

8

Re-generating Secretarial Education for Poverty Eradication, Self Reliance and National Development

By

JOSEPHAT O. CHIGOZIE ORAH

*Department of Business Education,
Federal College of Education,
Okene.*

Abstract

The socio-political and economic problems facing Nigeria today can only be tackled effectively by providing gainful employment to our vibrant youths who are unemployed. However, it is impossible for government to employ all unemployed people gainfully due to limited vacancies in government establishments. Government can solve this problem by providing skill based education to our teeming youth. This can be done effectively through secretarial education which is an education programme that equips beneficiaries with appropriate skills, knowledge, values and competencies that enable individuals to be useful to himself and the society thereby contributing to national development. This is not effectively done now due to defects inherent in the implementation of secretarial education programme. This paper examines the imperative for re-generating secretarial education. It also discusses employment opportunities and challenges. The paper proffers solutions which includes among others, employment of qualified teachers, declaration of secretarial education disaster area, mounting orientation programmes to correct the wrong impressions about secretarial education.

It is an acknowledged fact by many people all over the world that education is the most viable machinery/vehicle through which individuals can be uplifted socially and economically. Education offers overall development of any nation. This is even more pronounced in the vocational and technical education sub-sector.

According to Kayoma, (2009) vocational education is purposive, usable and performance based. It bestows on beneficiaries practical skills and competence that can earn them paid and self-employment. Many social challenges will be resolved when we make our vocational and technical education functional to absorb idle youths and make

Journal of Resourcefulness and Distinction, Volume 4 No. 1, November, 2012

them more productive in the economy (Ezenwo, 2012). Secretarial education, which is an integral part of vocational education, also provides education that guarantees self – employment and high productivity that will in-turn reduce or eradicate poverty. Secretarial education is geared towards producing secretaries who would be able to fit properly in the office of any organization. It is the type of education that inculcates competencies in areas such as office procedure, office machine, planning, word processing, stenography, management etc. It therefore follows that graduates of secretarial education will not only perform as office secretaries but also as office managers, (Njoku, 2000). To this end, the recipients are exposed to the four main components of secretarial education/studies (office management and technology) programme, general studies/education, foundation courses; professional courses and supervised industrial work experience.

Despite the intended objectives of secretarial education, it has been observed that graduates of secretarial education are not competent enough as to meet the demand of employers and or self employment. In other words graduates of secretarial education lack the required training for efficient services both to themselves and to the society. The reason for this is not far fetched. Orah, (2007) stated that the extent to which those teaching secretarial subjects have required competencies, skills and attitude is still in doubt.

The assumption that anybody can teach any subject once a fair knowledge of it has been acquired is not applicable to secretarial education subjects. Tonne (1970) in Orah (2007) listed the skills expected of a business teacher to include the following: -

- i Skills and attitude desirable for all educated persons.
- ii Competency in business or in some phase of it.
- iii Knowledge of principles and method of teaching
- iv A general education

It therefore becomes imperative to think of a way to re-generate secretarial education so that it will be given a new phase, a new horizon and a new impetus. It is on this basis that this paper is written.

Definition of Concepts

In order to discuss the present issue meaningfully, it is relevant to define some of the terms involved so as to come to terms with the issue in question.

Poverty: according to Sinclair (1992), is the state of being very poor. To be poor therefore is a state of having very little money or few possessions that are hardly enough to take care of one's need. Poverty is a man made disease and can only be healed by the efforts of human beings. In the opinion of JDP (Caritas Nigeria, 2008), Poverty means more than just lack of financial resources as measured by the one US dollar demarcation.

Re-generating Secretarial Education for Poverty Eradication, Self Reliance and National Development

Self Reliance: is the ability of an individual to be able to fend for himself. It is the ability of one to be able to take care of basic needs of life without relying on anybody or government. Acquisition of functional education and skills as can be acquired from secretarial education is one of the only sure ways of self-reliance.

National Development: this is tied up with self reliance of an individual. When citizens of a country are reliant the country too will be developed. In other words, a nation made up of self-reliant people will naturally translate to national development. The ultimate aim of national development must be to bring about sustained improvement in the well being of the individual and bestow benefit to all. Orah, (2008) opined that as soon as individuals are made to acquire specialized skills that will enable them to help develop the society, then that society or country becomes developed. The author further stated that National Development is synonymous with self-reliance in every aspect of national life.

Meaning of Secretarial Education

Secretarial education has to do with the teaching and learning of skills, competencies, ability, knowledge attitude and functions that enable an individual to function as a secretary. A person, who receives secretarial education, performs secretarial functions for organizations, individuals or even for himself.

Secretarial education is usually taught as a specialty in the department of business education alongside accounting and salesmanship (Marketing). In polytechnics and some universities, secretarial education exists as a department. A graduate of secretarial education, either from college of education, polytechnic or university is known as secretary. It is worthy to note that the training of an effective secretary in the various institutions of higher learning do not only involve the acquisition of skills in shorthand and typewriting, but also the acquisition of skills in the use of various equipment. Okoro (1999), stated that secretarial training involves a good knowledge in courses such as English Language and communication, data processing, office information system, personnel management, office administration and management, human relation, industrial and human psychology, word processing, business law etc, which groom the secretary towards efficient services in the office.

Secretary on the other hand can be literally described as keeper of “secrets”. Okoro, (1999), quoting encyclopedia American defined a secretary as a person (Male or Female) who takes charge of the secrets of his employer. The author further stated that a secretary is someone who has undertaken a specified period of education and training and obtained/acquired,

1. Wide general education
2. Secretarial skills
3. Business knowledge

4. Personal qualities:

A secretary is not a clerk, copy typist, office attendant, personal assistant, sales clerk, store attendant etc. as usually misconstrued by many people.

Employment Opportunities in Secretarial Education

Secretarial education plays a vital role in employment generation and self-reliance of individuals in every society. This assertion is supported by Ibigami, (2000), who stated that no society could under-estimate the responsibility of functional education for its citizens, therefore, the necessity for equipping each individual for some occupation is a fact that even the most primitive society has now realized. The various components of business education (secretarial education inclusive) satisfy this idea and thus, encompass the entire education.

Igwe, 1987 in Atakpa (2000) stated that secretarial education (profession) is remarkable for its appeal to both male and female with post secondary education. It provides challenging job opportunities after graduation than any other discipline in a wide variety of occupational area in which to work. Specific areas of employment opportunity for secretarial graduates are discussed below.

Establishment of business centres: secretarial education graduates have the opportunity to establish business centres where different types of secretarial services are offered. Services such as word processing, typing of documents, cyclostyling, photocopying of documents, binding, internet browsing etc. can be offered by secretarial graduates. No doubt that centres such as this are money spinners in this days when information and communication technology is in vogue. This, in no small way generates income to the operator and thereby reducing poverty and promoting national development.

Secretarial graduates can seek paid employment in offices, establishments, organizations, institutions etc. where secretarial staff is in high demand. It is a truism that no office, no matter how small can function effectively without a professional secretary. By doing this, the individual generates income with which to solve his/her economic problems. Orah, (2012), stated that graduates of secretarial education can establish tutorial centres where business related courses such as shorthand, typewriting, office practice etc are taught. By engaging in this venture the individual is rendering essential services that will provide employable skills to individuals thereby producing self-reliant people who will in-turn contribute to national development.

Graduates of secretarial education can also render consultancy services to individuals and organizations on secretarial matters cum issues. Such consultancy services will include writing proposals, letters, documentary and rendering advisory

Re-generating Secretarial Education for Poverty Eradication, Self Reliance and National Development

services to people who need them. In fact, secretarial education is a powerful tool with which to reduce poverty and engender national development. It is a discipline that offers variety of training in skills and competencies thereby equipping the recipient with necessary tools with which to be self-reliant. Through secretarial education individuals who are not professional secretaries can be exposed to elementary part of it such as key boarding and typesetting of documents.

Challenges of Secretarial Education

Secretarial education is a component of business education which is an off-shoot of vocational education. Therefore it follows that all the challenges of vocational business education affect secretarial education in one way or the other. Some of these problems are discussed below. Teacher quality and quantity still remains one of the greatest problems of secretarial education. Secretarial education is over-flooded with professional undesirables who are ill prepared and see teaching as last port of call for the unemployed, be it vocational, technical, science etc. Today, poor conditions of service and low regard for teaching profession in general have produced schools which are peopled by teachers lacking adequate knowledge, professional skills and commitment and who are often demoralized, (Adeyanju, 2010).

This situation affects secretarial teachers more in the sense that most people see secretarial teachers as low intelligent individuals who are in the teaching profession due to lack of any other thing to do. Also, most people see secretarial teaching as a field for all comers. No wonder, that graduates of business related courses are employed to teach secretarial education.

The quality of students admitted to study secretarial education is another serious challenge. In most schools, candidates admitted to study secretarial education are very poor intellectually. Most of them gain admission with fake results. The effect of this is that they (students) find it very difficult to cope with secretarial education subjects such as shorthand and typewriting. Again, most students lack the interest in this course probably because of wrong perception by some people that secretarial education is for low intelligent people.

Another serious challenge to secretarial education is the issue of inadequate facilities, equipment and materials for effective teaching and learning Oyedele (1985) in Atakpa (2000) lamented that Nigerian youths are being educated more in accordance with yesterday's world rather than in preparation for tomorrow's living. It is not an over statement to say that many institutions where secretarial education is taught lack required materials, equipment and facilities necessary for the teaching and learning of secretarial education. For example, in some schools, technical courses such as typewriting and word processing are taught without typewriters and computers.

Students are even required to come to classes with their own machines. This situation discourages students and teachers who in-turn discourage others from associating themselves with secretarial education.

Government policies with respect to civil servants who are secretaries is also another serious challenge to secretarial education. A situation where a holder of Higher National Diploma (HND) in secretarial education is not promoted beyond certain level like his counterpart in other professions discourages people from enrolling in secretarial education. In fact those who are working as secretaries in public service are trying to see how they can be converted to administrative officers. This trend should not be allowed to continue.

Another great challenge to secretarial education is inadequate funding. According to Igwe and Ibenema, (2006), funding needs of vocational education, business education inclusive are quite different from those of general education. According to the authors there is minimum level of funding below which vocational education cannot be effective and should not be attempted. Funding has been the bane of secretarial education. This has made it impossible for the programme to be implemented as enunciated in the various curricula of secretarial education at various levels.

Need for Re-generating Secretarial Education

Secretarial education which is an aspect of vocational education is a veritable tool for employment generation and poverty alleviation. Secretarial education provides the needed skills and competencies necessary for individuals to be able to create employment and fend for themselves. However, despite the known roles of secretarial education in employment generation, it has not been accorded the importance it deserves and so not meeting the intended objectives. For secretarial education to play its intended roles, there is need to re-generate it in the following ways.

A functional and good educational programme is the one which prepares the beneficiary in a functional, practical and pragmatic way so as to enable him face the vagaries of life. I dare to say that the re-generating secretarial education should start with the teachers. This is because no matter how good an academic programme may be, if there are no good teachers it will not meet the intended objective. Adeyanju (2010) listed the following qualities as what good teachers (secretarial education inclusive) need to know and be able to do.

- 1 A much improved academic subject matter background i.e. a better mastery of teaching subject, as well as sound pedagogical skills, especially, the use of learner-centered approaches.

Re-generating Secretarial Education for Poverty Eradication, Self Reliance and National Development

- 2 Effective use of language (English), for laying a sound foundation, activity based teaching, cooperative learning techniques, ample use of resources, assessment of learning achievement, and reflective teaching;
- 3 Ability to manage learning needs of students
- 4 Ability to use a range of teaching techniques, classroom management and assessment skill that foster learning;
- 5 Ability to plan creative lessons with adequate and appropriate support materials, which may mean improvisation, where necessary, and
- 6 Ability to benefit from educator mentors and other experienced teachers for improved performance.

In re-generating secretarial education, efforts should be made to have teachers who would have high level moral, modern equipment and teaching aids, sufficient materials and supplies and formal continuous professional training. This is necessary if the intended objectives of secretarial education which is to produce all-round graduates who will be job creators instead of job seekers.

Bamidele (2002) in Orah, (2012) opined that there is no substitute to the pursuit of excellence. The author further suggested that any educational programme should be reviewed periodically so that the following objectives would be achieved.

1. The training programme environment adequately replicates the work environment rather than resemble it.
2. The training meets the demand of the individual labour market
3. Scholarship to the trainees to motivate and encourage those who are willing to enroll in the programme.
4. That sufficient number in terms of quantity and quality and highly motivated instructional personnel are available to run the programme.

I wish to add that candidates wishing to study secretarial education must show interest in the subject. A situation where some students dabble into the subject makes them to behave as if they were forced into it. There should be mechanisms put in place to weed out those who are not interested in the course at any point in time.

Re-generating secretarial education requires government to formulate good policies with respect to secretaries and secretarial teachers. This will encourage the practicing secretaries and secretarial teachers to remain in the service. A situation where practicing secretaries are treated with disdain is not good enough.

Re-generating secretarial education requires government to introduce grant to individual who are studying vocational courses which include secretarial education. This is because it is through vocational related courses that a nation can rise to be among the developed nations. It is as a result of the lip service that government is

paying to this type of education that is responsible for what is happening in this country in terms of unemployment. It is unemployment that breeds other vices, such as, kidnapping, Boko-Haram insurgency, armed robbery, prostitution etc. all these can be curbed with adequate orientation by government.

Conclusion

Secretarial education is needed in our country now more than ever before. This is so because of its role in providing skills, competences, knowledge and attitude necessary for individual to be useful not only to themselves but also to the country. Any country that plays with skill oriented courses is playing with fire and is only inviting chaos, anarchy and rebellion. It is for this reason that government should regenerate secretarial education to play a role in employment generation so as to avert its attendant problems.

Recommendations

Secretarial education is a skill related subject that plays a vital role in employment generation and poverty alleviation. To harness the prospects of secretarial education fully, the following recommendations are drawn.

1. Only qualified teachers should be employed to teach secretarial education. Government and government agencies should stop playing politics with education. It is evident in our schools that most teachers employed to teach secretarial education are not qualified.
2. Secretarial education should be declared a disaster area by government by providing a dedicated fund meant for running of vocational related courses. Government should realize that funding needs of vocational courses are more since it is practical and skill orientated. It is with fund that materials, equipments and facilities required for secretarial education are purchased.
3. Secretarial teachers should be paid special allowance so as to retain them in our school system. Other wise, they are likely to leave and join blue chip companies where they will be paid better.
4. There should be an orientation programme to correct the erroneous impression by some individuals who see secretarial education as a useless and unimportant course. People should be made to realize that secretarial education is a course that requires high intelligence and therefore should be respected.
5. Teachers of secretarial and other related courses should form a chattered association with which to champion their course. Issues relating to salaries, funding, promotion and professional development should be discussed.

References

- Adeyanju, T.K. (2010). *Quality teacher education and sustaining teacher effectiveness*. Being distinguished public lecture delivered at F.C.E. Okene, 7th September.
- Atakpa, R.A. (2000). Career opportunities in business education in Nigeria. *Business Education Journal* 3 (3) October 69-113.
- Caritas/JDP Nigeria (2008). *Signs of hope, poverty reduction for a better Nigeria*. Lagos. Catholic secretariat of Nigeria P 11-14.
- Ezenwo, N.W. (2012). Nyesom Wike's Advocacy for technical education – and idea most welcomed. *Nigeria education report* 1 (1).
- Ibigbami, D.B.O. (2000). Funding business education in Nigeria: the way forward. *Business education journal* 3(3) 194-101.
- Igwe, C.O. & Ibeneme, O.T. (2006). Proper funding of technology education: A condition for sustainable Development of Nigeria youth. *Journal of vocational and adult education (JOVAE)* 5(1) 27-33.
- Kayoma F.O. (2009). Reforms and innovation in vocational education: The way forward. *Journal of teacher perspective* 3(30) 475-486.
- Njoku, C.U. (2000). Teaching secretarial administration subjecting in a modern technical age. The journal so far. *Business education journal* 3(3) 244-252.
- Okoro, F. (1999). Occupational Mobility of secretaries and today's modern office- a critical perspective. *National association of professional secretarial staff of Nigeria workshop proceedings*. 15 – 22.
- Orah, J.O.C. (2007). *Teachers' rating of constraints to the teaching of business education in colleges of education in North Central Zone of Nigeria*. An unpublished M.Sc. thesis faculty of Education Unizik, Awka. P. 33.
- Orah, J.O.C. (2008). Towards improving the standard of business education for sustainable national development. *Unizik orient journal of education* 4(2) P76-81.
- Orah, J.O.C. (2012). *Re-engineering business education for employment and self productivity in Nigeria*. Being a conference paper delivered at the 14th annual national Conference Organized by National Association for advancement of knowledge (NAFAK) held at the Polytechnic, Auchi, between 12th – 16th.
- Sinclair, J. etal (1992) *B.B.C English Dictionary*. Onitsha: African Feb Publisher Ltd.

