

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING THE ATTAINMENT OF BUSINESS EDUCATION GOALS AND EFFECTIVE MARKETING OF ITS PRODUCTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Business education is an effort to provide citizens both general and vocational education, developing beneficiaries into productive citizens and wise consumers. Therefore, it needs to be effectively and efficiently delivered by appropriate agencies and agents for beneficial results. There are, however, opinions and evidences of a wide gap between performances of products and expected performances as there are products that hardly effectively defend their certificates. As a result of unsatisfactory performances of products of the programme some prospective students distance themselves from the programme, preferring other degree programmes and employers are hesitant in employing the products. The programme would lack academically talented students, if the development is not checked. Recommendations include the fact that the programme needs to be effectively marketed to prospective students in favour of having a continued quality programme to realize objectives. Measures have to be adopted also to improve performance of the graduates, meeting employability.

Introduction

Strategies are devices, techniques and actions planned and embarked upon in the effort to solve problems. Hence, strategies, as coined above, are techniques and planned actions to undertake with a view to enhancing goal attainment and effective marketing of Business Education and its products.

Business education, as a specialized area of general education, has goals or objectives that justify it as part of the total educational effort, and efforts need to be made by practitioners to ensure fulfillment of those objectives.

Also, business education is a service that business educators render to beneficiaries (consumers) of the education effort, and there is the realization that consumers of the education service are capable of preference of other education programmes to business education. Hence, there is the need to efficiently market the programme to potential consumers (prospective students).

According to Osuala (2004), business education is a programme consisting of two parts of instruction, and they are the office education which provides vocational education for office workers or careers, through initial, refresher, and upgrading education and general business education which is a programme that provides students with information and competencies needed by all in managing personal business affairs and in using the services in business.

The definition above contains education about business which is for all beneficiaries of the education service and education for business which is for those who wish to make careers in business education.

Goals (Objectives) of Business Education

Objectives of Business education include:

- 1) Equipping the beneficiary with knowledge and cognitive development to be an intelligent member of his/her society;
- 2) Providing the beneficiary skills acquisition and development with a view to attaining employability;
- 3) Training beneficiaries to become well-mannered members of their societies;
- 4) Providing the individual economic and commercial knowledge, thus making him or her an intelligent partaker in the economic affairs of the community;

- 5) Providing the individual entrepreneurship knowledge and development towards business ownership (self-employment).

The objectives identified above are allied to the objectives of Higher Education.

According to the National Policy on Education of the Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004, section 59, Tertiary Education covers the post secondary section of the national education system which is given in the universities, polytechnics and colleges of technologies, including such courses as are given by the colleges of Education, Advanced Teachers' Colleges, Correspondence Colleges and such institutions as may be allied to them.

Objectives of Higher Education

The National Policy on Education (2004:59) enumerates objectives of higher education as follows:

- 1) Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training.
- 2) The acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and the society;
- 2) The development of intellectual capacity of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
- 3) The acquisition of both intellectual and physical skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of their societies;
- 4) The promotion of scholarship and community service;
- 5) Forge and cement national unity, and
- 6) The promotion of national and international understanding.

According to the Policy document, the Tertiary institutions shall pursue those goals through;

- a) teaching;
- b) research and development;
- c) virile Staff development programmes;
- d) generation and dissemination of knowledge;
- e) a variety of modes of programmes, including full-time, part-time, block-release, day-release, sandwich, etc.
- f) access to training funds such as those provided by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF);
- g) Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES);
- h) maintenance of minimum educational standards through appropriate agencies;
- i) inter-institutional cooperation;
- j) Dedicated services to the community through extra-moral and extension services.

Statement of the Problem

An examination of the objectives of business education and those of Tertiary Education as provided above which should guide universities in producing graduates show promise of turning out products of high caliber with both intellectual and practical skills. However, opinions and evidences depict a wide gap between this expectation and results.

According to Azuka (2004), there are reports of business education graduates who can only teach commerce and economics. There are also those who cannot speak, write simple correct sentences, and those who cannot undertake simple word processing.

They distance themselves from teaching the skills subjects of shorthand, typewriting, and accounting, presumably because of their inability to handle those subjects.

Also, there are prospective students who would not consider applying for admission to business education because they presume the programme to be for "the less academically talented". Hence they show preference for medicine, engineering, architecture, among others.

Though these assumptions are fallacious (baseless), since they militate choice of the programme by those who consider themselves "academically talented", there is need to identify and adopt strategies

to remove such baseless, but unfavourable notions from minds of applicants and their parents and guardians, thus marketing the programme effectively to achieve goals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify contributing factors to the unacceptable standards of performance of graduates of business education and proffer solutions, aimed at better performance.

Specifically, the study intends to undertake the following:

- i) Identify whether admitted students meet entry standards;
- ii) Ascertain whether universities have adequate or enough qualified staff;
- iii) Determine whether the universities have adequate equipment and facilities for the programme;
- iv) Ascertain whether there is a minimum standard for the universities with respect to the programme;
- v) Identify university administrations' roles in the unpleasant situation;
- vi) Identify methods for marketing the business education programme which is a service; and
- vii) Proffer strategies for improved performance.

Significance of the Study

Findings of the study would benefit the following:

- i) universities running the business education programme would make amends, where necessary;
- ii) there is hope that current and prospective students of the programme would benefit from an improved programme, if recommendations are utilized.
- iii) students in business education and other business programmes at other levels of tertiary education would also benefit from the improvement in the curricular of their programmes which would make them more marketable on graduation.
- iv) employers of labour would benefit as it is the hope that graduates would be better educated to serve them more effectively, if they are employed.

Research Questions

The research questions of the study are:

- 1) Are students admitted to the undergraduate business education programme initially qualified for admission?
- 2) Do the universities offering the business education programme have enough qualified staff?
- 3) Do the universities have adequate equipment and facilities for the programme?
- 4) Is there a minimum standard for the running of the undergraduate business education programme?
- 5) Is the business education service being marketed efficiently and effectively?

Business Education at the Undergraduate Level

According to Osuala (2004), business education teachers are prepared in Nigeria on two levels; the NCE business education teachers in Colleges of Education and at the relevant departments at the polytechnics, for technical education. The second level is done at the university's department of business education for the Business Education B.Sc programme.

He observed further that the students at each level spend about six to ten weeks of practical teaching for their professional training.

At the degree level, the University of Nigeria Nsukka admitted the first batch of students in 1962, and the Ahmadu Bello University followed in 1963 while many other universities like the University of Benin, University of Port-Harcourt, among others followed suit. Now, there are many universities, both

federally owned and state owned, offering the business education programme, among other degree programmes.

Entry Qualification of Students

The role of adequate prerequisite qualification in determining performance on the course cannot be over emphasized because evidences abound of those “managed in”, without appropriate qualifications, failing to graduate satisfactory, if at all they graduate.

In some universities, with a view to filling quotas, candidates with deficiencies at the SSCE are admitted, and warned to make-up those deficiencies before they complete their programmes, else they would not graduate. Many of such candidates in those units cannot graduate, years after completing the programme, because they are unable to remedy the deficiencies at the SSCE.

This militates production of quality graduates in the programme which is the principal objective of business education.

Also, because of the realization of the fact that SSCE deficient applicants are admitted to the programme in some universities, prospective applicants who consider themselves “academically talented” prefer applying to other programmes, not wanting to be in the same grouping with “under achievers”. This also militates marketability of business education satisfactorily.

Adequacy of Qualified Lecturers

The staffing position of the departments or units of business education is grossly unsatisfactory in the various universities where the programme is being offered. According to Azuka (2004), the position of staffing at the University of Nigeria Nsukka is not encouraging as, on the average, in each of the programmes offered at the Department of Vocational Teacher Education, there were only three (3) to four (4) lecturers.

In line with the picture above, there are only three lecturers as permanent members of staff at the Business Education unit of the Federal University of Technology, Yola. The picture above holds for most of the universities offering the programme at the undergraduate and other levels.

The reality is that the few lecturers around are overloaded with teaching too many courses, and some of the courses are consigned to part-time lecturers, who would certainly have greater commitment to their areas of primary appointments. The situation undeniably tells negatively of quality of work done and would affect product quality.

Availability of Adequate Equipment and Facilities

Business education is an equipment and facilities based programme, and unless these things are there, teaching of the programme will be incomplete as the programme would be taught only theoretically, without practicals that will result in acquisition of manipulative skills. The equipment are computers, manual and electric typewriters, videos and video tapes, laptops, internet connections, among others.

For a complete business education equipment and facilities, there is need for the department to have a computer laboratory, typing pool and model office, among others. The programme should make the students Information and Communication Technology relevant.

However, only very few departments of the universities offering the programme can boast of having met the requirement, to some degree. In a majority of the universities, the equipment and facilities are not there; and even if they are there, they are meagerly unserviceable. In some universities, it was reported that equipment and facilities (a few of them) acquired are stacked in the offices of the Heads of Department, for lack of available space to keep them for use of both the lecturers and students.

Certainly, business education in such universities will continue, for sometime, to be theoretical only, relatively. Thus, the qualitative goal of products will be far from being met.

Existence of Minimum Standard

At the NCE and Diploma levels, there exist minimum standards developed by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), for the college of Education and Polytechnics respectively. However, this presenter is not aware of a minimum standard developed by the National Universities Commission for the university undergraduate business education programme.

What obtains is that the various universities offering the programme have various curricular and titles for the business education they run, e.g. B.Sc Business Education, B.Tech. Business Education and Bachelor of Business Education (B.B.Ed).

This certainly would militate efforts to satisfactorily achieve common standard and attainment of goals.

Efficiently Marketing the Business Education Programme

The business education programme needs to be efficiently and effectively marketed among other programmes offered in the universities if the programme is not just to maintain its present 'market share' of university students, but also to attract applicants to it, this increasing the number of students interested and want to apply to it for admission.

According to Olorunmaye (1992), influences drawing students from Business Studies include:

- 1) Some academically strong students perceive business studies as subjects for the academically weak, so do not identify with such areas of study.
- 2) Some parents strongly advise their children away from business studies because they, too, perceive it to be for the less academically talented.
- 3) Some students perceive business subjects as areas for the females, hence they opine they do not belong in those areas, for they are academically stronger.

The points above have been found to be fallacious (baseless) because business education has been established to be very cognitively and psychomotively demanding. Also, the fallacy in point three is cushioned on the fact that, both in the sciences and business studies, many females have equally excelled and many more are leaders in cognitively demanding careers.

There is the need, therefore, to efficiently market the business education product to such people, aiming at making them discard with such erroneous assumptions to begin to patronize the programme for the benefits they would derive from doing so.

According to Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong (2002):

A product is anything that can be offered to a market to satisfy a need or want. The concept of product is not limited to physical objects, such as cars, a television set or a bar of soap. In addition to tangible goods, products include services which are activities or benefits which are offered for sale that are essentially intangible and do not result in the ownership of anything tangible. According to Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong (2002): A product is anything that can be offered to a market to satisfy a need or want. The concept of product is not limited to physical objects, such as cars, a television set or a bar of soap. In addition to tangible goods, products include services which are activities or benefits which are offered for sale that are essentially intangible and do not result in the ownership of anything tangible.

Broadly defined, products also include other entities such as experiences, persons, places, organizations, information and ideas.

Efficient Service Marketing Strategies

According to Kotler, et al (2002), successful service companies focus their attention on both their employees and customers. They understand the service profit chain which links service firms' profits with employee and customer satisfaction. This chain consists of five links (strategies) identified below.

1) **Internal Service Quality**

This is concerned with superior employee selection and training, a quality work environment and strong support for those dealing with customers which give the company or organization a potent competitive advantage that leads to superior sales and profit performance.

2) **Satisfied and Productive Service Employees**

There is great need to have more satisfied, loyal and hardworking staff who show commitment to attainment of organizational goals which results from commensurate employee remuneration and motivation. This will always result in service readiness and availability.

3) **Greater Service Value**

There should be more effective and efficient customer value creation and service delivery which will result in high goodwill, and greater patronage by customers.

4) **Satisfied and Loyal Customers**

The company's performances should be such that satisfy its customers, ensuring their loyalty which will result in repeat purchase and referring other customers to the company. This will result in the company not only retaining its customers (market share), but attracting customers from other products.

5) **Healthy Service-Profit and Growth**

This will earn the company or organization recognition as a superior service firm which provides value services to customers, resulting in guaranteed profitability.

The points above are aptly captured in the purpose of the study, ranging from qualification and number of staff (teachers of business education, conditions of service of the personnel, whether the conditions are motivative enough to elicit commitment of staff), to quality performance of business education products to attract new entrants.

On measurement of service quality, Kotler, et al (2002) observed: To measure service quality, the provider has to determine how customers of the service perceive quality. Studies suggest that customer assessments of service quality are the result of a comparison of what they expect with what they experience. Any mismatch between the two is a 'quality gap'. The quality manager's goal is, therefore, to narrow the quality gap, taking into consideration that what is being measured is perceived quality, which is always a judgment by the customer.

To improve quality, service marketers have to identify;

- i) the key determinants of service quality (the key criteria customers use to judge quality);
- ii) what target customers' expectations are; and
- iii) how customers rate the firm's service in relation to these criteria against what they expected.

By focusing on the dimensions that are important to customers, the service firm can ensure that customers' expectations are fully met, and can be guaranteed future patronage.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the picture of business education presented above, though efforts have been made tremendously by government and other parties concerned to deliver qualitative business education, more efforts have to be made to achieve desired objectives.

Recommendations

In the bid to attain greater heights in achieving delivery of quality business education to the teeming youths, adoption of the following strategies is recommended.

- 1) The practice, by some universities, of admitting students with deficiencies in favour of the quota system should be discouraged, especially since such students exhibit difficulty in passing or completing the programme satisfactorily. Also, adoption of the recommendation would remove the ground on which those who presume themselves “academically talented” base their decisions to refuse applying to business education.
- 2) According to Ogonnaya (2003), the efficiency and effectiveness of Higher/Professional Education depends largely on the quantity and quality of the teaching workforce. The universities that offer the business education programme should, in the interest of quality, reduce the workload of the few lecturers (for efficiency) by employing more qualified lecturers, and pay them reasonable salaries to curb “brain-drain”. Dependence on part-time lecturers should be discouraged because commitment of such part-timers would be more to their primary employments.
- 3) To produce currently qualitative business educators, the universities offering the programme should equip the course adequately with current items and facilities, especially modern computers and other office equipment necessary for acquiring the practical skills. Where there are some items of equipment stacked away from use, due to lack of space, efforts should be made to gain necessary space to begin to use the items for the purposes of their acquisition.
- 4) According to Obagah (2001), today’s information dissemination has turned the world into a global village. Advancement in the areas of science and technology is on the increase, such that many teaching/learning organizations not fast enough are now at the backyards of those learning and keeping pace with new inventions and innovations. The universities offering the business education programme should embrace modernity by making the programme ICT compliant.
- 5) Discussing standard of attainment nationally, there should, first, be the standard set by a relevant and responsible body, against which achievements can be measured. The NUC is, therefore, in spite of provision of the NPE for universities to decide the content of their courses, design a common minimum standard for the undergraduate business education programme in favour of standard enforcement nationally.
- 6) Government should, as a matter of priority, continue to increase funding to higher education, as majority of the university administrators blame their inability to recruit more qualified staff and acquisition of relevant equipment on lack of funds from the government. Also, the universities should source additional funds for necessary projects, in areas other than government, to supplement government efforts.

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