the first in the history of Nigeria as a nation, (one) 1 Dollar has risen to N500 naira and above. This has forced many industries to close down thereby leading to high rate of unemployment. Unemployment represents the number of people in the workforce who want to work but do not have a job (Wood, 2015). Many students are not interested to veer for office education program as their graduates cannot procure equipment and facilities for self-reliant.

f) Production of low quality products:

NAFDAC can testify to this, due to the financial meltdown now in Nigeria, a lot of substandard goods, fake drugs and low quality products are being brought into Nigeria. Entrepreneurs now devise which ever means to make ends meet either by producing low standard goods or importing substandard goods in Nigeria. This is an economic challenge because it allows many fake equipment and instructional materials to litter all over tertiary institutions and the private sectors. This leads to lack of producing qualified graduates to man the office and business world (Idowu, 2012).

g) High rate of unemployment of office education graduates

It can be argued that one of the most pressing global economic challenges facing Office education in Nigeria is the large number of its graduates that are unemployed in the country. Past governments introduced many strategies aimed at reducing the level of unemployment in the country. Ibrahim (2016) stated that as early as 1999, more than 70% of Nigerians lived in poverty (a direct consequence of unemployment). He further stated that the National Bureau of Statistics (2013) reported that 54% of youths were unemployed in 2012. Since graduates have no job, new students have no interest for veering into office education.

h) Lack of adequate, up-to-date equipment and instructional facilities due to corruption

Corruption is a global issue and is the root of Nigeria's economic problems. Corruption takes many forms and infiltrates all political, educational and economic sectors. In 2013, Transparency International deemed Nigeria as one of the most corrupt nations in the world, ranking as 144th in Corruption Perception Index out of the 177 countries measured. Mathematically, it shows that Nigeria was the 33rd most corrupt country in 2013. Gallup (2012) poll found out the 94% of Nigerian thought corruption was widespread in government circles. Recently, the Central Bank of Nigeria (2016) reported that 76% of the country's crude oil revenue intended for the bank was unaccounted for in 2014/2015.

Due to corruption in the way of miss-appropriation of public funds as highlighted, the government of Nigeria always do not provide enough financial allocation to the educational sector of the nation to make allowance for the procurement of adequate, up-t-date, functional equipment, machines, and instructional materials and facilities to be used in facilitating teaching and learning in office education, knowing fully well that this is a type of education that requires complex, sophisticated and current equipment to match with the present world's technological advancement. Schools are littered with obsolete, dead, equipment and machines. This is a great current challenge facing office education in Nigeria which calls for urgent and immediate review by all stake holders.

i. Lack of sponsoring office education lecturers for national and international conferences and workshops

Due to lack of sufficient funds by TETFUND, educators of office education are not adequately sponsored to go for conferences and workshops which are a big current set back in the education system. This is evidenced by the recent withdrawal of students on study leave abroad, non-payment of conference fees and workshop using the word "BELLETED" which business educators are yet to comprehend.

j. Employment of unqualified teachers for the teaching and learning of office skills

No educational system could rise above the standard of its teachers. Such is true of office education. Experienced over the years have shown that most people being employed to each office education courses are not suitably qualified and therefore lacked the experience, manners, attitudes and cordial relationship required for teaching office skills.

Conclusion

Since office education is contributing to the nation's economy by producing qualified citizens who will man the office and business world of today, Nigerian government should as a matter of urgency provide adequate funds to make it match with other ones in other countries of the world.

Recommendations

1. Urgent review of Office/Secretarial Education Curriculum to include entrepreneurial skills.
2. The government should employ necessary machineries to combat the incessant killing thereby restoring peace and security in the nation.
3. Government should as a matter of urgency allocate enough funds to the education sector of Nigeria. This will make provision for the procurement of functional, adequate equipment, machines, instructional materials and facilities good for teaching and learning of office education.
4. Government should make exchange rate procurement simple and cheap.
5. Reduction in interest rate: If the rate at which banks charge interest on loan can also be reduced, it will help entrepreneurs in Nigeria to be relieved of these global financial crises.
6. Immediate increase and quick payment of salaries of lecturers and teachers: This will boost their Morales to put in the best in their work.
7. Procurement of functional equipment by schools when fund is provided by the government.
8. Urgent attention and remedy on the devaluation of the Nigerian naira.
9. Government should embark on enlightenment campaign in media – audio, television and print on the need for business education skills to stimulate the citizenry to appreciate vocational and technical education.
10. More skilled and experienced personnel should be recruited in educational institutions to teach business education.

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