



INSTITUTION-INDUSTRY COLLABORATION IN BUSINESS EDUCATION: PROSPECTS, CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Contemporary business and industrial sectors are daily bombarded with emerging trends and challenges that make it imperative for business educators to be proactive in order to remain relevant. One of the platforms for achieving continued relevance is institution-industry collaboration in business education. Therefore, this paper x-rayed the prospects, challenges and strategies for promoting result oriented collaboration between institutions offering business education and relevant industries. The paper explained that the current curricular of business education in colleges of education and universities cannot be effectively implemented in isolation of the professional skills and expertise of top-notch stakeholders in the industrial sector. The paper identified poor supervision, communication gap, students' poor attitude and hostile economic environment as some of the challenges impeding effective institution-industry collaboration. Strategies for boosting collaboration between institutions and industries include mentorship, training and retraining of business education students and lecturers, excursions to production factories, joint exhibitions, collaborative research and organizing distinguished lecture series. The paper suggested among others that Business Education Department in every tertiary institution should establish liaison units for institution-industry collaboration in order to bridge the gap between academic institutions and professional industries. It was equally suggested that institutions and industries should synergise in regular review of business education curricular in order for business education graduates to be able to cope with the demands of the 21st century in the world of work.

Keywords: Collaborative research, SIWES, Fieldtrips, Skill acquisition and Synergy.

Introduction

The technological and industrial advancement of any country depends on the ability of such country to ensure proper and functional human capital development among the citizenry. It is quite obvious that contemporary technological advancement offers tremendous challenges and significant opportunities for business education graduates. Universally, the nature of office work is undergoing spectacular changes at a breath-taking pace due to the influx of new technologies in various industries. According to Okeke-Ezeanyawu and Oguejiofor (2019), there is a technological race between the business environment and educational institutions. Without any doubt, the constant changes in external environment such as internationalization of education, technological innovation and labour market demands for new skills have inevitably led to a paradigm shift in perception about educational institutions. Resultantly, educational institutions are now perceived as the pivot of national long-term goals and sustainable human capacity building. Thus, institutions are expected to contribute to national development through high relevant human resource development and to enable learners acquire both physical and intellectual skills, competencies and knowledge which will enable individuals to become self-reliant and productive members of the society.

In order to fulfil their mandate, it is imperative for educational institutions to establish synergy with industries. Such synergy is commonly referred to as Institution-Industry collaboration. According to Emeasoba and Mmuo (2018), institution-industry collaboration is the partnership between formal education and the industrial sector to create enabling environment for students to acquire hands-on experience,



knowledge, skills and appropriate attitude to work. It is the cooperation between highly skilled personnel in many industries and educators which enable students to have practical training. It is a means through which industries meaningfully contribute to the training of students in appropriate skills relevant for employment. Furthermore, Ejeka and Ebenezer-Nwokeji (2017) opined that institution-industry collaboration involves a bilateral agreement, formal or informal to foster a symbiotic relationship in education and training. This relationship is cooperative in nature due to the fact that the collaboration is beneficial to both the institution and the industry.

As a highly dynamic field of study, business education has been defined in various ways by various authors and experts. Without any equivocation, the concept of business education has evolved over time. This is evident in different meanings offered by different researchers in trying to make clear the meaning of business education. Pocol et al (2022) viewed business education as a programme that prepares students for entry and aid advancement in jobs within business as well as prepares them to handle their own business affairs to function intelligently as consumers and citizens in a business economy. Similarly, Trumbach et al (2023) described business education as the foundation upon which students build an awareness of business and an understanding of business concepts. Business education encompasses knowledge, attitudes and skills needed by all citizens in order to effectively manage their personal businesses and economic system. Business education is an embodiment of vocational knowledge and skills needed for employment in a broad range of business careers. In addition, business education is an embodiment of vocational knowledge and skills needed for employment in a broad range of business careers. In other words, business education means education for business or training in skills that are required in business offices, clerical occupations and business policy analysis without mincing words. Business education is one of the most dynamic programme in the field of education (Anike, 2023).

Prospects of Institution-Industry Collaboration in Business Education

Institution-Industry Collaboration is critical for skills development, generation, acquisition and adoption of knowledge as well as the promotion of entrepreneurship. It is very obvious that there is a need for institution-industry collaboration in order to fulfil the lofty objectives of business education. A diligent observation of the minimum standard for Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), Business education developed by the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE, 2020) reveals that some courses cannot be taught in isolation of the relevant industries. Such courses include BED 129 (Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme, SIWES), BEE 320 (Entrepreneurship in Business Education), BED 322 (Business Proposals Presentations and Fund Sourcing – Practical), BEE 323 (Collaborations and Innovations of New Products), BEE 325 (Portfolio Development and Investment), BEO 325 (Desktop Publishing), BEM 329 (Direct and Online Marketing) and BED 213 (Business Education Practicum). The National University Commission (NUC) Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) for the Nigerian university system published in 2022 contain some courses whose objectives will be more effectively achieved through the instrumentality of institution-industry collaboration. Such courses include; BED 325 (Creativity and Innovation in Business), BED 326 (Nigeria Business Environment), BED 329 (Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme- SIWES), BED 414 (Digital Marketing for Business Educators), BED 417 (Human Resource Management) and BED 423 (International Marketing for Business Educators). Institution- industry collaboration in the aforementioned courses will expose Business Education students to industry requirements and industrial operations thereby filling the gap between knowledge and practice.

A sincere evaluation of the implementation of Business Education programme in Nigeria's institutions of higher learning clearly reveals that government alone cannot provide functional, skill-oriented and highly effective Business Education programme. Therefore, it becomes imperative that industries be keenly involved in the practical skills training of Business Education students to complement classroom experience so that the students will adapt to the skills and conditions needed for survival and relevance in the world of works. Institution-industry collaboration will help genuine stakeholders in Business Education to tap the energies, synergies and resources of the industries to the full because an effective collaboration between the institutions and industries will galvanise the industries to make their expertise, equipment and expendable materials available for the training of business education students (Udegbunam et. al. 2018).

Oviawe et. al. (2017) asserted that institution-industry collaboration will reduce or eliminate certain deficiencies that existed beforehand in the training of students. Similarly, Ibik (2014) explained that institution-industry collaboration in Business Education attracts the following prospects;

- a. Making students' training more meaningful and relevant to the available jobs in the industries



- b. Exposing students to the training environment which is a replica of the actual work environment obtainable after graduation so as to eliminate the phobia associated with new work environment
- c. Offering students first-hand information concerning new technologies, processes and latest development
- d. Reducing the burden of career choice on the students, since proper career guidance and exposure to the different industries help them to identify careers that are suitable to their interests and abilities. Students are exposed to career decision process and information needed to navigate advantageous career paths.
- e. Creating and maintaining an avenue for the flow of information between the institutions and industries about various careers and their entry level skill requirements and
- f. Assisting in the planning and development of a relevant curriculum that takes cognizance of students' needs, industries' needs and societal needs. Furthermore, institution-industry collaboration in business education can be used as skill acquisition programmes for students' special skills training/retraining for lecturers, curriculum planning and review, research collaboration, grants and scholarships to business education students among others.
- g. Soft skills such as ethnics, social responsibility diversity, globalization, and communication are inculcated into the students early enough.
- h. Internship, SIWES, Business Education Practicum, Entrepreneurship practical etc. are avenues for networking for students through which they can get employment and contacts for their products and skills after graduation.
- i. Valuable experiences gained during these collaborative programmes can be added to the students' resumes or curriculum vitae after graduation.
- j. Creativity and problem solving skills are acquired, developed, improved upon and applied by participants during collaboration with related industries.
- k. Collaborating industries derive the benefit of creativity and innovation from business education students who are being trained by them. Such innovations always prove profitable to the organizations.
- l. Institution industries collaboration enhances students' preparation for the ever changing technologies and innovation in the business world by assisting them to understand globally related issues in the world of work (Akinyele, 2015).

Within close proximity to tertiary institutions are high standard industries that have a highly skilled workforce of production, functional facilities and raw materials that can be very useful in the practical training of Business Education students.

Challenges of Institution-Industry Collaboration in Business Education

Despite the immense benefits derivable from institution-industry collaboration in Business Education, it has been observed that there are multi-dimensional challenges that impede the effectiveness of collaboration. One of the major platforms for institution-industry collaboration is Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). Oviawe et. al. (2017) revealed that many challenges have impeded the collaboration between institutions and industries in the aspect of SIWES. These include; students' apathy to SIWES, disruption of academic calendar by recurrent strikes and other events, poor supportive attitude of the industries, poor attitude of students during SIWES, industries apathy to SIWES, poor economic state of the industries, non-establishment of institution-industry liaison offices and mismanagement of industries' financial and material supports. In addition to the aforementioned challenges, Udegbonam, et. al. (2018) identified poor maintenance of industries' supplies and communication gap between institutions and industries as impediments to functional institution-industry collaboration. The implication of such haphazard implementation is non acquisition of requisite skills by business education students. It therefore becomes imperative that the aforementioned challenges are tackled with every form of seriousness by stakeholders in business education.

Furthermore, institution-industry collaboration has been less impactful due to wrong student placement (many students choose organizations owned by their acquaintances, whether relevant or not to their programme of study due to financial constraint hindering them from traveling or residing where they can acquire relevant skills), inefficient supervision (at times, no supervision at all), rejection of student-trainees in some cases by public institutions, local and multi-national organizations. Oyinloye and Asonibare (2020) identified the following as challenges to synergy and collaboration between institutions and industries; corrupt practices, poor supervision, uncooperative attitude of students and stakeholders, incessant strike actions, epileptic power supply, cult practices, poor career counselling and unfavourable government policies. Similarly, Ikelegbe (2019) discovered the following challenges of institution-industries



collaboration; differences between the values, objectives and missions of institutions and industries, poor commercialization of higher institutions research, mistrust among prospective collaborators, shortage of fund for industries to initiate collaborative work with institutions, poor motivation for entrepreneurial activities among academics, absence of reliable contractual negotiation between institutions and industries, differences in management culture of institutions and industries especially in financial management, and non-adaptation of institutions' structures to the needs of industries. In addition to the aforementioned challenges, unstable economy, rising inflation, societal moral decadence, politicization of appointments in the public sector, widespread insecurity across the length and breadth of Nigeria, infrastructural deficit and hostile business environment are some other challenges that impede a result-oriented collaborations between institutions and industries. However, most of these challenges are surmountable if there are deliberate efforts on the part of the government at all levels, management of institutions and captains of industries to ensure a functional synergy between institutions and industries in the areas of training and retraining of staff and students, research activities and curriculum development.

Strategies for Institution-Industry Collaboration in Business Education

Institution-industry collaboration is an avenue for facilitating the transition from school to the world of work and ensuring that Business Education students are adequately exposed to industrial experience in terms of handling equipment and machines which they are likely to meet after graduation. Okeke-Ezeanyanwu and Oguejiofor (2019) opined that greater collaboration between institutions and industries will not only satisfy the immediate needs business education graduates but also ensure that the needs of employers are satisfied by the quality of business education. In order to foster a symbiotic relationship between institutions and industries so as to galvanise business education to an enviable position, it is very necessary to adopt pragmatic strategies.

Apart from the SIWES for business education students, other strategies for boosting the efficacy of institution-industry collaboration in Business Education include constant review of the Business Education curriculum to meet emerging needs of the industry, research collaboration and grants, provision of ICT scholarships to business education students, regular work-visits/excursions, field-trips by business education students to top-notch industries, organizing seminars and workshops by the industries for business education students and special invitation to industrial workers for distinguished lecturers (Oviawe et. al., 2017).

Other strategies for boosting institution-industry collaboration in Business Education include; establishment of institution-industry liaison offices in every tertiary institution, sharing of training facilities between institutions and industries, donation of equipment and devices by industries to business education departments and units. In addition, Okeke-Ezeanyawu and Ogeujiofor (2019) asserted that appointment of industrial experts into the governing councils of tertiary institutions, industrial support programmes, entrepreneurial mentoring and business education students, organizing regular skill acquisition programme for business education students, effective communication between stakeholders. Organising regular visits to factory sites, regular presentation of papers by industry experts in capacity building workshops and seminars, provision of career advice by industries to tertiary institutions, involvement of industries in developing courses based on industrial needs through curriculum upgrading, vacation employment for students who are interested in working in the industry for a short period, giving students access to reference materials not available in institutions and special information concerning functions and structures, training and retraining of business education lecturers in modern practice in industries.

Furthermore, institution-industry collaboration in business education can be boosted through the following strategies; formation of joint ventures between institutions/Business Education Departments and industries, inviting experts from industry to institutions as resource persons to demonstrate skills and production techniques to business education students and lecturers during practical classes, instituting a deliberate policy for students to be absorbed by registered industries for SIWES, increased institutional/organizational awareness and recognition of the value of collaborative research activities, inviting industry experts to address students during orientation, partnership between institutions and industries in innovative activities to develop new products (Ikelegbe, 2019; Udo, 2019).

Suggestions

In order for institution industry collaboration to fulfil the appropriate aims and objectives, the following suggestions were made;

1. There should be adequate supervision and monitoring by both institution and industrial based supervisors on the job and frequently in such a way that the goals, mission and vision of business education are achieved.



2. Students involved in institution industry collaboration should be adequately motivated financially and materially.
3. Business Education departments should establish liaison units for institution-industry collaboration so as to bridge the gap between academic institutions and professional industries.
4. Business educators at all levels of authority in tertiary institutions should ensure that the strategies highlighted in the paper are adequately implemented for effective collaboration between institutions and industries to enhance nation-building.
5. Every business education department/unit should be mandated to organise elaborate exhibitions of products and services offered by the department on semester basis.

Conclusion

Education blossoms when different stakeholders play their roles efficiently and effectively. Based on the points highlighted in this paper, it is obvious that institution-industry collaboration is very vital in achieving the goals of business education. The implication is that, effective collaboration between institutions and industries will propel business education to its rightful place as an indispensable tool for national economic development.

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