
Revamping the Business Education Programme at the Secondary Education Level

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Abstract

The article focuses on the concepts of business studies and business subjects as components of business education programme of secondary education. It highlights the relevance of business education to the students, the society and the nation's economy. It also lays emphasis on the need for institutions of learning to teach employability skills to students before they enter into the world of work. It discusses the factors militating against business education at the secondary education level. It concludes by proffering practical solutions to the problems identified, and suggests ways and means the secondary school business education graduates can be gainfully employed. It also suggests that the present business education curriculum should be expanded to include office technology and computer programme instruction in view of the changing nature of today's employment in Nigeria.

Introduction

Prior to the present National Policy on Education in Nigeria (FRN, 2004) which provides for the 6-3-3-4 system of education, there have been criticisms and counter-criticisms about Nigerian education and the training system which were placed under two major categories. In the first place, the old system of 6-5-2-3 was said to have collapsed, or at best described as deficient because it was not geared effectively enough to the realities and needs of the labour market, that is, it was not adequately employment-oriented. Secondly, that there was insufficient application of the system's facilities and manpower towards the solution of the country's pressing development problem, that is, it was not adequately service-oriented (Esene, 2004). This led to the view expressed by Oladebo (1990) when he stated that "the system of education produced "misfits", who look for public jobs which were not available in required numbers. The system was unable to produce sufficient skilled persons to meet the needs of the economy.

However, the 1977 National Policy on Education laid emphasis in many fields including business education subjects so that the students can be adequately equipped

with marketable, saleable, and knowledge required for entry-level employment. In order to meet the needs of the society, the National Policy on Education de-emphasizes our liberal education system for the utilitarian type of education. In recognition of this, business education programme was incorporated into our educational system right from the junior secondary school level for a gradual skill development and competency.

For more than two decades after independence, Nigeria operated a secondary school curriculum that was similar to a large extent, to that existing under colonial rule. However, in 1977, National Policy on Education was promulgated which stated that the existing five years divided into two sections: a three-year junior secondary school (J.S.S.). The junior secondary schools started operation in September, 1982 and the senior secondary schools went into operation in September, 1985.

Remarkably, the introduction of the JSS in Nigeria was aimed principally at providing pupils with the training that will make them ready for the world of work as well as to provide opportunities for further education. In order to make the pupils well prepared for the world of work, the curriculum comprised both pre-vocational and academic

National Policy on Education and Secondary Education

Section 5, sub-section 20 of the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) defined secondary education as the education children receive after primary education and before the tertiary stage. The broad goals of secondary education shall be to prepare the individual for (i) useful living within the society; and (ii) to provide opportunities for higher education programme. In specific terms, secondary education, according to the policy document shall: (a) provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background; (b) offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles; (c) provide trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades; (d) develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world cultural heritage (e) inspire its students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence; (f) foster national unity with an emphasis on the communities that unite us in our diversity; (g) raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens; and (h) provide technical knowledge and vocational skills for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development .

For all purposes and intents the National Policy on Education is intended to direct schooling to reflect individual and national survival. The philosophy, aims and objectives of the policy were designed to enhance the status of the individual in the society, as well as raise the level of national consciousness, and train the youths for living.

Until 1982, there was no curriculum for business studies in the secondary schools. The development of vocational business studies curriculum was therefore to fill the gap which exists in the training of youths for career.

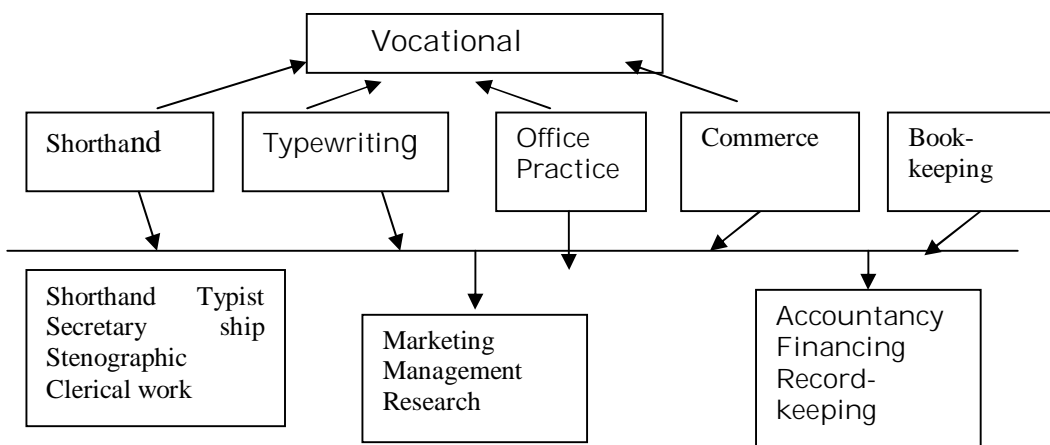
Ehiametalor (1990) remarks that the curriculum on vocational business studies was intended to fulfill the above objectives. That is, preparing students for the world of work through organized exposure to practical experience within the learning environment. The author also posits that a vocational business study is a new concept in the Nigerian school curriculum. Its inclusion resulted from the development of the National Policy on Education, which for the first time in the history of Education in Nigeria justified the need for vocational courses in the junior and senior secondary schools, with the aim of orienting the secondary school students towards careers in various industrial sectors in the society. The vocational business studies curriculum was designed to accomplish three fundamental purposes (i) the mobilization of the national resources; (ii) meeting the need of the national and the individual in the society; and (iii) to developing manpower for the industrial concerns.

There is no doubt that through the vocational business studies curriculum, we can develop the interest of junior secondary school children in various areas of economic activity and to enable them to decide on a profession or career options available in the office.

Secondary School Business Studies Curriculum

The business studies curriculum is like any other subject curriculum except that it is practical oriented. The junior secondary school curriculum is a practical one because the pupils enrolled in any of its five combination of curricular options (office practice, book-keeping, shorthand, typewriting and commerce) are expected to acquire some skill. These five subjects are regarded as the necessary pre-vocational course that would lead to career options in the middle and higher education levels. In essence, these subjects are to metamorphose into career options as depicted in the diagram below.

Table1: Possible Vocational Career Options in the Business Studies Curriculum



Source: Business and Economics Education: Principles and Methods by E.T Ehiametalor, 1990, 45.

The information in Table 1 shows us that the business studies curriculum offered at the junior secondary school level is designed solely to introduce the pupil to the basic or fundamental principle of business administration. It is pre-vocational because, at that level, the intention of the curriculum planners is the arousing of interest and creating awareness of the various career options available in the office. Against this background a curriculum structure has been worked out for use in the JSS. See table 2.

Table 2: Junior Secondary School Curriculum

Group A Core	Group B- Pre-Vocational Electives	Group C. Non-pre- vocational Electives
English	Agriculture	Religious Knowledge
French	Business Studies	Physical and Health Education
Mathematics	Home Economic	Arabic
Language of Environment to be taught as LI	Local Craft	
One major Nigerian Language other than that of the environment	Computer Education	
Integrated Science Social Studies and	Fine Arts	
	Music	
Citizenship Education		
Introductory Technology		

Source: National Policy on Education FRN 2004: 21 –22

Conversely, the senior secondary school shall be comprehensive with a core-curriculum designed to broaden pupils’ knowledge and out-look. To this end, every student shall take all the six core subjects in group A and a minimum of one (1) and a maximum of two (2) from the list of elective subjects in groups B and C to give a minimum of seven (7) and maximum of eight (8) subjects. One of the three elective subjects may be dropped in the last year of senior secondary school course.

The composition, organization and management of the senior secondary school curriculum structure is reflected in Table 3

Table 3: Organization of the Senior Secondary School Curriculum

Group A – Core	Group B – Vocational Electives	Group C – Non- Vocational Electives
English Language,	Agriculture	-Biology
Mathematics	Applied Electricity	-Chemistry
A major Nigeria	Auto-Mechanics	Physics
Language	Book-keeping and	Further Mathematics

	Accounting	
One of Biology, or Chemistry,		French
	Building Construction	Health Education
Physics or Health Science	Commerce	Physical Education
	Computer Education	Literature–in-English
One of Literature-in-English, History,	Electronics	History
Geography or Religious Studies	Clothing and Textiles	Geography
	Food and Nutrition	Bible Knowledge
A Vocational Subject	Home Management	Islamic Studies
	Metal Work	Arabic
	Technical Drawing	Government
		Economics
	Woodwork	Any Nigerian Language that has Orthography and Literature, etc
	Shorthand	
	Typewriting	
	Fine Art	
	Music	

Source: National Policy on Education by FRN, 2004: 21-22

The composition and organization of both the junior and senior secondary school curriculum shows that we do not offer business educational programmes at the secondary education level. As at now, the pre-vocational studies, (called integrated approach) comprising office practice, book-keeping, typewriting, shorthand, and commerce are offered and taught in the junior secondary school, while at the senior secondary school level, typewriting, shorthand, commerce, book-keeping and accounting and economics are offered. Each of these subjects is studied separately and has its own specific objectives. What can safely be said and documented in this paper is that business studies and business subjects are programmes for the junior and senior secondary school students, and that business studies and business subjects are called business education offered at the tertiary educational institutions for vocational business education majors.

Ekpenyong (1993) observed that the secondary school curriculum is both academic and vocational because it included both general and vocational course. He was therefore of the view that business subjects offered in Nigeria secondary schools are not adequate to (a) prepare students for further studies in business studies, and (b) provide orientation of basic office skills with which to start a life of work for those who may not go further. Osuala (2004) advocated the urgent need in the Nigerian education system to integrate general business subjects fully into the secondary school curriculum. His reason was that it will serve as a capstone course for the field of

business subjects to cater for the majors and non-majors. Furthermore, he stated that every Nigerian student should develop consumer business and socio-economic competencies. General business therefore needs to be taught in all Nigerian secondary schools. To answer the problem of unemployment in secondary school leavers, Nigerian secondary school, according to Osuala should be sufficiently comprehensive in content and scope. Incorporating the normal three academic wings – grammar, technical and business. The stress here is that the complexities of modern societies demand a type of education that can equip the individual with knowledge, skills and competencies that can make students to be highly functional and marketable in the society. On his part, Nwaokolo (1990) suggested the inclusion of basic business in place of commerce at the JSS level. The reason, according to him, was that basic business incorporates all the features of commerce and also include ethical, cultural and social education as they affect business. He further asserted that basic business incorporates all the rudiments of business subjects with the necessary background to different specialization areas of business subjects.

Possession of Entry-Level Employment Skills

Communication, Mathematics and Science have been identified as the three basic academic skills required of secondary school students. However, entry into the job market requires a fourth set of skill as well as the fifth skill, both comprising job-specifics of vocational skills demanded by the occupation. The fourth set requires vocational skills which comprises of skills and competencies (employable skills), while the fifth skill calls for the acquisition of job performance skill which requires little or no supervision on the part of the employees.

Studies by Barton and Kirech (1990) showed that employers want schools to take more responsibility for students-employability skill development. In order to prepare the students adequately for the world of work, schools should therefore strength their curricula to incorporate general and specific skills. In doing so, the employers will enjoy the services of the secondary school students who are potential employees.

Archer (2001) posited that entry-employment skills are the necessary knowledge, competencies and skills needed by secondary school students to perform basic and routine office duties. Arukwe (1990) noted that office skills are those abilities and competencies that enable employees perform office duties effectively and help job seekers to be easily employable in the office as office workers. Weaver (2005) noted that the secondary school students should be trained in the area of office technology so that they can be equipped with the right and acceptable skills before facing the challenges in the world of work. Corroborating this view, Lankard (2007) stated that many employees believe that employability skills must be acquired by potential workers to enable them gain entry-level employment, keep and retain jobs. Okwuanaso (1992) maintained that the employer expects the new office skilled workers to bring to the office or to their small business proficiency skills that are traditionally pre-requisites for employment. According to him, employers look for graduates who are

competent, noting that there is no acceptable substitute for proficiency as far as job-entry requirements of secondary school students is concerned.

Ehiamletalor (1990) concluded that the business subjects curriculum permits the business subjects which will inevitably lead to entry-level employment as secretary, stenographer, shorthand-typist, proof-reader, machine operator, computer operator, filing clerk, salesman, receptionist, accounting clerk, bank clerk, bank teller, record keeper, insurance agent, and so on. Okorie (2001) itemized the following as the reasons for studying business education at the secondary school level: (a) It assists in career selection,. (b) It gives opportunities for self-employment; (c) It tackles the problems of the society; (d) It leads to better consumer decisions and judgments; and (e) It is one of the most relevant studies in contemporary society.

The rapid growth and development of organizations have necessitated the need for workers to acquire certain skills and competencies that will make them contribute meaningfully and effectively to those organizations. Esene (2001) listed personal image, attitudes, habits, behaviour, techniques of communication, problem-solving, decision-making and the ability to manage and organize are employability skills needed by employers. Taiwo (1985) posited that if the secondary school students cannot secure employment after six years of secondary education nor be admitted into higher institutions of learning, then there is the need for a re-examination of the objectives of the secondary school education in order to make it more relevant and meaningful to the school graduates and to society which is the immediate consumer of the services of the secondary school products.

Toby (1997) noted that the goal of employability is that all persons who are in school and who do not have unpremeditated handicaps that preclude them from working have been prepared for employment. The effect of this goal is, according to him, to minimize the number of percentage of the population of working age who are not in school and who are not able to participate in society as productive workers, whether in paid or unpaid employment. Employability, according to Toby, has four major dimensions, which include: 1. the development of competencies in the basic learning skills; 2. the development of competencies relating to acquiring and processing information and making decisions about careers; 3. the development of competencies pertaining to roles, knowledge and skills require for entry into a job; and 4. the development of attitudes, values and habits which are essential to effective participation in the work of the nation.

A study by Esene (1998) to determine factors responsible for the unemployment of secondary school youths in Nigeria revealed the following as the major factors:

1. Expansion of education and the subsequent over supply of labour.
2. Geographical immobility of labour in the country,
3. Inadequate job opportunities,
4. Lack of labour market information,
5. Lack of government machinery to place school leavers in jobs,

6. Unwillingness of the employers of labour to participate in the organization of the business/commercial schools,
7. Poor job performance of the graduates of such schools,
8. The preference employers have for job-seekers trained in the departmental schools and roadside centres.
9. Over-production of certain categories of school leavers, and
10. Refusal of employers to fill vacancies.

The study also revealed that the graduates of business/commercial schools were not employed months after their training. In deed, some had to wait 12 to 24 months; while others have to wait indefinitely.

These factors, though important, have often been over-looked by policy makers and educational planners. Business education programme for the secondary education is both for general education and vocational office education. In other words, it is education meant to prepare persons for the world of work, and the persons so trained are absorbed in the economy where they can help generate more economy, without which the educational process of business/commercial schools cannot be said to be completed. These factors are serious enough to be looked into for possible solutions.

The Way Forward

Teachers are at the core of educational programme implementation. They form the bedrock of the entire educational system. Similarly, Business Studies Teachers carry out directly the most important responsibilities of translating business studies curriculum into reality. However, the teachers we need for the implementation should be those who are knowledgeable in content and pedagogy. Instructional materials and equipment as prescribed by the Comparative Education Study and Adaptation Centre (CESAC) should be made available for use by the teachers and students in the teaching/learning situations. This will help to understand quickly and easily the essential skills and competencies needed to be inculcated in the students while in schools.

The business studies curriculum should include more business subjects where the students can acquire practical skills required for employment. As noted by Shyllon (2004), employers of labour are eager to employ workers who have received adequate training and are competent to execute their work with little or no supervision by the executive. To achieve this laudable goal of making secondary school business studies students competent, Moody (1983) posited that today's business curriculum must satisfy a number of pressing demands such as (i) the charge to provide basic skills education; (ii) the need to shift from a secretarial-related curriculum to management related curriculum; and (iii) the necessity to incorporate technology advancement into the curriculum through new courses and modification of existing courses; (iv) the desire to provide retraining, as well as initial training, to adults in the job market and to those struggling to find jobs; and (v) the need to introduce all students to practical economic and basic principles of free enterprise and entrepreneurship.

The important question is, how does the business studies teacher know the students' level of achievement in relation to the syllabus? This is where the continuous assessment comes in. The new system of education emphasizes among other things, continuous performance evaluation. Not all teachers and principals know what this means. As a result of the lack of sufficient awareness, re-education or training the teacher is likely to evaluate the students the same way he has always done it. In order to change his attitudes, he must be informed of the importance of continuous assessment as a monitoring device to detect student's problem areas so that he (student) could be helped through it.

Evaluation of Business Education Programme

The business education programme is new in the Nigerian school system when compared with other programmes before it. This is the more reason why its evaluation should be done progressively. However, when evaluation of performance is mentioned in schools, most staff members are somewhat worried that the authority is trying to be cynical. Their frame of interpretation is that such evaluation will be attached to promotions. The type of evaluation needed in a new programme such as the vocational business studies programme at the secondary education level should be to determine pupils progress in learning the material designed for the level. Essentially therefore, such evaluation is intended to help to:

- (a) determine educational needs and provide information for planning;
- (b) indicate instructional strengths and weaknesses;
- (c) to check on the suitability of programme in terms of (government) requirements;
- (d) to show the relationship between achievement and the system's stated goals
- (e) to provide data for public information.

The information provided by the evaluation will help in the revision of the programme to meet goals already established for it. The important thing is that both the administrators (principals) and teachers are helped to do their work better, since the evaluation is to help improve on efficiency.

Conclusion

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) which recommended the present 6-3-3-4 system of education is certainly an innovation on the 6-5-2-3 system of education. The introduction of business education programme at the secondary education level is a welcome and commendable efforts on the part of the federal government. However, as times are changing in favour of communication and information technology, the need to incorporate office automation into the secondary school business studies curriculum becomes obvious. The expansion in the business studies curriculum will help students acquire marketable and saleable skills and competencies which are required for entry-level employment. The acquisition of job

entry skills by students would have reduced to a minimum level by employers of labour who charge schools to take more responsibilities for students' employability skill development in their programme of instruction. Business education is of great importance to the people, the society, and the economy of the nation. Opportunities to earn a livelihood without preparation for an occupation are decreasing rapidly. Manual and skilled labour jobs in many instances are being replaced by technological procedures. The link between man and productive labour is education. Education makes individuals eligible for holding a job in a given fields of employment. In addition, the changing nature of today's employment picture is creating new changes and challenges for institutions of learning, employees and employers of labour.

Recommendations

Arising from the above discourse, it is recommended that the:

1. existing secondary school business studies curriculum should be expanded to include office technology and computer courses. The inclusion of more of such courses would help students acquire additional skills required to execute their work on employment with little or no supervision by superior officers
2. Business Studies Teachers with the relevant skills and pedagogy should be engaged in teaching and learning. These teachers, of course, should possess the relevant teaching qualifications to teach both the skills and non-skill business subjects.
3. the Ministry of Education should make funds available for the purchase of relevant instructional materials and equipment. The availability and their proper utilization would help students to acquire the needed knowledge and skills required for gainful employment.
4. secondary schools should establish cooperative societies to enable the students organize and run retail businesses. The establishment, operation and management of such school cooperative outfit will expose the students to actual work experience situation, particularly for future self-employment and self-reliance.

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