Issues and Insights into Business and Secretarial Studies in the 21st Century Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper exposed the issues and insights in business studies, which encompass secretarial, marketing, accountancy, management and administration in the 21st century, technological dynamism. Specifically, it focused on the problematic issues and insights in secretarial studies. Among them are: theory-oriented teaching and learning; unrealized predictions and visions of the Y2K; clamour to ostracize shorthand and typewriting from the curriculum; relegation of people behind the keyboard, unsupervised SIWES, and inadequate teaching and learning facilities. This paper identified sound theoretical and practical skills expected of secretarial students to cope in the electronic business (e-business) environment. It concluded that modern business activities are machine-oriented and as a result everybody is seen behind the keyboard. Keyboarding is a rejected stone that I later became the pillars of the house. It recommended that teaching and learning should tally with machines, equipment, and electronics used in real life situations.

Introduction

An issue is a question, problem, trend, etc arising for discussion and debate. The insight is the understanding, perception and power to see into something (problem, question, event) with the mind. Therefore, this paper, focused on issues and insights in business education, secretarial studies and general business in the 21st century Nigeria. The problematic issues in business studies, business education and secretarial studies are numerous. They are among others (inter-alia): all-theoretical learning (ATL), unrealized prediction/visions of the Y2K, and clamour to ostracize shorthand and typewriting from the school curriculum. Others are: relegation of people behind the keyboard and inadequate teaching and learning facilities. A slogan says, "I saw somebody behind the typewriter,, why must it be you"? Specifically, this paper establishes sound theoretical and practical skills, knowledge, and enlightenment expected of business and secretarial students to cope in the electronic business (e-business) environment.

Business education is that aspect of the total 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 (Davis and Oladunjoye, 1987). Business Education comprises the following components: accounting, secretarial, general business, teaching practice, students industrial work experience scheme (SIWES), marketing and distributing, professional education, and general education. Business education is neither business studies nor general business. The issue is that business education has emphasis on teaching methods and pedagogy while general business or business studies emphasize management functions (Osuala, 1999). The appropriate habitats for business education are the colleges of education, faculties of education and institutes of education. On the other hand, the correct place for business studies/general business is faculty of Business Administration and Management. An expert of business education is a business educator while a specialist in business studies is a manager or administrator. A business educator is one, who identifies the problems facing teaching and learning in business education and general business subjects and is able to proffer solutions to these problems.

Contemporary Issues and Insights into Secretarial Studies

Secretarial studies deals with the education and training given to a person to equip him or her with such skills as: information processing skills (analyzing, synthesizing, keyboarding, transcription editing, displaying, proofreading, printing etc). Also there are reprographic skills as (typing, duplicating, photocopying, scanning, manifolding etc). Communication skills are acquired. They include: writing, reading, listening, hearing, speaking, spelling, punctuation, syntax, grammar, vocabulary and tone of voice: sweet or polite, bitter or vulgar. It equally sharpens a person in office management competencies such as: planning, organising, directing, staffing,
controlling, and commanding. There are psychomotor skills such as: hand writing, money/material handling, dexterity speed/accuracy and erasing. It makes one an acquaintance of human relations and attitudinal skills. They are among others: love, humility, cooperation, respect, good appearance, courtesy, obedience, honesty, tolerance, understanding, punctuality and regularity to work, etc. These aforementioned competencies are used in every business office (Ohaegbulem, 2004).

The Contemporary Issues in Secretarial Studies include:

1. The Continued Clamour for (he Deleting of Shorthand and Typewriting from the Syllabus. This call is neither clarion nor logical. It is a call due to laxity and disability to purse laudable objectives. Shorthand does not only teach the learner how to write strokes and read them back according to their sound. It teaches a lot of skills that are yet indispensable in the technological office. Machines do not operate themselves; human knowledge is required to make machines useful. The computer itself is an intelligent idiot. It depends on what the user/operator feeds it with (Garbage-in-garbage-out). Shorthand provides skills on organization, communication, transcription, listening, hearing, writing, reading, spelling, punctuation and so on. Machines cannot do all these without the interaction with the user. Yesterday's secretaries took dictations from their bosses and transcribed the shorthand notes on the typewriter. But today's secretaries, enjoy job enlargement and enrichment. Bosses no longer waste their precious lime dictating to secretaries; rather the secretaries do the entire functions for the boss's approval. This should be because the secretary's job description is akin to the boss's job description too. Machine minded jobs do not end with the machines. Human interface exists (Nnadi and Nnnadi, 1996).

Similarly, typewriting is a process of writing using a machine called typewriter. These typewriters were built based on a qwarty basis. This means that the building of keyboards ranging from typewriters to computer took a common principle. The issue is that keyboard operators are usually relegated by the social, royal and bursiersis class. They say, "I saw someone behind the typewriter, why must it be you"? Fortunately to the keyboard operators and unfortunately, to these castigators and lampoonists, the stones rejected by builders later became the pillar of the house (Acts 4 verse 11, the British and Foreign Bible Society 1999). Today, everybody is behind the keyboard either operating a calculator, GSM handset keyboard, computer, typewriter, piano, word processor, etc. The lampoonists called typist "palm kennel crackers". Presently, people type and send text messages here and there' using handset keyboard. The simple truth is that technology in the 21st century has improved and enlarged the secretarial functions rather than displacing it.

2. Lack of Inadequate Teaching and Learning Facilities: Secretarial Skills are Psycho-Cognitive Outcomes. When a learner hears, or reads, he/she forgets, -when he/she sees, he remembers: but when he does, he has mastery. This makes it imperative for teaching and learning to go with the exact tools/machines., which the graduates would work with. Unfortunately, secretarial courses are taught without the machines and equipment used in the world of work. People after reading secretarial studies go to learn keyboarding from the roadside mushroom centres. This apprenticeship learning is more of training than education. The roadside learning has the technical know-how only without the theories and principles underlying the concept practiced.

According to Amusan (2004), Polytechnic education aims at breeding citizens with solid technological foundation for economic development. Also, it should produce middle class technocrats who should be both quantitatively trained and qualitatively cultured with greater exposure oh "know-how" and "hand-on". In the end, they should be competent diplomats with abilities to handle various pedigrees of small-scale businesses. It is appalling that graduate secretaries cannot operate the keyboards of the computer, electronic/manual typewriters, word processors etc. They cannot handle the telephone receiver effectively. This is due to emphasis on paper qualifications and theory based teaching and learning. The National Policy on Education (1998), has not achieved its technical, vocational and technological purposes.
Gender Issues in Secretarial Studies

Secretarial studies are relegated to the background. Statistics have shown that there exists a lot of disparities and bias in career choice by male and female students. Secretarial studies is seen as a "woman's course". This is erroneous, misleading and un-academic. Okpala, (1987: 24), in Ohaegbuiem (1996), maintained that the sex of a secretary does not really matter and it is illegal to discriminate among sex although there may be valid reasons why a man or a woman may be preferred for a certain or a particular job or post. Furthermore, Shaw (1977), also in Ohaegbuiem (1996), stated that a woman boss might prefer a male secretary because there might be certain aspects of her job for which a male assistance would be useful. A male boss frequently benefits from the views and 'feminine angle' of his female secretary.

The erroneous belief of male and female students against secretarial studies is further shown with the comparison of male and female students enrollment into secretarial studies and Electrical Electronics Engineering Technology in all the polytechnics at National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) levels for 1990/91, 1991/92, 1992/93 and 1993/94. Science and Engineering-Courses are assumed by women to be for men. This is why, Nigeria has only one-woman pilot in the person of Chinyere Onyenucheya. Study the following choice of courses:

Course: Secretarial Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male ND</th>
<th>Male HND</th>
<th>Female ND</th>
<th>Female HND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990/91</td>
<td>1412(36%)</td>
<td>287(29%)</td>
<td>2543(64%)</td>
<td>686(71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991/92</td>
<td>1640(40%)</td>
<td>365(31%)</td>
<td>2447(60%)</td>
<td>735(69%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992/93</td>
<td>1191(31%)</td>
<td>410(31%)</td>
<td>2629(69%)</td>
<td>913(69%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993/94</td>
<td>1820(32%)</td>
<td>628(31%)</td>
<td>3946(68%)</td>
<td>1366(69%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Course: Electrical Electronics Engineering Technology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male ND</th>
<th>Male HND</th>
<th>Female ND</th>
<th>Female HND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990/91</td>
<td>2711(94%)</td>
<td>782(97%)</td>
<td>178(6%)</td>
<td>22(3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991/92</td>
<td>2094(94%)</td>
<td>547(94%)</td>
<td>144(6%)</td>
<td>34(6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992/93</td>
<td>2342(94%)</td>
<td>1100(95%)</td>
<td>159(6%)</td>
<td>61(5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993/94</td>
<td>1389(91%)</td>
<td>329(94%)</td>
<td>132(9%)</td>
<td>22(6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Comparatively, in 1990/91 enrolments into Secretarial Studies were 36% (male) and 64% (female). Electrical Electronics Engineering Technology has 94% (male) and 6% (female) at ND level. Similarly, at HND level the percentage stood at: 29% (male); 71% (female) for secretarial, studies while Electrical Electronics Engineering Technology has 97% (male) 3% (female). The tables above show all these disparities.

Infrastructural Issues in Business Studies

The 21st century business activities in Nigeria are machine-oriented. Unfortunately, business studies graduates leave school without the practical "know-how". They passed through rote and theory-based studies. Eighty seven percent (87%) of them never saw the machines and equipment used for real life work. The secondary school students claim they do business studies but have never seen or touch typewriters, computers, photocopiers, duplicators, scientific calculators, etc. The tertiary institutions are also in this kind of mess. They lack the necessary facilities, laboratories for effective teaching and learning. The growing use of the works of technology such as electronic machines, equipment, etc has endorsed practical-oriented leaching. In order to achieve the objectives of National Policy on Education and 6-3-3-4 system of education in particular, leaching and learning must be with the tools at work place. The Industrial Training Fund (ITF) should actively involve business studies Students in the Students Industrial Work experience Scheme (SIWES). They should be duly attached and supervised. SIWES by business studies students is tantamount to carelessness, lack of insight, loss of bearing and vision by our educational planners.
Predicting and Forecasting General Business in the 21st Century Nigeria

Forecasting simply means the prediction or saying in advance what is likely to happen (Hornby, 1998). Similarly; Olaitan and Ndomi (2000) defined forecasting as the estimation of the value of dependent variables (Yf) from the actual or projected value of independent variables (x$^i$) in a regression model. In addition, forecasting is the estimation of the future value of dependent variable of an equation. When a forecasting is based on estimated or projected values of the independent variables, it is called a conditional forecasting. Most forecasts made in vocametrics, business and sekemetrics are conditional. Forecasting is one of business principles used in teaching secretarial, accounting, marketing, administration, management, communication, word processing and what have you.

The year 2000 (Y2K), was slated for education, health, transport, house, employment, etc for all. Unfortunately, the issues are unrealized predictions. The issues in these failures are: porous statement of objectives, lack of vision and mission, bribery and corruption, fraud, embezzlement of funds, politics, forgery, adulteration, mismanagement and selfishness. The insights and ways to the realization of prediction are: dedication, faithfulness, godliness, sound mind, determination, thoroughness, firmness, follow-up actions, effective supervision and accreditation, focused checks and balances, etc.

Issues in Electronic Business

The teaching and learning of business subjects in this third millennium should as much as possible accommodate the tentacles of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Teaching without the matching instructional materials is analogous to cooking food without salt. Modern business has gone nuclear; hence electronic business (e-business) is the order of the day. By electronic business, we mean the on-line delivery of information and services through Information and Communication Technology, such as computer networks, Global System Mobile (GSM), Electronic Payment System (EPS), Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) and Electronic Data Processing (EDP). Business educators should be conversant with on-line machines, computers, electronic typewriters, word processors, (GSM) hand-phones, landlines, etc for a virile and vibrant education and training of business students.

According to Osuala (2004), electronic business is growing at an incredible pace. Many organizations and individuals are looking to the website as the future and major source of information, goods, services and communications. Today, the Internet is the global information bank (GIB) for firms, government, researchers, teachers, students and individuals alike, information sourced from the website is authentic and generally recognized. The issue in electronic business is that so many organizations may find themselves either going on-line or going out of business. This is the vision and insight of this paper.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this paper. They are:

1. Rote learning should be avoided. This can be achieved by making teaching and learning match with adequate and sufficient machines, equipment, facilities and gadgets used at work place on graduation.

2. Educational policies and targets should be supervised, monitored and controlled according to plans for the attainment of the stated objectives.

3. Business and secretarial curricula should be frequently updated to accommodate the emergence of new technologies.

Conclusion

This article has identified the major issues and insights in business and secretarial studies in the 21st century Nigeria. They are, inter alia, the failure of the relegation of people behind the keyboard, because everybody is now behind the keyboard either with a computer, GSM hand-phone, word processor, calculator, on-line machines, e-typewriters and so on. The forsaken and rejected stones by builders are now the pillars of the house.

Also, it revealed sound theoretical and practical skills expected of business students in order to cope in the electronic business environment. So, many organizations are going on-line. Those that cannot will face the insurmountable of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Again, this paper exposed that Nigerian education is yet theory-oriented. Teaching and learning should go with facilities, gadgets, machines, equipment, etc. used at work place on graduation. This paper pointed out unrealized predictions and forecasts due to irresponsible designs and practices. It recognized the fact that supervised SI WES, adequacy of teaching and learning facilities, etc. will make Nigerian education system to triumph in this 21st century technological dynamism.
References


