

Business Education and the Mirage of Career Opportunities in Public and Private Sectors

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the current trend in business education and the mirage of career opportunities. The paper discussed the concept of business education, the goals of business education, the concept of career opportunities, business education and career opportunities in the public and private sectors and problems facing business education. Conclusion was drawn and recommendations made among others are that, government should stop paying lip service to the development of business education, a vocational guidance programme should be introduced at the secondary school level to enable students make a realistic choice of career.

Introduction

The current Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) as a subject which Business Education belongs in the Nigerian educational system is a relatively recent programme. Though Vocational and Technical practices are as old as man himself. Even though, Vocational and Technical Education in schools are recent, it began about ten decades ago in Nigeria, and it has received acceptance as discipline of strategic importance in the country, and consequently has grown in leaps and bounds. This is in terms of staff and student members, programme relevance and programme usefulness to the growth and development of the individuals and the nation at large.

The whole world is presently faced with information revolution through automation, within the next ten years, automation networks would permeate the work place and technology would change the face of office practice and the role of secretaries. Presently, automation is gradually taking over all manually operated process of office activities and this is forcing many secretaries to update their knowledge and cope with the new roles and challenge of automation. It is pertinent therefore to ask a question, what are the opportunities left for the graduate of Business Education in terms of job placement in the 'face' of the present technological revolution?

Vocational education can be defined as training or retraining experiences, which are designed to fit the individuals for gainful employment in recognized occupations.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004) National Policy on Education) stated that Vocational Education is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related science and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. It is a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work. Also, FRN (2004) highlighted the following goals for vocational and technical education in Nigeria:

- a) Providing trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels.
- b) Providing the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
- c) Giving training and imparting the necessary skills to individuals who shall be self- reliant economically.

Based on the above goals, certain curriculums were put in place which will enable trainees on completion of vocational education programmes to have the following options:

- i. Secure employment after acquiring employable skills.
- ii. Set up their own business and become self-employed and be able to employ others, etc.

Business education, as a component of Vocational Education, has the sole aim of preparing students adequately for the world of work. This concept has received wide attention all over the world. Business education has been variously defined in different ways. However, there is a general consensus that it is a body of knowledge that prepares both the mind and the body for the world of work.

It is pertinent to mention that business educators must anticipate the needs of business community and cater for these needs by providing programmes that will enable the students acquire appropriate skills that will enable them to perform and function efficiently in tomorrow's business environment. As indicated earlier, business activities are geared towards changes in the world and with the present computer revolution which is revolutionising the way companies in both public and private organisations operates today has informed our educational planners to include computer education as part of business education curriculum.

Goals of Business Education

Fundamentally, business principle is a mental process of making judgment of choices in exchange of values based on money concept. It is important to know the techniques of business, such as shorthand, typewriting, bookkeeping, selling, etc. But to know them merely as technique is not education but being able to put them into use for personal and societal satisfaction is very essential.

From the forgoing statement, it can be concluded that the goal of Business education is education for self-reliance. Business Education therefore has a vital role today in greater promotion of employment in the economy of any nation (Osuala, 1996). This means that the products of business education do not have to wait for anybody to generate employment for them because they could easily be self-employment. They should be able to establish small scale businesses on their own because they have acquired enough skills in the areas of office education, marketing and accounting which are essential tools in business management. Though the major problem in this area is capital which has been mentioned earlier as the handicap of business education product.

Nichol (1992) stressed that many professionally trained teachers of business education might find other jobs other than teaching due to one influence or the other because they have been completely trained to take up other jobs other than teaching. They would not have much problems in shifting to alternative jobs.

Business Education equips people with managerial skills to manage both human and material resources towards the attainment of a nation's objectives. Salau (1999) stated that Business Education plays a major role of the ultimate supplier of vocational and consumer education in a civilised society. It is an education that teaches and shows students and the public how to make a living and how to develop, plan and forecast for the future. It is also an education that teaches industrial enterprises practicum where students would be made to come face-to-face with the reality of life.

According to Aina (1990), Business Education has the following functional competency

- a. ability to select and apply successfully the required knowledge and technical skills to solving problems in one's area of work and life;
- b. possession of the required skills for a particular job;
- c. the technical know-how in the application of the knowledge acquired; and
- d. the drive and the industry to discharge successfully the functions of the occupational role that one may find himself/herself.

Business education is that part or aspect of the total educational programmes 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. If general education is thought of as the adjustment of the individual to his environment, Business Education must be thought of as the adjustment of the individual to his business environment. Business Education therefore could be seen as the education about business and education for business. This is perhaps why Osuala (1996) stated that, though business sectors are the engine for the national economic development, but business education is the fuel to the engine.

Stressing the importance of Business Education, Nanassy, Malsbary and Tonne (1977) in Salau (1999) maintained that, to be economically literate and informed citizens, wise consumers and competent workers, each person must have some understanding of the world of business and how it functions. Everybody must possess at least minimum knowledge, skills and understanding with which to make contributions to the world of work. Business Education plays a very important part in providing students. at all levels with the ability to function effectively in the business world whether public or private sectors.

Business Education and Career Opportunities

Longman (1982) in Atueyi (1999) defined career as a field of employment in which one expects to remain especially in such a field which requires special skills, qualifications and training. It is used to describe an engagement in an occupation which offers a long term series of opportunities for advancement in some specified organisation or business.

Career opportunities in both public and private sectors for business education graduates can simply be referred to as an identified job opportunities at a particular period. As stated earlier, Business Education is a vocational programme that provides training that leads to so many areas of specialisation that are required for harmonious growth in the economy of any nation. Office education is a vocational programme for office career, marketing and distributive is a programme for marketing career, accounting education programme is a vocational programme for accounting educators and accountancy as a career just to mention but a few. In fact, Atueyi (1995) maintained that, career opportunities for secretarial staff in today's world are unlimited.

Osuala (1996) maintained that, while office education is a vocational programme for office career, general business education provides information and competencies needed for managing and using business. A well trained business education graduate are not only for teaching profession but can perform in all sectors as: Managers, Managing Directors and Chief Executives, Public

Relation Officers, Confidential Secretaries, Data entry operators, System Analysts and Designers, Accountants, Marketing managers, Trainee and human resources officers, Supervisors, System Administrators, Customer Service Representatives, Staff Analysts, Programme and Media librarian, Liaison officer, budget and planning officer. All the aforementioned are among many career opportunities for graduates of business education in the public and services. Business education no doubt has prepared the graduates of the programme and equipped them with the necessary skills that will make them excel in each of the careers listed above.

It is important however to note that we are presently in information technology era and many things are bound to change because the only thing that is permanent is change. Unfortunately, people fear and resist changes. But this is real, we are in the era of paperless automated society, perhaps that is why Nwakolo (1995) envisaged that this millennium age will be associated with problems, Bailey (1996) and Osuala (1996) in Atueyi (1999) shared the view of Nwakolo (1995) when they enumerated some of the problems as: the fear of moving from traditional environment to automated environment, change of duties, change of layout of accustomed environment, increased job responsibilities and host of others too numerous to mention.

Good as the prospects of job for products of Business Education may be presently, there is a mirage problems facing as business education graduates particularly from Colleges of Education finding it difficult to secure job in the teaching profession. This might be due to poor curriculum planning. By the contents of the Nation's policy on Education , Colleges of Education graduates are suppose to teach at the primary school level of education but the curriculum of education at that level has not made any provision for any business subject to be taught to pupils in the primary school. Hence, the general complaint by the State Primary Education Board (SPEB) that they is no place for business education graduates. In the banking and other sectors, preferences are often given to Ordinary National Diploma (OND) holders over the NCE holder counterparts. The implication of this is that majority of the NCE Business Education graduates ended up being jobless some out of frustrations became pump attendant at the petrol stations or a roadside hawker. Some serve as office boy waiters at the bar just to mention but a few, it is even saddened to see an NCE business education graduate when she could not find job going back to school of nursing to start afresh. Some ended up obtaining another Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) to start all over again at 100 level in the Universities.

Problems facing Business Education

Nwankolo (1990) and Salau (1999) have a common position on the death of well-trained business educators at all levels and general apathy to vocational education in Nigeria. One may agree with these authors but Aina (1990) added that another serious problem is that, too many people are ignorant of business education and its subject contents.

A new dimension has been added recently when even some academics are confused about the subject contents and areas of specialisation in business education as a course. From time immemorial and all over the world, even as contained in the various Nigerian JAMB brochures and National Policy on Education (2004), Business Education is made up of the following major areas where students can specialise. Accounting Education, Marketing and Distributive Education, Management, Cooperative Education and Secretarial Education while Economics and Commerce are feeder subjects to Business education. Another misconception is to see Business Education as Business Studies. Business study is just a subject thought to students at the junior secondary level as outlined in the National Policy on Education (2004).

From all the foregoing stated problems it could be seen that there have been lots of misconceptions about the subject, business education and the doubts in various minds about the performance of the products and career making in both public and private sectors of the economy.

Salau (1997) opined that Vocational and Technical Education has not been taken care of as expected in Nigeria. He stressed that people in the country have been paying lip services to it. If roadside trainers could make do with age-worn typewriters to train “secretaries” and majority of the nation's polytechnics, universities and Colleges of Education do not even have laboratory to train people for this essential service and where there are some, the equipment are outdated. The country is not yet on the right part to economic and technological development that are expected to launch country to be among the 20 developed economy in year 2020 as advocated by President Umar Musa Yar'Adua's Administration.

Conclusion

Business Education has been discussed as a sub-set of vocational education, which no doubt plays major roles in the economic and social development of any society. Unfortunately, this type of education has not been accorded the right recognition in the Nigerian society. It is still being regarded as education that is meant for dropouts. But to be economically literate and informed citizens, wise consumers and competent workers, each person must have some understanding of the world of business and how it functions which business education provides.

To improve the quality of business education and improve the quality of business education graduates in order to generate self-employment, the common core experience should provide the following for all students there should be:

- Individual and group counseling to clarify work values and develop copying and planning skills,
- a career information centre that will provide job hunting skills, interviewing skills, educational and training opportunities and financial aid possibilities;
- training, goal setting and decision-making for the selection of tentative career paths;
- occupation/career information through community linkages such as field trips, speakers, shadowing experiences and internships;
- a vocational guidance programme to be introduced in secondary school so as to enable students make a realistic choice of career rather than of infatuated choice of career; and
- loan from the NDE programme to be at the reach of every student of business education who may need such loan for his/her initial capital.
- Furthermore Business education students should be exposed to the various stress available at both public and private sectors while in the school. This will make the students appreciate the courses they are undergoing.

The introduction of entrepreneurship into the syllabus of NCE by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) particularly for the School of Vocational and Technical Education is a welcome development. But the curriculum should be further expanded to accommodate the practical aspects of entrepreneurship. The National Universities Commission (NUC) should equally introduce Industrial Enterprises practicum in the syllabus for the Universities. The small business management that is indeed in the present syllabus has not achieved much. Industrial Enterprises practicum will expose students to various careers in their discipline and students would be made to role play and act in each career in their capacity as occupiers of their positions, whether in the public or private sector. No doubt, this will be a morale booster because things learnt through practical experience are better learnt and easily remembered.

Finally, it is pertinent to state here that no country can develop economically, socially or technologically without sound Vocational Technical Education, which business education is a subset. Government at various levels should not be paying lip services to the development of vocational education and ensure that business education is accorded the right recognition.

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