



## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILL ACQUISITION IN BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

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### **Abstract**

*Business education has been identified as a programme that has the capacity to reduce unemployment and idleness among youths if the vocational skills embedded in it are practically and adequately taught with appropriate instructional facilities under a conducive environment. The study hinged on the theory of skill acquisition, which hypothesized that the number of repetitions was the primary parameter that affected the course of learning. The concepts of business education, skill acquisition and business education programmes are discussed. Available vocational skills in the three options in business education programme are highlighted while a list of associated skills that are necessary to aid the implementation of acquired vocational skills are provided. Three major sources of challenge against effective skills acquisition in business education programme are also discussed. The paper concludes that unless the identified challenges are tackled, skill acquisition in business education may be a myth. It was therefore recommended that business education students should appropriate vocational mindsets to enhance dignity of labour through the use of the knowledge and skills already acquired.*

**Keywords:** *challenges, acquisition, vocational skills, business education programme.*

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### **Introduction**

Business education is a sub-set of technical and vocational education and training (TVET). It is a programme of study that should inculcate employable skills into the recipients in addition to general education. The federal republic of Nigeria (2013) defined technical vocational education and training as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. By this, the introduction of technical vocational education and training into the nation's educational system was borne out of the need to provide occupational skills for those who are interested in developing careers in any related field of vocational education such as business, technical, agriculture, home economics and fine arts. Thus, the goals of technical vocational educational training of which business education is an integral part shall be to:



- i. provide trained man power in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly, at craft, advance craft and technical levels,
- ii. provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development: and
- iii. give training and impart the necessary skills to individual for self-reliance economically (FGN,2013).

As part of adding value to TVET, Abban and Quarshie in Lidimma, Ninyel and Guwal (2016) pointed out that the paradigm shift towards practical skill training with TVET in Africa is increasingly being reshaped to make it more attractive and effective. The authors stated further that one of the most important

Features of technical vocational educational training, as recognized by African governments, is its orientation towards the world of work with the curriculum emphasizing the acquisition of employable skills.

To achieve the goal of acquisition of practical and vocational skills for self-employment or paid employment in business education, the skills acquired are supposed to boost the recipients' job prospects and productivity. By this, business entities are expected to be more productive to ensure greater contribution to both individual and the nation's economic growth, on the premise that business education graduates actually possess the vocational skill requirements of the labour market.

The worsening high rate of unemployment among business education graduates is occasioned by shortage of the right vocational and practical skills capable of making the recipients effective and productive. Thus, Akhigbe (2014) asserted that additional skills in vocational discipline, where graduates will acquire the appropriate practical and applied skills and competences needed to enable them function as independent, self-reliant and productive members of the society is imperative.

Iwele, Ekwueand Crossdale-Ovwido (2014) remarked that although different methods of teaching have been adopted in business education with the aim of achieving the set goals but not much have been achieved and that attempts made to improve the system through industrial training have not imparted so much on the learners. This suggests that there is a gap between the business education contents received and the reality in the economy. The concern of this paper therefore, is to discuss major challenges affecting the acquisition of needed vocational skills in business education in order to reduce recipients of business education programme from the unemployed graduates roaming around the cities in search of unavailable white collar jobs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theories are like foundations upon which buildings are erected. Thus, Synoddy (2012) defined theories simply as explanations of a natural or social behaviour, event or phenomenon. The theory upon which this work is built is the skill acquisition theory



propounded by Synoddy (1926). Synoddy hypothesized that the number of repetitions was the primary parameter that affected the course of learning. The Theorist explained that skill learning is a two-stage process which comprised of adaptation stage in which the learner acquires the neuromuscular pattern required to perform the movement, and a facilitation stage, in which the efficiency of the movement pattern is improved. The theory explains that knowledge developments are in declarative, procedural and automaticity stages. The more interaction with learning environment and resources, the more learning outcomes are achieved. Skill acquisition is student-oriented. It is expected that students will be actively involved in the process of learning those vocational skills in the field of business education which is distinct from rote learning in which the learner plays passive role. The uniqueness and practicality of business education programme give justification for the use of this theory, since it holds the view that skill acquisition is task-oriented and the goal of business education can be only achieved through demonstration of the dexterity of the skills acquired in today's work environment.

### **The Concepts of Business Education and Skill Acquisition**

- A. Business education is that aspect of vocational education that aims at the production of competent personnel in any of the three options in business education programme in order to contribute to the nation's economic growth either through self-employment or paid employment. Okwuanaso and Nwazor (2000) defined business education as a course that offers knowledge and competencies required for entry into business occupations in all sorts and prospering in them. In his view, Osuala in Ogunribido (2008) opined that business education is that type of education which provides students with information and competencies needed for managing personal businesses and services of the business world. Mamman and Nwabufu (2014) defined business education as a programme of instruction which offers specialized instruction for office occupation and general business orientation which is capable of transforming the nation.
- B. Ekpenyong (1988) defined skill as the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in the execution of performance. Akomolafe and Adegun (2005) defined skill as proficiency, the ability of doing something well. Skill acquisition therefore, is a process of learning how to possess expertise knowledge about an occupation. The objective of skill acquisition is to bring the knowledge so acquired to maximum level of competency. Skill acquisition is a systematic and sequential development of skills that promotes efficiency and effectiveness in the performance of a specified job. Some of the needed skills in business education for effective use of vocational skills include communication skills, reading skills, and manipulative skills. Thus, Ezeji and Okorie (1988) remarked that the acquisition of requisite skills is a means of increasing the productive power of any nation. However, Udo (2015) reported



that due to some barriers, the level of practical skills acquired by students compared with the demands in the labour market is nothing to talk about. Thus, Ekpenyong in Udo (2015) observed that the foregoing explains why most employers of labour in this nation and abroad believe that the products of vocational business education are half-backed and unusable without further training.

### **The Business Education Programme**

Typically, business education programme is run in colleges of education and in faculties of education in most Nigerian universities. The following three options-Accounting Education, Marketing/Distributive Education and Office Technology and Management (OTM)/Secretarial are offered under the umbrella of business education. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (2018) stated that the objectives of business education are to equip graduates with the right skills that will enable them to engage in a life work in the office as well as for self employment. In most tertiary institutions, where business education is offered, the programme is organized in such a way that all students offer all the courses in their first two years regardless of their area of specializations. This is to enable business education undergraduates possess broad knowledge and required skills needed in teaching and work in business environments.

In order to achieve the objectives of business education, a close examination of the state vocational technical education (2007) and the Faculty of Education Handbook (2014) revealed that courses offered covered the three options in business education in the first two years. These courses include principles of accounts, office practice, office technology, introduction to marketing, keyboarding, economics, commerce, entrepreneurship education, among others. Thus, Igboke in Ibe and Nwosu (2014) noted that business education at all levels of education enables the recipient to acquire skills and knowledge of business develop basic skills for personal use in future and develop basic skills for office occupation with which to start a life of work for those who may not undergo further training.

To this end, the authors observed that business education should be seen as a panacea to the inculcation of employable skills and the creation of employment in order to curb massive unemployment and youth restiveness.

### **Vocational Skills in Business Education Programme**

Vocational skills are empirical skills that individuals acquire in a specific area of interest. They are more practical than theoretical skills. Individuals learn vocational skills from hands-on experience. The training takes place outside the traditional classroom setting. Students are placed in manual labour intern positions that coincide with their vocational career choices. Students are exposed to hands-on activities through first-hand experience, and they acquire classroom knowledge, ([Http://italo.org](http://italo.org).)



Vocational skills are available in many different career fields. Vocational classes offer job oriented training for specific professions. Thus, in many cases, vocational courses have the potential to lead to skills acquisition. Onifade in Owojori (2008) observed that the three options in business education programme had the following vocational opportunities which can be acquired through effective and practical oriented programme implementation:

- A. Accounting education graduates can establish;
  - 1. A firm of accountants which will enable them to be consultants to private and government establishments;
  - 2. Auditing firms for consultancy services for both private and government establishments;
  - 3. Accounting schools for secondary school and educational centers for professional students;
  - 4. They can write and publish books on accounting and auditing;
  - 5. They can organize workshops and seminars for organizations;
- B. Graduates marking Distributive education are expected to be very versatile as they can be engaged in.
  - i. buying and selling of any product whether agricultural, technical, business, arts, etc
  - ii. Sales promotion of all products for organizations.
  - iii. Promotion and advertisement of service occupations or organizations e.g. radio, television, cinema house.
- C. Graduates of office Technology and Management are the secretaries who can engage themselves in the establishment of;
  - i. business centers (have computers for production of documents, e-mail; browsing; typewriters for typing; fax machines for sending out documents; telephone services; photocopying; binding) and cyber café centers.
  - ii. secretarial institutes where typists, stenographers and secretaries can be trained.
  - iii. Writing and publish books in the field
  - iv. They can also organize workshops and seminars for secretarial workers
  - v. They can also provide consultancy services for organization in recruiting activities.

Also Ibidapo, Fagbemi and Aina (2013) and Osuntuyi, Olowe and Olayemi (2013) observe that the following are the available opportunities in business education apart from teaching employment: Establishment of vocational schools/training centres, stenographic secretarial services in private and public offices, employment as purchasing and supplies officers, establishment of retail/wholesale business and establishment of business Centre's. In their contribution, Okolie and Ogbaekirigwe (2014) explained that there are assorted forms of skills that students/graduates are expected to acquire through technical and vocational education and training of which business education is part. These skills include



innovative skills, practical skills, self-motivation skill, financial skills, marketing skill, time management skill and professional skill. Thus, if all these skills are sufficiently acquired, it will enable business education graduate conceive a business outfit, establish it, fund it, work through its difficult and growing stages and nurture it to maturity to become a successful self-employed graduate.

These skills will no doubt, provide assistance to the effective utilization of the acquired vocational skills in sustaining a business outfit of one's interest.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and Business Education Programme**

Current development in the field of technology has improved the way and manner in which decisions and business operations are carried out across the globe. Business educators are part of the lubricants in the engine of the nation's economy. The skills possess by business educators have a significant impact on the output (graduates). The skills possessed by business educators in the early years of the introduction of business education programme may not be adequate to move the nation forward economically in this era of technology which has globalized the entire world.

The term 21<sup>st</sup> century skills is generally used to refer to certain core competencies such as collaboration digital literacy, critical thinking and problem solving that advocates believe that schools need to teach in order to help students thrive in the present economic world. Thus, the responsibility of business educators in today's educational system is to teach students how to learn and not what to know or learn. The 21<sup>st</sup> century skills are a set of abilities that students need to develop in order to succeed in the information age. These skills according to the partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (2010) are as follows:

- a. **Core Subjects:** Core business education courses are the pillar upon which the fundamentals of business organization are created. They form the functions and duties of any profit making organizations. It is instructive to note that there are three areas of specialization in business education programs as practiced in Nigeria. There are account education, marketing education and office technology and management education. Business educators and business education students are expected to be specialist in at least one area where they can stay competitive in a changing economic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- b. **21<sup>st</sup> Century Content:** The partnership noted that today's learning environment should aim at producing knowledge workers who are highly skilled in the higher order skills which require the use of cognition rather than physical strength or manual manipulation. Thus, Witzen (2001) remarks that knowledge workers are distinguished from old-style manual workers largely by their education and training and their skills. By this, the 21<sup>st</sup> century business education programme is expected to prepare its recipients for global awareness. This may not be achievable through



the banking concept of education, hence, a need for a shift to a more modern encompassing strategy that will accommodate effective acquisition of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. The 21<sup>st</sup> century partnership skills (2010) listed twelve abilities that today students (business education students inclusive) needed in order to succeed in their careers during the information/knowledge age. They include critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, technology literacy, leadership, initiatives and social skills among others, which are essential in this age of the internet.

- c. **Life Skills:** Business education program is a life-long learning which may lead to the production of responsible citizenship. Ekpeyong (2008) categorized life skills into general and professional; where ability to cope with various life situations outside ones job environment is referred to as general social life skills, while the learning acquired or seek to acquire in order to cope with various situations relating to one's job, career or profession will qualify as a professional social life skills. Social skills are crucial to the success of business educators and business education graduate because they need interaction and frequent connection with others around them who may be individuals or co-operate organizations. This networking skill if properly developed by business education students, will enable them maintain long lasting relationships with their business partners or the customers, thus, promoting the company's image and productivity.

### **The Challenges**

Business education programme is expected to be the corner stone on which Nigeria should rely and provide its youths the opportunities to train, develop vocational skills and abilities that will make them self-employed and employers of labour. Studies have shown that business education has been inadequately funded: (Elemure and Elemure, (2013)Ibe and Nwosu (2014), Enijuma and Aina (2008), Ogiagah and Ofulue(2014). The foregoing is a pointer to the fact that effective vocational skill acquisition in business education programme is faced with some challenges which could be categorized under the following subheads.

- a) **Teacher-Related Challenges:** The 21<sup>st</sup> century business environment is ICT-driven. The Vocational skills and competencies needed in ICT related jobs are expected to be inculcated into the learners by their lecturers. The extent of acquisition of vocational skills in specific subject areas to promote self-reliance is determined by the teachers/lecturers' ability. Innovativeness and professional training and development which they have received. In support of this, Gambari and Okoli in Okolocha and Nwadiani (2014) remarked that most educators are theoretical in nature when teaching skill subjects and other related subjects. Apart from the fact that business education programme is inadequately provided with



equipment and facilities for practical demonstration. The availability of required facilities is not in itself sufficient to enhance skill acquisition but also depends on the ability of the teachers to effectively integrate the use of these facilities into the mindset and learning experiences of students. It is important that teachers are prepared to ensure that students are skillful in at least one option of the business programme to enable them have access to the world of work. In achieving this, business educators must be highly motivated which can be through the provision of needed instructional equipment and conducive learning environment apart from regular attendance at relevant professional seminars and conferences.

- b) **Government Related Challenges:** It has been revealed that education has not been adequately funded, and for any skill acquisition programme to be effective, it must be well-financed. Low budgetary allocation to education in general, has its own negative effect on what is allocated for purchase of teaching equipment and facilities in business education. It is regrettable to note that the same government that expressly listed the needed resources in the national policy of education (NPE) (2013) for effective practical oriented business education programme turned against the UNESCO's recommendation of 26% annual budgetary allocation to education. This situation has affected the quality of the products of business education. How will a student taught keyboarding with manual typewriter be able to establish own business center in this era of technology? How will they demonstrate marketing skills where there is no marketing talk shop? Thus, Shaibu, Oshiogwe and Mbaegbu (2014) recommended that institutions of higher learning should fully equip business education departments with gadgets so as to give necessary training to business education students to improve knowledge and skill.
- c) **Students' Related Challenges:** The 21<sup>st</sup> century students are wiser more exposed and more expensive. Most of them are extravagant, they cannot imagine starting a small scale business that could be nurtured and developed to maturity. Some of them are in a hurry to 'make it'. Even when the teachers are doing their best to ensure that they acquire skill in business field, their mindsets are operating at different frequencies on how to get rich quickly; hence, robbery, kidnapping, cyber-crimes, 419 and the likes are on the increase nowadays. The dignity of labour has no place in the students mind. In support of this Imogie (2007) asserted that most students do not have academic ambition and that they no longer challenge lecturers. An average Nigerian student now wants to take out of the system just the certificate and not the knowledge. Imogie further said that attitude of the Nigerian students to study was not encouraging they prefer pleasure to study, and most of them are only interested in money. They have forgotten that it is only through knowledge that money could come.



## **Conclusion**

Business education programme is enriched with different courses that can equip the recipients with knowledge and skills that can make them self-employed and employers of labour. The three different options in the field of business education are integrated to ensure that learners have good general and basic knowledge and later become experts in one of the options for economic buoyancy. However, there are some impediments which may hinder the effectiveness and attainment of goals of business education. It is therefore concluded that unless the identified challenges are properly and adequately taken care of the acquisition of vocational skills in business education may be a myth.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that;

1. Business education teachers should be motivated through adequate provision of needed facilities and resources like e-learning facilities and platforms that will enhance practical demonstration with modern teaching materials.
2. Governments at various levels should improve on their budgetary allocation financially to vocational and technical education and training in order to facilitate learning to produce self-reliant graduates for the world of work instead of job seekers.
3. Business education students and graduates should develop appropriate vocational mindset and attitude towards dignity of labour and put into the use of knowledge and skill already acquired in business education to set up their own business.

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