

RE-FOCUSING UNIVERSITY BUSINESS EDUCATION CURRICULUM TO EQUIP STUDENTS WITH SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES NEEDED FOR SUCCESS IN MODERN INDUSTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The need to ensure success of educational programmes makes curriculum reform a continuous process, in order to follow the changes in the society and the industry to meet the need of the people. Thus, refocusing the curriculum of Business Education becomes necessary and urgent in the light of the changing needs of the society. Therefore, there is need to reposition the present Business Education curriculum which is an integral part of TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) to facilitate needed inculcation of right skills and competencies for effective performance of students in line with technological advancement obtainable in modern industry. Modern industry is looking for knowledge-based workers instead of manual-based workers of the conventional industry. In light of the positive fronts in the industry, talent is becoming a top issue among executives. Not filling job openings and not having the right skills set in the workforce can negatively impact manufacturers in various ways, including not being able to meet growing customers' demand, the inability to respond to new market opportunities and failing to innovate. This paper x-rayed the present Nigeria Universities Business Education curriculum with the needs of 21st century industry and world in mind. It explores the view of different researchers on the concepts of business education, curriculum and industry; presented the philosophy, objectives and contents of the present curriculum; compared the programmes of some selected Nigerian universities with the NUC Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS); presented some skills needed by modern industry and how business education curriculum at university level could be enriched in line with what now operates in the technological age while concluding with useful recommendations among which greater emphases should be placed on computer and entrepreneurial education and a well coordinated Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES).

Keywords: Re-positioning, Business Education, Curriculum, Skills and Competencies, Industry.

Introduction

We are living in an age of knowledge, an age of where education or human capital holds the key to our successes as a people and as a nation. Only education, particularly the type of quality education produced in good universities, can instigate rapid social, economic, scientific and technological changes needed to guarantee our march to the future with pride and confidence, education still remains most potent weapon for injecting hope in our youths and ability to negotiate better quality of life for our people. There is no alternative to education as it is the only priceless and timeless gift that could be offered to any child and there is no investment too much in the education of a child.

Societal dynamics have made changes inevitable. Changes do not just occur unless some new order is appearing to replace the old in a situation where man stands to gain and if the change is assured can lead to development.

Changes, however, do not normally come about just because some people decide they want a change. There must be an event which informs those in charge of education that present system is either not achieving or is incapable of enabling the achievement of development goals. Once that decision is made, what remains is the attempt to carefully identify not only why the old system can no longer be continued in its present form, but also how to provide a more acceptable alternative in which innovations and educational reforms are necessary as education is a dynamic process (Mustapha, 2008). Educational reform is a plan, programme, or movement, which attempts to bring about a systematic change in educational theory or practice across a community or society.

Conceptual Issues

A proper look at the extent of fulfillment of the philosophy and objectives of any academic programme cannot be done without taking a hard look at the curriculum and Business Education is not an exception.

Curriculum

Curriculum has no generally acceptable definition. It, however, has its origin in the Latin word *currus* which means a race course which people run through to reach a goal. When applied to education, it is seen as ground which learners and teachers cover in order to reach a goal or simply as planned experiences offered to a learner for a specified period under the guidance of an institution (Offorma, 2002; Ohiwerei and Azihi, 2010). Abubakar (2005) sees curriculum as the overall rationale for the educational programme of an institution which influence the total experience of a student. He also sees it as the entire body of course offered by a school including the selection, organization and refinement of knowledge, understanding attitudes, skills, values and behaviour to be transmitted to the students.

Business Education

Popham, (1975) and Obi, (2012), stated that the term Business Education has been viewed differently by scholars. A general accepted definition as be difficult to arrive at because research and theoretical formulations have continued to grapple with the problem, providing as many definitions as there are experts. Some schools of thought

believe that business education is a programme of study to produce teachers for secondary and post-secondary schools. Hence the view Business Education as education for business teachers – a specialized the professional arm of the technical and science education focused at preparing and equipping those to impart business skills and competences to students and other business trainees. Another school of thought views the concept of Business Education as education for business. Supporting this view, Sani, (2015) asserts that Business Education as an aspect of educational programme which prepares students for careers in business. He further said that it is education needed to teach people business, education needed to handle personal affairs and education needed about business in order to be good citizens for the society. To Okoli (2010), business education is an important part of the general education which emphasizes on skills and competencies acquisition for use in offices and business related occupations.

Similarly, Nwanewezi (2010) described business education as encompassing education for office occupation, business teaching, business administration and economic understanding. Abdulkadir (2011) noted that one remarkable important characteristic of business education programme is that, its products can function independently as self-employed and employers of labour. To this end, the tenet of business education embraces basic education for teaching career, entrepreneurship, business understanding, office environment and vocational practices. Obi, 2005 defined business education as a type of training which helps the students to achieve all the aims of education at any level of learning but has as its primarily aim the preparation of students for a business career or enable those that that career become more efficient and to advance to higher business position.

Osuala, (2004), gave a somewhat acceptable definition of business education as a programme of instruction which consists of two parts (1) Office education – a vocational programme of office careers through initial, refresher and upgrading education and (2) General business education – a programme to provide students with information and competencies which are needed by all in managing personal business affairs and in using the services of business.

Business education plays a significant role in Nigeria's economic growth and development. It improves personal qualities and builds the attitudes of individuals that are necessary for adjustment to personal employment situations, and also provides knowledge, skills and competences for individuals to function well in office occupation and create job for themselves and others (Amoor and Udoh 2008). It could be deduced from the definitions above that Business Education is an education for and about business. In this 21st century, it combines both theoretical and practical knowledge. In the same vein, it exposes the recipient to the economic system of his country and equips him with lifelong skills that would enable him to make reasonable judgment as a producer, employee or consumer of goods and services. Business education deals with empowerment necessary to meet business challenges in a dynamic business world or society. It offers recipients the ability to cope with emerging changes in education and in business where the person is expected to manifest all the skills acquired while in training. Therefore, business education is planned for training and developing recipients to expose them in the field of business, and as a professional, consequently, expanding the way for imparting competences for economic development of the society which has gone virtually digital and global (Wordpress.com 2018).

Finally, Aliyu (2013) stated that the purpose of Business education stresses the need for:

- a. Specialized instruction to prepare students for career in business.
- b. Fundamental instruction to help students assume their economic roles as consumers, workers and citizens.
- c. Background instruction to assist students in preparing for professional careers requiring advanced study.

Skill and Competency

A skill is the ability to carry out a task with determined result often within a given amount of time, energy or both. Skill is an ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic and sustained effort to smoothly and adaptively carry out complex activities or jobs (Obi, 2012). Competencies refer to skills or knowledge that leads to superior performance. It is a measurable skills, abilities and personality traits that identify successful employees against defined roles within an organization Abdulkarim (2016). A competency is more than just knowledge and skills. (google.com) Competency is defined as the individual's ability to use, apply and demonstrate a group of related awareness, knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to perform tasks and duties successfully and which can be measured against well-accepted standards (levels) required in employment as well as assessed against provided evidences at work location (Obi, 2005). The competency affects both individual's job responsibility and performance on the job and usually fall into two categories, namely technical and behavioral.

Industry

An industry is a group of manufacturers or businesses that produce a particular kind of goods or services. It is the production of goods or related services within an economy. There are four types of industry namely: primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary. Primary industry involves getting raw materials e.g. mining, farming and fishing. Secondary industry involves manufacturing e.g. making car and steel, quaternary industry involves research and development industry e.g. IT (learnontheinternet.co.uk).

Philosophy, Objectives and Contents of Nigeria Universities Business Education Curriculum

According to the National Universities Commission (NUC) Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS), the philosophy, objective and contents of Bachelor Degree in Business Education - B.Sc (Ed.) in Business Education programme are as presented below.

The Philosophy: The philosophy aims at a complete development of the individual student teachers to make them effect business teachers, and high caliber professionals in business establishments.

The Objectives: Based on the philosophy, the following objective shall be achieved to:

- Assist the education sector by producing a committed and efficient breed of business education teachers for the junior and senior sections of the Nigerian Secondary Schools.

- Produce manpower endowed with analytical and critical knowledge of the major factors in contemporary business world to influence the development of a virile economy.
- Provide a course of instruction and all necessary facilities and exposure for the pursuit and acquisition of learning and knowledge for services to humanity.
- Provide adequate educational foundation for interested graduates to pursue higher degree on business education or other relevant areas in education.

The Course Contents: The five-year course contents are presented as appendix I.

Comparing the Philosophy of some selected Universities in Southern Nigeria with NUC's

The universities did not adopt different philosophies. University of Nigeria and Nnamdi Azikiwe University had theirs subsumed in the philosophies of their Vocational Teacher Education Departments. By implication, they have the NUC's in focus. However, Delta State University and Ambose Ali University had the same philosophy thus, to meet the requirements of the changing office environment and the call by the Government of Nigeria for institutions to include computer literacy in their programmes.

Comparing Programme Objectives of some selected Universities in Southern Nigeria with NUC's

NUC	UNN	UNIZIK	ASUU	DELSU	AAU
1. Assist the education sector by producing a committed and efficient breed of business education teachers for the junior and senior sections of the Nigerian Secondary Schools. 2. Produce manpower endowed with analytical and critical knowledge of the major factors in contemporary business world to influence the development of a virile economy. 3. Provide a course of instruction and all necessary facilities and exposure for the pursuit and acquisition of learning and knowledge for services of humanity. 4. Provide adequate educational foundation for interested graduates to pursue higher degree in business education.	(Subsumed in the broader objectives of Vocational Teacher Education) <i>Therefore, presumed to have also implicitly adopted NUC's</i>	(Subsumed in the broader objectives of Vocational Education) <i>Therefore, presumed to have also implicitly adopted NUC's</i>	Same with NUC's	To give the students the skills of: 1. Planning; 2. Organizing; 3. Written communication; 4. Records management Leadership; 5. Controlling office operations.	(Same as those of DELSU)

Key: UNN (University of Nigeria, Nsukka), UNIZIK (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka), ASUU (Anambra State University, Uli), DELSU (Delta State University, Abraka), AAU (Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma).

Source: Business Education Student Handbooks of the 5 Universities.

As can be expected, some differences exist in the programmes of selected universities and the NUC curriculum as presented in the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (BMAS). This has to be so because each University, naturally, has the

autonomy and leverage to expand and update its programme provided that the BMAS of the regulatory body is not compromised in the process.

However, there are differences and dissonance in the curriculum as some universities above adopted different philosophies and objectives (e.g. Ambrose Ali University has separate philosophy and objectives for their options in Accounting and Secretarial/Office Management) while some maintained the general philosophy objectives of the NUC. Again, there are variations in the courses offered and some run the courses (broad-base) for all students from 100 to 400 levels (e.g. University of Nigeria and Ambrose Ali University) while some run 100 to 200 levels for all and 300 to 400 specialization (e.g. Delta State University and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka).

It was observed that some of the universities, e.g. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, has options in Accounting, Office Technology/Management, Commerce and Cooperative; Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma has four options in Accounting, Secretarial Technology, Management and Computer Education respectively.

A Critical Look at the Curriculum against the philosophy and Objectives

A critical look at the curriculum contents against the philosophy and objectives revealed some inadequacies. This means that the curriculum (NUC BMAS and the individual universities) are not achieving the set objectives. For instance, the philosophy aims at a complete development of the individual student teacher to make them effective business teachers and high caliber professionals in business establishments. It is difficult to develop student teachers and make them effective and high caliber professionals with curriculum that has become almost obsolete. Okoye (1991) in Ohiwerei and Azih (2010), the process of curriculum development and planning is a continuous one. It does not end once and for all the time. Uwaifo (2006) equally pointed out that a close look at the Vocational and Technical Education curriculum generally reveals some problems that border on inadequate course contents. The curriculum last reviewed in 2007 has lasted for eleven years. In tandem, the students' handbooks in the different universities have also lasted for more than fifteen years. This is in utter neglect of the speed with which the business world has been moving in this era of innovation, globalization, free market and knowledge-based economy.

Part of the objective invades to produce manpower endowed with analytical and critical knowledge of the major factors in contemporary business world to influence the development of a virile economy; and to provide a course of instruction ad all necessary facilities and exposure for the acquisition of learning and knowledge for services to humanity. It is doubtful whether an inadequate and obsolete curriculum can continue to produce manpower with critical and analytical knowledge in the contemporary business and industrial world. It is equally not feasible to achieve these with obsolete facilities.

Skills for the Modern Industries

According to Filonia, (2018), the ten top 21st century skills have been listed as:

- Adaptability
- Analysis/problem-solving mindset
- Collaboration/team work
- Communication

- Digital fluency
- Entrepreneurial mindset,
- Empathy
- Resilience
- Self-awareness and
- Social/diversity awareness

These are also called applied skills, cross-disciplinary skills, transferable skills, employability skills, non-cognitive skills and soft skills. They are knowledge, work habits and character traits necessary to succeed in this rapidly changing world, and the good news is that, just like any other subject, 21st century skills can be taught, practiced and incorporated into everyone's life (Surrenda and Wells, 2018).

Repositioning Business Education Curriculum to match the 21st Century business industry

Business Education curriculum could be repositioned for effective Business Education programme, to prepare its recipient for academics as well as for business industry. The current curriculum should be enriched in line with what now operate in the technological age as said earlier. Supporting the need for the inclusion of new courses in the existing business education curriculum, Mustapha (2008) asserts that in order to keep abreast of the constantly changing world of work, Business Education must continually assess and raise its programmes. Incorporate in them the values that are basic to business in order to produce well-trained and better-informed citizens who will know where the jobs are today and where they are likely to be in future.

1. Emphasis on Computer education: One major reform which should be into business education Curriculum is Computer education. We are now in the age of information technology occasioned by rapid breakthrough in the world of computer. This has impacted positively on information dissemination and management, which are the basis of decision making in organizations, be it private or public. Computer is of valuable benefit to business education and it is incomplete without adequate computer literacy. Business Education graduates are expected to possess adequate master of computer application packages to enable them perform effectively in modern industry after school. The challenge is to enhance their efficiency in management, and this could be facilitated by adequate computer knowledge. A critical overview of the NUC BMAS curriculum as it affects Business Education would reveal that no adequate consideration is given to computer education. Emphasis should move from computer appreciation to practical application. Computer related courses ought be offered right from year one through to final year so that students on graduation, will no longer be embarrassed by employers who during interview demand that those who could operate the computer should start work immediately with fantastic remuneration.

2. Emphasis on Entrepreneurship: The two semester course on Entrepreneurship for year one and year three as specified by NUC BMAS may not be adequate to impart the much-needed vocational and entrepreneurial skills on the students. The students should be made to offer vocational and entrepreneurial course throughout the four years duration of the programme just as accounting and typewriting. This will give business education graduate the much-needed in-depth knowledge of enterprise

management and thus be able to occupy and play relevant roles in the world of business and industry.

3. A well Coordinated SIWES: Another critical look at the NUC BMAS for B.Sc Ed and Masters Graduates is none mention of Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). This programme is coordinated by Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and the SIWES units of tertiary institutions. This is a well thought out programme. This programme should be welcomed by the universities for the undergraduates. Much should be done by all stakeholders to enrich this programme to actualize its lofty objectives of exposing students to out of classroom experiences. Effective monitoring should be embarked upon to make sure that the students get relevant place of attachment and that they actually participate in the scheme. Experience has shown that most students only seek for organizations to absorb them and thereafter go into hiding, only waiting for the expiration of the scheme. Most students seek for local government offices en masse where they only visit once for two hours or less in a week. Supervision wise, all school and industrial based supervisors must make sure that students are monitored by scrutinizing and signing their log books on regular bases to know their participation and performance. Concerted efforts need to be put in place so that students will gain what they are expected to gain practical to march modern industry during employment.

4. Small Scale Business Management: A mention of this course is seen only in year three of NUC BMAS which is insufficient. This course should be made compulsory for all Business Education students from year two. The course content should include course items like: sources of financing a small scale business, small business accounting, laws relating to registering a small business, effective utilization of profit including ploughing back, personnel administration and integrating business skills with proprietorship skills on brainstorming session on possible areas of investment in vocationally based business education.

5. Office Information Technology: This course is mentioned once in level two hundred which is not also sufficient of NUC BMAS since we are in the age of technology which should greatly affect office education. Students should be thought with modern office equipment as shown below to match with the requirement of modern industry. Such equipments are as follows:



Adapted: Sam et al (2013)

6. Element of Communication: Communication in English is only mentioned twice in year one in NUC BMAS. This course should be taught in year one to four considering its usefulness. One observes that most of the business education graduates still find it very difficult to communicate effectively even after leaving their schools.

7. The Shorthand Issue: The question has been should shorthand continue to be part of the curriculum in this 21st century? For those specializing or majoring in Secretarial/Office education, it is not an option because it is part of the career or core courses as different from general education (Abiodun & Oludele, 2017). There are indeed arguments still in favour of shorthand that is difficult to counter and that must be why many institutions still retain it in their curriculum. A vital tool for secretaries and journalists, one might be surprised to learn that in this digital age, shorthand is still regarded as an absolutely essential skill. Some say it is outdated and irrelevant especially with the increasing usage of sophisticated technology. The following specific benefits were earlier identified by Holborn (2012), it is an addition to the practitioner's CV; more convenient for recording accurate speech than digital recorder which might develop technical fault; preferred in law courts as the notes scan be kept as evidence, only those trained in the use of the skill can decipher the notes unlike the tape recorder that can get into wrong hands. The skill is also a pathway to drilling journalism and business education students in pronunciation, grammar, spelling and other aspects of communication skills.

It was emphasized by Likitina and Lapina (2017) that the trend in 21st century curriculum development for business education should focus on the issues of flexibility teaching method, including problem-solving, case studies, online education, student-centered learning and lifelong learning. Again, curriculum offerings especially at the tertiary level should cater for most of the requirements of modern skills even if taken as electives in other departments. Some of skills are self-reliance, self-confidence, self-control, self-knowledge, appreciation of diversity, creativity, language and communication skills, assertiveness, sense of humour and above all, resourcefulness and

adaptability. Also to be included and made mandatory is internationally focused courses – at least one foreign language and integrated studies of history, geography and culture of other people (Aquah, 2014).

Conclusion

Today's learners face a difficult and complex future. Accordingly, the education sector must work to equip learners with the skill they need to confront new challenges arising almost on daily basis in the world of work. Available research findings indicate that the existing Nigeria Universities business education curriculum is outdated and requires radical modification to meet today's needs. The philosophy and objectives should be to develop global players with an entrepreneurial orientation, 21st century employability skills, and with the technological know-how to solve real-world problems in organizations and communities. The current veteran teachers and the environment they teach also need re-branding. This can be accomplished by providing 21st century competency-based and problem-based teacher education curriculum, together with modern facilities and case studies in industries. Graduates must be self-reliant as well as career and employability ready.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing discourse so far, the following are recommended:

1. National Universities Commission should not only update the curriculum of Business Education but also ensure strict compliance and uniform implementation of the benchmark minimum standards, thereafter.
2. All stakeholders should be involved in updating the curriculum but business education major should lead in the curriculum review, beginning from the philosophy, objectives to the contents and facilities for implementation.
3. The curriculum should subsequently be reviewed at least every three years to take care of the diversity and fast-paced world of work in this 21st century.
4. More courses, giving students more flexibility, should be incorporated in the curriculum as listed earlier, borrowing from research experiences and international standards already being set by some institutions in other countries. For instance, online and hybrid instruction should be introduced for some of the courses currently taught face-to-face. This will increase access to training for students and provide them with skills needed for working with computers and internet, which are necessary for many jobs today.
5. Entrepreneurship, a well coordinated SIWES, Small Scale Business Management and other employability skills should be integrated and well coordinated into activities, tasks and projects (not just taught theoretically) to demonstrate the skills required by business and industry.
6. Courses in soft and hard skills (e.g. broadened business communication, business ethics, computer apps development, public finance, peace and conflict resolution, etc.) embodied in the 21st century employability skill-sets should be expanded to model work readiness traits required for success, including ethics, integrity, honesty, accountability, time management and respect for diversity and environment. Others are initiative, self-reliance, perseverance, language and communication skills, resourcefulness and adaptability.

7. Shorthand is still relevant even in this 21st century in spite of the technological revolution, should still be retained in the curriculum and emphasized for those specializing in Secretarial/Office Management Education at the bachelor' level. If the Pitman system is no longer popular, other systems such as Sloans's, Tee Line, etc could be introduced. In the alternative, an easier approach through technology-enabled app (meant to stimulate and enhance learner's interest) could be developed, by combined team of business educators (professionals) and IT experts, for teaching the art.
8. At least, one or two foreign languages should be included in the curriculum and made compulsory in order to "internationalize" the programme.
9. The veteran teachers of business education should continually be retrained to keep them abreast with the realities of the 21st century curriculum development and innovation.

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APPENDIX

Course Content as per the NUC BMAS

Year I

GST 111 – Communication in English I
GST 112 – Logic Philosophy and Human Existence
GST 113 – Citizenship education/Nigerian People and Culture
GST 121 – Use of Library Study Skills and ICT
GST 122 – Communication in English II

Core Education Courses

EDU 111 – Introduction to Teaching Profession
EDU 112 – Foundation of Education (Philosophy, History and Sociology)

Core Business Courses

VTE 111 – Introduction to Vocational Education
BED 111 – Foundation of Business Education
ECN 111 – Principles of Economics
ACC 111 – Element of Accounting I
BED 112 – Administrative Office Management
BED 113 – Business Mathematics
BED 114 – Word Processing
MKT 111 – Principles of Marketing

Year II

GST 211 – History and Philosophy of Science
GST 212 – Application of Computer
GST 222 – Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution
GST 223 – Introduction to Entrepreneurship Education I

Core Education Courses

EDU 211 – Educational Psychology
EDU 212 – Educational Administration

Core Business Courses

ECN 211 – Micro Economic Theory I
ACC 211 - Introduction to Financial Accounting
BED 211 – Principles of Business Finance
BED 212 – Business Statistics
BED 213 – Economics Production
ACC 212 – Element of Accounting
BED 214 – Organizational Behaviour
BED 215 – Office Information Technology
BED 216 – Business Method II

Year III

EPS 301- Entrepreneurship Studies II
EDU 302 – ICT in Education
EDU 321 – Curriculum and Instruction
EDU 312 –Special Method Course
EDU 313 – Education Technology

EDU 311 –Tests and Measurements

Core Business Courses

BED 311 – Fundamentals of Data Processing

ECN 311 – Microeconomics Theory

BED 311 – Small Scale Business Management

ACC 312 – Management Accounting

BED 322 – Human Relations

ACC – Fundamentals of Government Accounting

MKT 311- Nigerian Marketing System and Commercial Policy

Year IV

EDU 411 – Curriculum and Instruction II

EDU 412 – Special Teaching Method

EDU 401 – Research Methods and Statistics

EDU 413 – Guidance and Counseling

EDU 422 – Special Education

Core Business Courses

BED 411 – Business Law I

BED 412 –Human Resource Management

ACC 411 – Taxation

ACC 412 – Auditing and Investigation

BED 421 – Business Organization

BED 422 – Vocational Guidance

BED 425 – Seminar in Business Education

ACC 413 – Cost Accounting II

ACC 414 – Spreadsheet Processing

Year V

EDU 500 – Teaching Practice (one whole semester)

EDU 502 – Special Methods III (post TP Evaluation/Remediation)

EDU 599 – Research Project

Core Business Courses

BED 511 – Business Law II

ACC 511 – Taxation II

BED 512 – Consumer Education

ACC 512 –Financial Management

MKT 511 – Principles of Advertising

MKT 512 – Sales Management

BED 513 – Administration of Business Education

MKT 513 – Retail and Wholesale Management