

FUNDING BUSINESS EDUCATION IN A DEPRESSED ECONOMY: IMPLICATIONS FOR STANDARDS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The perennial problem of funding education in Nigeria has become contagious to all forms of education. Business Education has had its share of the funding problem even in the presence of increased interest in the discipline. The paper carried out an opinion survey involving some administrators, lecturers and students domiciled in the departments of Business Education of The Rivers State College of Education, the Rivers State Polytechnic and the Rivers State University of Science and Technology. The survey assessed the adequacy of funds for providing qualified teachers, equipment, research, standard libraries and standard lecture theatres. The findings showed that funds for the identified parameters have been grossly inadequate. The paper recommends the creating of investment units in all departments of Business Education to explore the numerous business potentials that are available to the discipline both within and outside the school campus. Furthermore, the paper recommends a full privatization of tertiary institutions if Nigerian Governments are unable to adequately fund them to ensure good standards.

Introduction

The world has become globalized in all spheres including business practices. Consequently, Business Education as a discipline has come to enjoy an increased popularity. In order to adequately cope with the business challenges of today we need accountants, secretarial administrators, marketing experts, financial gurus, etcetera, who are usually products of Business Education. Unfortunately, Business Education, like other disciplines, has been affected by the general and persistent economic depression in Nigeria. Funding for Business Education, as noted by Atakpa (2001) has not been commensurate with the increased demand for its services. This situation has created the problem of standards. The paper examined the problem in relation to the tertiary institutions in Rivers State and made recommendations for the adequate funding of Business Education.

Statement of the Problem

Business Education in Rivers State tertiary institutions has been poorly funded and this has created the problem of inadequate standards. This situation is in line with the input - output principle or the computer language of Garbage in - Garbage out. Generally, the under funding of education with the consequent fall in standard has been a sustained problem in Nigeria over the years. The paper believes that the standards of Business Education in tertiary institution have falling as a result of inadequate funding. This thesis, if found to be true, has negative implications for the business world.

Purpose of the Study

The paper appraised the funding of business education in tertiary institutions in Rivers State and its effects on standards. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Find out the funding standard in Business Education in Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State.
2. Determine the effect of this funding standard on academic achievement in Business Education.
3. Recommend measures for adequate funding of Business Education.

Research Questions

The following Research Questions guided the study.

1. Are funds allocated to Business Education adequate to provide the necessary facilities, equipment and manpower?
2. Can funds available to Business Education sustain good standards?

Review of Literature

Business Education aims at imparting skills, knowledge and competence which equip the recipient for self-reliance (Frankie-Dolor, 2001). Tonne (1961) defines Business Education as the form of education that prepares students for entrance into business career and render efficient service. The purpose of Business Education, according to him, are two fold:

- a) Training for specific jobs, and
- b) Ability to use these skills in the environment of business.

The definition proffered by the Policy Commission for Business and Economic Education (1975) as enunciated by Abdullaln (2002:1) indicated that :

Business Education represents a broad and diverse discipline that is included in all types of educational delivery systems; elementary, secondary and post secondary. Business Education includes education for office occupation, business teaching, business administration and economic understanding.

In the opinion of Abdullahi (op cit), Business Education covers the following types of education.

1. Secretarial Education
2. Commerce or General Business Studies
3. Distributive Education, and
4. Accounting Education.

Funding Standard in Business Education

Funding education generally in Nigeria has been problematic. The long standing disagreement between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has its root on adequate funds for education. The president of ASUU has severally stated as much. According to him;

The current crisis in the Nigerian Universities is traceable directly to the failure of the Federal and State Governments ... to honour the June 30, 2001 Agreement. The lack of adequate infrastructure, well equipped laboratories classrooms, hostels and other necessities for learning and research is due to this failure. The Recurrent, Restoration, capital and stabilization funds which are badly needed to sustain the minimum acceptable standards for our Universities have not been provided (Fashina, 2003:1).

Business Education has its own share of the funding problem and consequent threat on minimum standards. In order to adequately fund all levels of education it is the insistent opinion of the ASUU that 26% of government's annual budgets be allocated to education as recommended by the United Nations. However, the odds against the practical adoption of 26% funding for education are high. A realistic option will be to explore the feasible ways of adequately funding education in Nigeria in order to maintain acceptable standards. The emphasis here will be on Business Education.

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1998) provides thus:

The financing of education is a joint responsibility of the Federal, State and Local Governments. Government recognizes the importance of technical and commercial education and the need to relate its programmes to the requirements of commerce and industry. Formulae for collaboration and joint responsibility ... will be designed for sharing cost burden between the public and private sectors.

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The provisions above show that Business Education is given a place of prominence like other

forms of education and derives its funding from the traditional ways of financing education. The need to improve the funding of Business Education is predicated on the increasing demand for that form of education and the necessity to maintain standards. Funds are of essence to acquire and maintain the following facilities for effective training in Business Education, typing machines, dictating machines, recording machines, adding machines, calculating machines, punch card machines, computers, cash handling machines, photocopying machines, duplicating machines etcetera. Improved funding for Business Education will also facilitate the provision of standard lecture theatres, standard libraries and text materials, qualified teachers and other facilities required for training in Business Education. Egwuelu (1992:143) believes that even though all of the listed facilities need not be available at a time to ensure success in training for Business Education the provision of a good number of them is imperative for success.

Sources of Funds

Educational leadership involves primarily the procurement and management of resources. School Business Administration concerns itself with school financing, budgeting, accounting and auditing. It is the responsibility of every educational administrator to carry out these functions (Okoroma, 2000:5). For the purpose of this paper school financing is most relevant. The traditional ways of funding Business Education like other forms of education include:

1. Government Grants
2. School fees
3. Development foundation
4. Consultancy services

Government Grants

Education is often the single largest industry in most countries. The cost of financing education in Nigeria has continued to increase with increase in human population which has led to a great increase in demand.

Education is financed principally from public funds such as taxes. In Nigeria, such, natural endowment as crude oil substantially pays education bills. The Federal Government allocates a certain percentage of its annual budget to education and is distributed to the various levels of federal educational institutions. The allocation to tertiary institutions is further shared among the various programmes such as business education, agricultural education, technological education etcetera. Educational institutions owned by State Governments are financed through State Government grants. Government grants to education have continued to dwindle over the years owing to increasing demands on other government services and priorities coupled with the less practical importance attached to education by the leaders of today. It will be incorrect to say that Grants have fallen due to dwindling resources to Governments because records show that the Governments of today and the recent past have received more money than their predecessors but have performed dismally in the area of educational development. Akinola (1990:17) worried about the funding situation hence he commented thus:

Our higher institutions are in dire need of money ... to cater for both their capital and recurrent needs. For a few years past, the budget has been cut back from year to year by the Federal Government. This cut-back has affected both capital and recurrent expenditures. In many higher institutions, capital projects embarked upon a few years ago, are yet to be completed due to lack of adequate funds.

The author observes that the above scenario is capable and does jeopardize standards. Business education is of the same 'parentage' with other forms of education. What happens to one affects the other because their financial strength is from one source - federal or state government.

School Fees

School fees constitute another source of financing education. In the past it was a meager source in view of the emphasis on popular education for all that is affordable. At all levels of

education school fees were unpopular in Government institutions as grants were expected to fully support education.

However, Anukam (1986) asserts that the dwindling government grants to education in the presence of increasing populations has elevated the role of and emphasis on school fees even in Government Schools.

Today the issue of school fees has reached a crisis situation in Nigeria tertiary institutions. Many higher institutions have introduced the policy of “commercial fees” where school fees are commensurate with services rendered. This conforms with the Federal Government Policy of “complete” or “absolute” autonomy for Universities which Okoroma (2001:101) has condemned as retrogressive and unnecessary. In the same spirit Adeniran (2000:2) frowns at the new emphasis on school fees through the policy of University autonomy and observes thus:

University autonomy does not mean an abdication of Government responsibility to fund the Universities. Students fees and charges remain a legitimate source of revenue in an atmosphere of University autonomy after adequate empowerment of students and their sponsors.

Development Foundation

Gifts, endowments, bequests and donations constitute another means of procuring funds for education. The downward trend of our economy has rendered this avenue somewhat impotent as people hardly have excess to give to education. However, some privileged individuals, agencies and companies still make gestures of gifts, endowments and donations to education at all levels and forms. Business Education has also benefited from these gestures.

Consultancy Services

A survey conducted by Adesina (1981) in Lagos showed that some schools can make up to one-half the total returns in fees from commercial activities. Although the prospects may not be equal for both urban and rural institutions, commercial ventures through consultancy services are increasingly gaining popularity in tertiary education. This is a deliberate effort to raise money to augment other sources for running the institution. The scope of commercial activities vary according to the initiatives of individual school administrators. Some institutions operate limited liability companies and are into manufacturing, extensive secretarial services, bakery, agricultural ventures, estate development, commercial health services, fashion design services, handicraft, raffles, entertainment etcetera (Okoroma, 2000:7; Anukam 1986:10).

What is Standard?

In the view of Akinola (1989:60),

The term “Standards” especially when used in relation to education, is relative. It is relative to the discipline or subject area, or the person making pronouncement about it. Its relative lies in the fact the “standards” depend on the degree and / or levels of expectations, or a minimum and / or maximum level of performance set for a given human endeavour. Standards are in varying degrees - high, low or average. Whether high, low or average, there is need for some kind of consensus as to what will constitute acceptable standards for the implementation of the 6-3-3-4 system of education.

Udoh (1989:142) describes standard as “the level or measure to which members of a group have to conform and by which the performance of each member of such group is to be judged”. According to him, ‘it is described also as the level or degree of excellence required for a given purpose.

Material and Methods

The hypothesis of this paper is that funding of Business Education in tertiary institutions in Rivers State has been inadequate and has resulted in poor standards. To confirm this hypothesis the author carried out a survey that involved administrators, lecturers and students in Business Education in tertiary institutions in Rivers State namely: The Rivers State University of Science and Technology

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(RUST), the Rivers State Polytechnic (RIVPOLY) and the River State College of Education (RSCOE). These are institutions owned by the Rivers State Government and constituted the target population.

A stratified random sampling technique was used to obtain the following sample size. **Table 1: Distribution of Sample Size**

Institution	Administrators	Lecturers	Students
Rust	10	15	50
Rivpoly	10	15	50
Rscoe	10	15	50
Total	30	45	150

Instrumentation

A questionnaire containing alternative items of 'agree' and 'disagree' with elements that sought to verify the adequacy or inadequacy of funds for Business Education was used. The elements included adequacy of funds for salaries, teaching facilities, library facilities, equipment and research. The respondents were requested to make their assessment of the various elements.

A total sample size of 225 respondents comprising of 30 administrators, 45 lecturers and 150 students were used for the study. The analysis of data involved the computation of percentages.

Findings

Out of the 30 administrators, 25 responded. Forty two (42) lecturers responded out of the 45 surveyed. Of the 150 students sampled 140 responded.

Table 2: Distribution of Responses

S/No	Parameter	Agree	% Agree	Disagree	% Disagree
1	Adequacy of funds for qualified teachers	75	36.2%	132	63.8%
2	Adequacy of funds for equipment	80	38.6%	127	61.4%
3	Adequacy of funds for research	78	37.7%	127	61.4%
4.	Adequacy of funds for standard libraries	70	33.8%	137	66.2%
5	Adequacy of funds for standard lecture theatres	75	36.2%	139'	63.8%
6.	Adequacy of Academic standards on records	82	39.6%	125	60.4%

The survey shows that only 36.2% of the respondents agree that funds are adequate to maintain qualified teachers in Business Education. On the adequacy of funds for equipment only 80 (38.6%) of the respondents were satisfied. Only 78 (37.7%) agreed that funds for research in Business Education are adequate. Out of the 207 respondents only 70 (33.8%) were of the opinion that funds for the provision of standard library facilities for Business Education are adequate. On adequacy of funds for standard lecture theatres only 75 (36.2%) of the respondents were satisfied. On the effects of funds on academic standards of Business Education only 82 (39.6%) of the respondents were satisfied.

All the parameters for the survey show that chi-square calculated values were lower than the critical table value at the 0.05 level of significance.

These results agree with findings of Okala (2001:60) who noted that:

The level of funding by government has continued to divindle across all disciplines in the school system. Inadequacy of almost everything had leached alarming proportion that something must be done to save the situation else manpower training will become a mockery in comparison to industrial demand.

Summary

Literatures and this study have revealed that adequate funding for education generally has been a big problem in Nigeria. Business Education among other forms has elicited much sympathy from the ASUU in respect of adequate funding. The demand by the ASUU that a minimum of 26% of Governments annual budgets be allocated to education is in recognition of the present inadequacy of funds for all levels and forms of education in Nigeria which has resulted in reduced educational standards. This study has shown that funding for Business Education which is usually reflected in qualified teachers, equipment, research activities, standard lecture halls, library facilities is grossly inadequate.

Implications for Standards

In view of the inadequacy of funds for Business Education at the tertiary level, adverse implications for standards are imminent. The graduates of Business Education will lack the necessary quality in learning which will obviously affect their performances on the job as accountants, secretarial administrators, marketing experts, financial consultants or as business educators.

Recommendations

The following recommendations Will improve the funding standard in Business Education.

1. The allocation of 26% of Government budgets to education as demand by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). This will raise the funding level of all forms of education and standards will be enhanced. This is the surest way to improve and have a sure funding for education. Other methods are gambles.
2. Create Investment Units in all departments of Business Education. Investment potentials are numerous in Business Education. Business centres can be established in relevant places within the institution and outside to provide secretarial services. Technical Units can be created to provide technical services at some fees to all offices using Business Education equipment and facilities within and outside educational institutions.
3. Privatization: If Government refuses to adequately fund education then it should privatize tertiary education so that adequate funds can be generated through fee payment.

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