



Educational program advancement for office training program considering the developing data innovation: A contextual analysis of the Nigeria declaration in instruction program

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Abstract

Every information technology (IT) driven society is expected to experience some dynamism in the way things are done and in the quality of the goods and services available unto them for use. It is against this backdrop that, a curriculum innovation would help to fashion learning experiences to be given under a close supervision, which would reflect changes in the aspirations and needs of the society. With the advent of IT, the secretarial world of work has experienced several changes from the use of manual machines to perform her operations to the new electronic ways of doing things. In order to make secretarial education relevant in producing vibrant workforce that would fit into today's world of work, there must be a conscious effort to review any existing curriculum to take into consideration new innovations, and see how to accommodate any possible change in societal needs/aspirations. The paper threw light into why curriculum innovation in the secretarial program is of paramount importance; specific areas that would need to be revisited, and recommendations were made, which if employed would go a long way to ensuring curriculum relevance of the secretarial programme, as it would be producing men and women who can compete favorably with their foreign counterparts and also a liberation from curriculum obsolescence.

Keywords: Information technology, Nigeria certificate in education, national commission for colleges of education, national policy on education.

INTRODUCTION

The use of technology has increased greatly in this modern dispensation. Education has moved from manual operational procedures to full automation of most of the teaching learning processes. In the office education (an integral part of business education), for example, there

are now such terms as word processing, data processing, reprographics, micrographics that are used to describe many technological processes that have evolved from traditional office occupations.

The advent of technology has brought about a faster and more efficient ways and means of handling office procedures and decision making processes based on accurate information, hence, most business organizations and even governmental agencies are now adopting office automation – which is also referred to as e-office in their routine operations.

This innovation therefore is a challenge to our educational systems, and the curriculum must be revisited to embrace these changes or else, we would be

Abbreviations: IT, Information technology; NCE, Nigeria Certificate in Education; NCCE, National Commission for Colleges of Education; NPE, National Policy on Education.

producing Nigeria Certificate in Education, and Nigeria University graduates in office education whose certificates would be obsolete. The skills they have so acquired while in school may not fit approximately with the current demands in the world of work. Secretarial or office education has gone beyond typewriting or computer appreciation/application we offer in the formal schools to the use of sophisticated interconnected computers, computerized telephone systems, teleconferencing, dictating machine, modern reprographic equipment to perform office work and many others have helped to facilitate the quality and efficiency of the work of the secretary. It is against this backdrop, that advocacy is made here for a review of existing curriculum at all tertiary institutions in Nigeria, in order to make office – education up-to-date and relevant to the current world of work demands

It is very obvious that, a graduate of office education trained with only Olympia/Olivetti Manual typewriter will obviously find it difficult to fit into the automated business office. In an era of high competition for scarce job opportunities, there will be no place for graduate of office-education who have no knowledge of these technologies because employers are out to employ and retain only the best that are functional in order not to waste scarce resources.

Business education, an integral part of education is referred to as 'functional/utility education' which equips her recipients with skills, knowledge and attitudes that would prepare them to enter into, and advance in any occupation of their choice. Business education is subdivided into the following options:

- (i) Accounting,
- (ii) Distributive and
- (iii) Office specializations.

Office education is a part of business education that equips students with all secretarial/office skills, knowledge and attitudes so that they can enter into and advance in any secretarial domain in order to be efficient and effective. It is the vogue in Nigeria today, that any employer who puts up an advert to recruit workers, demands that prospective applicants should possess knowledge in computer operation and word processing as an added advantage. The implication of technology to office education is that, the more knowledgeable we are in this new trend, the better it is for the economic, political, social and educational development of Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON CURRICULUM INNOVATION

Curriculum change or innovation becomes necessary when the curriculum fails to meet the desired goals, or to reflect change in the economy, politics, agriculture,

industrialization and technology of the country, to meet this change a revision of the curriculum is required.

Olaitan (2003) explained that curriculum innovation is a process by which new ideas, Knowledge, skills and attitudes are included in a curriculum to bring about new changes and new goals in the educational set-up of a society as a result of technological development of improvement. Change occurs in the area of science and technology, politics, industrialization, education, business etc.

Innovation in secretarial business education has become a necessity as the existing curriculum has failed to achieve the desired objectives of business education due to the new ideas, skills and attitudes of doing things globally, especially with rapid changes in technology, office works which is being done with automative machine, hence the need to produce personnel who are able to manipulate such. Curriculum innovation in secretarial business education would entail revisiting the curriculum content of secretarial business education with, a view to adding new business ideas, skill, knowledge and attitudes in business. For example, the addition of entrepreneurship education, which is aimed at meeting the needs of the society to help graduates become self-reliant. The Nigeria NPE (2004) stated that, education should achieve the following goals:

- a. The inculcation of national unity,
- b. The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society,
- c. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around,
- d. And the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of this society.

They also explained the aims and objectives of business education as a vocational course, to provide technical knowledge in applied sciences, technology and business, particularly craft, advanced craft at technical levels, provision of technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, commercial and economic development, to give training and impart the necessary skills to individuals to enable them become self-reliant economically. Also, Osuala (2002) emphasize that business education (which includes secretarial education) should aid in developing within an individual:

- a. The knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes that will enable him to use sound reasoning in making personal business decisions as consumer of goods and services,
- b. An understanding of and an appreciation for a nation's business enterprise system, emphasized both the privileges and responsibilities for participation in, preserving, and improving it,
- c. A level of economic literacy sufficient to enable the

individual to analyze alternatives to make reasoned judgments sound decisions and to take intelligent action as a citizen in a democratic society,

d. An acquaintanceship with the broad range of occupations opportunities in business sector of the economy.

Unfortunately, the products of the existing curriculum in business education lack some necessary modern ideals, skills and attitudes to function in an information technology based world of work. This gave rise to the production of graduates without employable skill. Instead of producing job providers, the curriculum continues to produce job seekers. Nigeria educational system is meant to give rise to the best political leaders, doctors, engineers, administrators, executive directors of business enterprises, which will in-turn give us the best political system, public health sectors, power and steel sector, agricultural sector, tourism, industries etc. Nzekwe, (2007) stated that in our society, the system has produced leaders who have mismanaged our economies. Instead of being noted as one of the developed nations, and fast growing, it is rated as one of the poorest nation and also between 1st and 3rd most corrupt country in the world. This calls for repositioning of the curriculum so as to identify the barriers and introduce changes that might overcome these lapses and also add new things to the curriculum.

According to Ezeji (2001), business education is a field which provides training for individuals to enable them acquires skills, knowledge and attitudes required for gainful employment both with the private and the public sector and equally to become self-reliant. It also trains the individuals to acquire the right attitudes towards the economy and to be able to take part in making economic decisions for the development of his nation. Nation-building on the other hand is the individual's contribution in the areas of economy, agriculture, industrialization, commerce, defense, etc to the development or the growth of the nation.

NEED FOR CURRICULUM INNOVATION

A change or innovation is an introduction of new ideas in an existing system or creation of new thing. Curriculum is ordinarily the planned learning experiences under the guidance of a school. Secretarial/Business education curriculum could be seen as those planned learning experiences that are prepared under the guidance of a school, designed to prepare individuals to take business vocation in the areas of shorthand, typewriting, word processing, reprography etc. Innovation in secretarial business education becomes necessary in schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities for the following reasons; (a) dynamic nature of knowledge, (b) research findings social/political changes, (c) abundant teaching

and learning materials etc, (Eyibe, 2006). This is true because knowledge is not static, but dynamic. There are new methods of teaching secretarial courses, the individualized method which is one of the best methods, the e-mail, and other new innovations in business, calls for innovations in secretarial education curriculum, most especially with the launching of Nigeria satellite.

Every year Nigeria Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education turn out thousand of students who flood the streets of our major cities in search of job; equally, our secondary schools turn out graduates in thousands without job. Instead of them to be job providers as entrepreneurs with competent business skills and knowledge, they become job seekers. This is because students graduate without vocational skills that will enable them to gain employment either with the public sector or private sector or be self-employed. One of the objectives of business education is to train individuals to acquired competent skills and knowledge in business to enable them be self-sufficient and to provide employment opportunities for others. Production of students without the requisite skill, turn them out to join the unending queue of unemployed youths, with the resulted consequences of social vices like crime, drug addiction, arm-robbery, etc.

It is expected that Nigeria educational system should be able to produce leaders of integrity, as explained in the goals of business education that, business education should be able to produce those that will be capable of managing Nigeria economy (Osuala 2002). Despite the many leaders Nigeria has produced, (both civilian and military) no concrete effort has been made to give the economy a sound proactive base as we have witnessed in countries like South Africa, China, India, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Brazil, Holland etc (Nzekwe, 2007). Unfortunately, in contrast to these countries, the Nigerian economy is mercantile and services oriented. Those leaders that are supposed to move the economy to the right path seem to run out of ideas, which lands the economy in some serious problems of lack of sound productive base, lack of sustainable economic growth, lack of equity in the distribution of resources, high rate of unemployment, corruption, mismanagement, wide-spread of poverty, poor leadership, poor organizational discipline etc (Nzekwe, 2007). Curriculum in business education is geared towards producing leaders of high integrity in both the industrial and in the political sector but with the present problems in the economy; a call for a revisit of NCE curriculum has become necessary.

In addition, most of the Nigeria grammar schools ignore some of the basic realities of the contemporary world, which include job-oriented education in their curriculum planning. Some youths are unemployed because they do not have the required skills necessary to carry out a particular job. Some have dropped out of school because of some economic or academic problems. Some could not continue in their studies because their parents could

not afford to pay their school fees, others because they are below average ability. These individuals may possess some business skills that can be developed through a planned secretarial education. Some of these youths, because of unemployment, have turned to be armed-robbers, drug-pushers, kidnappers, prostitutes etc. The responsibility to turn them around lies on the government, business education planners, society and school, religious bodies, Non-governmental organization (NGO) etc. to review these learning activities that will bring about a positive change.

In the early 80s the main teaching materials in the field of business education available were the manual typewriters, electric typewriters, tape recorder, the calculator, the adding machines, the ledger book, and others. With the introduction of the computers, cyber-café, teleconferencing, etc for effective teaching of secretarial education in our schools, the service delivery changed, hence, the need to include these in the curriculum of business education and to reflect the changes in the method of instruction and evaluation.

New and faster means of doing things are being discovered through research; in the areas of processing and sending information, the e-mail, internet is fast replacing the manual letter postage using the post office. The ATM card is fast replacing the use of cheques. This support explains the importance of individualized method of teaching business subject noted by Osuala (2002).

Most of the business education objectives fail, because most of the planners do not take into consideration those that are to be involved in the planning of the curriculum. According to Nzekwe (2006), the society, the learner and the teacher must be taken into consideration when planning curriculum. In planning the curriculum of business education too, the society, the learner and teachers must be involved. It has been observed that, those employed to plan business education programs are administrators who do not have knowledge of business education; they are described as interlopers because most of them have no teaching qualification (Osuala, 2002).

NEEDED CURRICULUM INNOVATION IN SECRETARIAL EDUCATION

Secretarial education is an aspect of business education; which is an integral part of vocational education, that gives training to individuals for the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge needed for employment in both public and private sectors and also for self-reliance. Owing to the change in labour market needs, changes in technology, there is therefore the need for secretarial education curriculum to be reviewed in order to meet these current societal needs. The subjects in secretarial education as noted by Igbinoba, (2008) are shorthand, typewriting, office practice, record-keeping, word

processing, secretarial duties, business methods, office practice, business law, computer appreciation/ application, and consumer education. These Programmes provide the necessary skills and knowledge needed for employment in the area of business in the office. Each of these areas has experienced one type of innovation or the other with the advent of IT. These innovations are all aimed at preparing and equipping the individuals with present realities of life in the workforce. Each new curriculum's objectives according to Ezeji (2001) should be in two fold, viz:

- i. It must prepare the students for initial employment, ii. It must provide a foundation for career development.

To be able to meet these objectives in business education, persons involved in drawing up the new curriculum, should bear in mind these facts. These objectives expose the fact that secretarial education only functions if it enables the individuals to become actually perfect in doing a job. The individual offering secretarial education will appreciate it if his interest and understanding are the primary factors involved in the planning of the new curriculum.

Secretarial education must establish appropriate work habits; habits are important because if a man lacks the habit of thinking and the habit of doing his required work, that man is of no use in a productive economic or social factor job. Olaitan et al. (1999) stated that even if the man possesses the required skills and the knowledge, Business Education is concerned with the establishment of certain habits through repetitive training both in thinking and in doing. Therefore the concern of those planning the new curriculum should be how those habits should be and how they should be taught, so that business education would be characterized by specific habits training.

Secretarial education curriculum should include the opportunity for all students to gain an understanding of the business world and the consumer world, thus facilitating intelligent consumer usage of the services and products of business. It should be organized to permit each student to progress at his own pace until he achieve his goals and interest, and to challenge him in order to maximize his opportunities and abilities.

The curriculum of secretarial education should be constantly reviewed, adjusted and improved by administrators/teachers to ensure that it continues to be appropriate to the needs of the community, students' social body and the economic which it serves.

It should use only physical facilities and equipment that will;

- a. Meet the standard of modern business, and
- b. Assist in building pride on the part of the student in their achievement and their preparation for a career, as noted by Talago (1970) in Osuala (2002).

For innovation in secretarial education curriculum to achieve the desired goals, it must be subjected to continuous evaluation in order to ensure that the production of skill manpower is maintained to meet the demand of those changes in the labour market.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPLICATION TO SECRETARIAL/OFFICE EDUCATION

IT has impacted greatly on the office education curriculum and even of practicing secretaries; hence the need to adapt and operate in accordance with the dictates of the change or else the office education curriculum would become obsolete. Innovations in every sphere of life bring about a change in needs, which invariably affect the curriculum in use at that period. If the curriculum for such a programme must be reviewed to cater for the emerging new needs, it would require finance.

It is important to note that a careful study of the NCCE minimum standards that has been in use since 2002 for the award of NCE in business education, and the one given by Nigeria University commission to graduate students in office education in Universities are no longer adequate for preparing secretaries or office education graduates. For example, the curriculum content for teaching courses like business communication is still manual oriented instead of being computer oriented. There are also some courses such as secretarial duties and office practice whose skills have become out-dated; which would need be revisited and repositioned to achieve the objectives of the modern world of work. The need for the trainer to be taught with up-to-date and comprehensive curriculum to meet technological changes cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, the need for Integration of elements of IT with office education courses, like information creation, mail handling, information storage and retrieval as well as note taking and transcription. The inadequate or lack of IT equipment training/retraining of lecturers (capacity building) and scarcity of funds for effective equipment, maintenance and provision of necessary supplies and consumables are problems which should be addressed before IT integration into office education curriculum will become effective and meaningful.

Komolafe (2005) gave some positive effects IT has on the secretaries this includes: helping to shape business world in many ways, enhances speed and accuracy, increased job opportunities for secretaries by providing additional career areas, and it leads to better decision making: because it is easier to collect, analyze and make information available more effectively and speedily. Inclusively were also some negative impacts which Komolafe (2005) cited as including:

(a) Manual skills and knowledge threatened by the change to computerization.

(b) Change in the office operations may lead to resistant behaviour.

(c) It has made secretarial function become a job for every tom, dick and harry as everybody can now perform some secretarial duties with the aid of IT gadgets.

Despite the negative impacts, the positive impacts still outweigh them all. If the curriculum is carefully reviewed the negative impacts will to some extent be dealt with.

CHALLENGES OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ON SECRETARIAL/OFFICE EDUCATION

Adebayo (2006) opined that there are some problems that must be urgently looked into for IT to be sustained in order to play its proper role in the advancement of all areas. Some of the known problems include the following:

- (a) Constant power failure, which damages equipment,
- (b) High cost of equipment installation,
- (c) Cost of maintenance and repairs,
- (d) Non-availability of capable technicians to maintain or repair the equipment,
- (e) Lack of up-to-date library facilities,
- (f) Absence of enough information technology oriented courses in the secretarial or office education curricula.

Secretarial/Business education at the NCE level is meant to train an individual to develop special skills to enable him/her to work in an office or to teach at the secondary school. If the secretary would take the option of working, the secretaries will work directly with chief executives in organizations or ministries. A well trained secretary is the image maker of the organization; simply put, human relations officer. In most establishments, the first officer visitors meet on entry into any office is the secretary. Every official activity of the secretary affects the public image of the organization he/she works in.

Olowo (2000) is of the opinion that "It is paramount to redefine the curriculum content of secretarial education in the light of emerging IT which is making the secretarial education graduates to face an international competition; now that the whole world has become a global village. From the above assertions, therefore, for a secretary to be relevant in this "new world" of work, he/she must be information technology literate, hence the need to revisit the existing curriculum.

Nwosu (1999) in a related study carried out said that there was no relationship between job preparation in schools and on the job activities. He observed that, word processing had not been given sufficient timing, and even the time allotted is not properly utilized. This is not unconnected with inability by those who offer the programmes to procure computers for the course, or power failure to enable the usage as and when the time comes.

It is important to note that, not much attention is given

to the practical when training in shorthand and word-processing. This has contributed in some way to the failure rate being experienced. This is the reason for which some had advocated for the removal of shorthand from the secretarial education curriculum especially with the invention of ICT. It is important to note that, the consensus of opinion has it that, dictation machines would not replace shorthand entirely, but would continue to be used to a large extent to enhance the teaching and learning

The occupation of secretaries according to the United States occupational outlook handbook 2006/07 edition, ranks among the top fifty largest growth organizations in California and in 2004, it was also ranked among the largest occupation in the U.S. economy. Job descriptions of secretaries are expanding and new titles are being created such as administrative coordinators, office administrators, administration specialist, and information manager. The skills required by employers of secretaries, according to the U.S. occupational outlook handbook 2006/07 edition, include the following: typing skill - at least 50 wpm typing speed; shorthand skill - 80/100 wpm; shorthand note taking skill; interpersonal skills; decision making skills; language and communication skills; book-keeping skills; computer operating skills; skills in selecting, operating and maintaining modern office equipment.

Igbinoba (2008) stated that, "changes in the office environment would increase the demand for secretaries who are adaptable and versatile. Nevertheless, job opportunities will be best for secretaries with extensive knowledge of software applications"

For secretarial students, according to Olowo (2000) it is that, the curriculum has painted typewriting and shorthand as the "only" core subjects of secretarial/business education as though they are the only subjects that run throughout the 3 year program" this is very erroneous. It is noteworthy also that some aspects of the course description does not reflect the changes that are currently taking place in the business world and this could have a consequential adverse effect in the area of imparting the appropriate know-how to the students.

The computer aspects of the curriculum need to be enriched and not limited to computer application introduced at the 1st semester of the 3rd academic session. Many arguments have been made in favour of IT in modern offices. Ekpenyong (2003) is of the opinion that the traditional teaching emphasis on chalk and talk be shifted to that of applying the resources provided by IT. The office practice also needs enhancement to reflect the technological advancement taking place in the present day office.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A cursory look at the course outline for core subjects of the office education both at the NCE and at degree levels

revealed that the curriculum is certainly wide in scope; the great concern of the author having undergone the training at the two levels, is the relevance and functionality of the content of the curriculum as it relates to the 21st century secretarial practice.

Since education is a dynamic instrument of change, the need to constantly review or revise the curriculum to ensure adequate and continued relevance to national needs and objectives is imperative. It is therefore the opinion of the author that the current curricula both at the NCE and at the degree levels for office education have outlived its usefulness. Secretarial practice in modern times has become dynamic hence the need for a review of the NCE curriculum of business education (office education option).

Selden and Jorgense in Azuka (1999) posited that "occupational preparation programmes must be redesigned to stimulate the working environments". In view of the issues raised therefore, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Computer enriched secretarial curriculum be integrated into the current NCE secretarial curriculum. Such courses should include:

- (a) Data and information systems;
- (b) Digital computer, computer software and computer programming;
- (c) Data representation and number systems and processing modes/techniques;
- (d) Course contents of the secretarial duties, Office practice and business communication should be computer oriented;
- (e) Courses such as survey of office information system; office automation, managing global information system could be introduced.

2. Training institutions – Nigeria Colleges of Education and Universities offering secretarial education should be well equipped with up-to-date and relevant teaching facilities and equipment. There should be a joint financing between the private, public and governmental agencies (local, state, national and international). Since no single individual can undertake the finding of business education: It could be very capital intensive.

3. There is a need to constitute relevant professional bodies, related educational agencies and representatives from industry to ensure that the current curricula in various institutions be reviewed. This onus rests on NCCE in order that the curricula may reflect the current trends and the needs of the society.

4. The Nigeria Ministry of Education should retrain the existing business teachers so as to be able to manipulate the machines involved for effective teaching of the learners.

5. Funds should be made available to all Nigeria educational institutions for the maintenance and upkeep of the machines.

6. There should be improved power supply to make sure that information flow is not distorted and to avoid damages to the machines.

7. The libraries should be well equipped if we are to join other countries that are connected to the Internet. In the light of these, teachers, schools, professional bodies such as (Association of Business Educators in Nigeria (ABEN), Business Educators Association in Vocational Education (BEAVE), Nigeria Institute of Management (NIM), etc) should be encouraged to produce relevant textbooks that reflect the needs of modern business in Nigeria for effective teaching and learning.

8. There is an urgent need for business education or secretarial studies departments in Nigeria Colleges of Education to have model offices similar to sophisticated business offices for simulation so that students can keep abreast of what they are likely to face after their training.

9. Teachers in the different institutions can meet with their chief executives to discuss the possibilities of bringing in proprietors with modern equipment into the campus. They can operate on commercial basis and at the same time serve the students on a term that will be acceptable to both partners.

10. Excursions should be restored back to the NCE curriculum to assist in taking the students to where they could be shown modern IT machines, and how they are operated.

CONCLUSION

If the objectives of business education are anything to go by, the recipients are expected to advance on their chosen career throughout life. In other words, they are to remain relevant in their chosen business career – office educator/secretary inclusive. This occupation is highly dynamic, lucrative and enormous. The introduction of IT has impacted positively upon secretarial practice, hence, the change in the way things are done in the offices of this 21st century. The resultant implication now suggests that, anyone that must acquire office education skills, knowledge and attitude must be computer literate, highly skillful and innovative, and should demonstrate how to utilize and develop IT in order to remain relevant in the modern day world of work. The recommendations suggested in this write up would certainly ensure a maximum capacity building both for those to be trained or retrained and they would be greatly empowered to compete well globally.

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