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Contents

Some of the Effects of the Growth of Water Hyacinth on Ogun River, Nigeria -O.A. Oke	1-5
School Library as a Tool for Exploiting the Benefits of Universal Basic Education (UBE) for National Development in Nigeria -Mbashir, A. Lanre	6-11
Misappropriation of Nomenclature in Business Education –Mrs R.I.O. Edobor, Mr. Patrick O. Ovias and Mrs T.A. Oyekan	uyi 12-18
Effects of Examination Leakage on the Integrity of Nige Tertiary Institutions –M.S. Omirin, Ph.D.	erian / 19-24
Electricity Consumption and Poverty Reduction in Nige A Calibration Analysis – Gafar T. Ijaiya	eria: 25-36
An Analytical Review of Edo Phonological Inventory -Nweke Joshua Azubike	37-43
The Representation of the Cosmic Process of Pain, Death and New Life in African Fiction – George N. Ans	aso 44-50
The Notion of Authentic African Imagery in Modern African Poetry: An Exploration of Some Selections from Senghor, Clark and Bitek – Ogbeide O. Victor	m 51-61
The Effect of Different Levels of Dehusked Castor See (Ricinus Communis) on Laying Hens –O.S. Adedeji; T.A. Adedeji; L.O. Ojedapo; I.A. Emiola and O.A. Amao	ds 62-69
A System's Approach to Solving the Professional Conflicts in the Health Sector in Nigeria -G.P.A. Adepoju	70-77

Integrated Rural Development and Education in Nigeria —Simon O. Akpakwu	78-84
Primary Science Education: The Cradle of Manpower Development in Nation Building -Osedum Robison Odinaka	85-92
Computer-Aided Sales Forecasting -Abada, G.O. and Chiemeke, S.C.	93-100
Laterite, Lateritisation and Importance in Engineering Constructions –J.A. Oniyide	101-111
The Executive-Legislative Relations in Nigeria's Fourth Republic –Abdulmalik Auwal	112-177
Accounting Ratios Analysis in Corporate Merger/Acquisition Bids: Imperatives for Business Capacity Building P.U.C. Agundu, Ph.D.	118-129
Developing Effective Advertising and Sales Promotion for the Performing Arts Organizations in Nigeria -Dr Muyiwa P. Awodiya	130-138
An Appraisal of Recommended Solutions to Students' Unrest in Higher Institutions in Nigeria –Mr Iheanacho, E.N.O.	139-144
Customer Satisfaction: The Driving Force in Bank Management –Linus E. Idam	145-150
The Role of Scavengers in Solid Waste Management: A Case Study of Minna –J.J. Dukiya	151-159
Assessment of the Effectiveness of Methods Used in Teaching Technical Drawing at Federal College of Education, Pankshin –Robert O. Okwori	160-167

Continuous Assessment and Examination Malpractice:
The Case of Federal College of Education, Kano
-S.O.A. Yusuf (Ph.D.)

Affordable Housing for Nigeria: The Way Forward
-Arc. A.W. Kareem and Arc. K.O. Lawal

Historical Development of Introductory Technology in
Nigerian Secondary Schools: An Appraisal
Michael Mantau Chiroma

186-193

Igbo Religion and Christianity: Change and Continuity
in Thought and Practice –David C. Okeke

194-208

MISAPPROPRIA'TION OF NOMENCLATURE IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

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Abstract

The eclectic nature of business education makes finding a single definition for it somewhat difficult. This is compounded by the fact that business education, as we know it today, "is a recent terminology in Nigeria because some people cannot differentiate it from the term Business Administration or Business Management" (Kanu, 1986). The issue of nomenclature vis-à-vis identity for business education persists to be a herculian task for even some that claim authority in vocational education. Some equate business education with secretarial studies, commercial studies and even technical education. Therefore, this is an attempt to justify the placement of business education in its proper position in the educational system in Nigeria.

Introduction

The issue of nomenclature in business education has generated a lot of controversy over the years among practitioners of education and scholars alike. One may rightly ask why should a name create a problem? What is in a name, after all? While there may be nothing more to a name than what we purport it to mean, the issue of nomenclature in vocational education of which business education is a subset, has more to it than the mere mentioning of the words, vocational, technical or business education. Kanu (1986) remarked that "the most serious problem which business education faces in Nigeria is the same which all other vocational education studies in Nigeria face". He asserted that "this problem is tied up with the history and system of education practiced in Nigeria".

It has been a long drawn battle over the ages for vocational education to reach its present status, as we know it today, yet none of its components have suffered more stigmatization than business education. The issue of nomenclature vis-à-vis identity for business education persists to be a herculian task for even some that claim authority in vocational education. A review of literature revealed that it means different things to different people. For instance some people:

- a) Equate business education/studies with secretarial studies (which is only an aspect of it).
- b) Equate it with commercial studies (which is tolerable).
- c) Others, even some institutions of higher learning, either subsume it and other vocation subjects either under vocational-technical education (as opposed to professional technical education thereby equating business education with vocational education, which is still tolerable but not good enough.

The Problem is Categorized Thus:

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- i. Vocational education strictly means business education. While we are not contesting that business education is vocational education, we are saying that vocational education is a broad term i.e. generic term, to be used by all types of educational programme that falls within its sphere.
- ii. Technical education and vocational education are often regarded as one and only one term and as such they are used interchangeably. For instance the revised NPE (1981) subsumes vocational education under technical education, and business education is referred to as vocational education at lower level of education and technical education at higher level of education.

Hence the problem at hand is of two-fold and through this paper we shall use a double-edged sword to severe business education's umbilical cord totally and partially from both technical education and vocational education respectively. Just like a newborn baby retains its identity and yet remains a composite creature of its parents.

The focus of this paper, therefore, is to clarify this issue by:

- a) Going down the memory lane of vocational education in Nigeria. Our understanding of its history will enable us appreciate the root of the misconceptions in business education.
- b) Defining the concepts involved in vocational education.
- c) Attempting to state what name business education should be at each level of education, and
- d) Suggesting ways by which the status of business education can be improved/raised to make it attractive to on-coming generations.

Business Education

The eclectic nature of business education makes the finding of a single definition for it somewhat difficult. This is compounded by the fact that business education, as we know it today, "is a recent terminology in Nigeria because some people cannot differentiate it from the term Business Administration or Business Management" (Kanu Op. Cit.). Echoing this, The International Dictionary of Education defines it as "studies of commercial and management subjects". It state further:

The term can sometimes be misleading because it tends to be used for a wide range of levels from office skills for school leavers to post-graduate or graduate studies in the more sophisticated management and business subjects and techniques.

Eni in Idih (1992) states that: "Business education for office occupations, distribution and marketing occupations, business teaching, business administration and economic understandings" Because of its many components business education could simply mean, "an educational process or context which has as primary aim the preparation of people for roles in enterprises; such roles

could be employee, entrepreneur/employer or simply as self-employed" (Ehiametalor, 1990). In summation, Ekpenyong (1990) states that:

Business education in a generic sense includes education which is intended for all who need education at high school or post high school (including university) level, other than for scientific and technical qualification, to equip then with knowledge and skill for their work in any sector of economic activity be it private or public.

Going by this definition, business education prepares one for proficiency in one's business career at whatever level it is offered. It does not prepare one for either scientific or technical career. This draws a clear line of distinction between what is business education and what is technical education. It will be misleading therefore to subsume one under the other.

Technology has made the proliferation of science prominent in business education especially the use of computer in instructional learning and in executing certain office work. All the electronic gadgets are regarded as aids to help in the completion of work. While a business educator may claim expertise in the use of these computer-based gadgets, this does not qualify him as a technical man. Business education is concerned with the education of the individual for business (those who want to take up career in business) and education of the individual about business (for all students in the entire school system irrespective of their career aspirations). It is a distinct body from technical education.

The Concept of Business Education

The review of the three concepts viz. Vocational education, technical education and business education highlights why some constructs in vocational education are wrong. For instance the UNESCO's reference to "vocational education" as education designed to prepare skilled personnel at lower levels of qualification for one or a group of occupations, trades of jobs" (Ekpenyong, 1991:16) is derogatory; subsuming vocational education under technical education on one hand and business education under technical education (NPE, 1981) is myopic. The same argument is advanced by the Ministry of Education Circular, SME/363/S/1/93 (Ekpenyong, 1991:17) that subsumed management, business studies, accounts, and secretarial studies under technical education. Technical education is given more prominence than any of its counterparts. Ekpenyong quite rightly noticed that:

In Nigeria, home economics and business education for instance, seem to have lost the chance of attracting sufficient public recognition, and government attention... on account of their being classified under technical education, (which by our analysis, so far, is wrong), rather than being treated as individual entities within the realm of vocational education to which technical education also belongs.

On the question of what shall we call business education? Any aspect of the total education programme that provides the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes needed to perform in the business world as a producer and/or customer of goods and services that business offers should be referred to as business education, at whatever level it is offered.

Secondary School Education

At the secondary level of education, it is right and appropriate to refer to all the occupational-oriented subjects as pre-vocational and vocational business education at this stage is meant for career exploration and therefore consists of all components of vocational education. It will be wrong to give any name to it other than vocational.

Tertiary Education and Technical Education

At post-secondary level where the purpose of education is for career specialization, anyone interested in a business career should be offered technical education.

It gladdens one's heart to notice the new wind of change that is blowing in our educational system. Our education planners have deemed it fit to accord a place of honour to vocational subjects at secondary school curriculum (NPE, 1998: Sec. 4). The whole of section of the same National Policy on Education was devoted to Vocational Education as offered by Technical Colleges. Here equal recognition is accorded to both business and technical subjects. NPE (1998; Sec. 5: 37) states:

The National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) shall handle technical and business examinations and award the National Technical Certificate (NTC), the National Business Certificate (NBC), the Advanced National Technical Certificate (ANTC) and the Advanced National Business Certificate (ANBC).

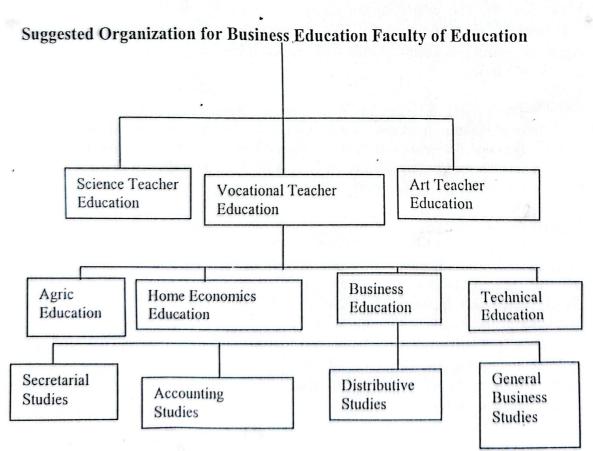
Polytechnic Education

Education at this level is streamlined. Its purpose is to offer specialized vocational courses at a tertiary level. All the branches of business education are accorded equal status under the School of Business and Management Studies. While there has been no problem regarding the issue of specialization or subsuming one course under the other, the reference to technical education as education for "sub professional level (NPE 1981: Sec. 6) is affecting the status of polytechnic education. The reasons being that of misconceptions as regarding the three concepts of Vocational Education, Technical Education and Business Education. It is hoped that the new NPE (1998) is the beginning of good things in vocational education.

University Education

At the university level, an examination of the UME/E Brochure for 2002/2003 by Joint Admission and Matriculation Board revealed that education courses such as Agricultural Technology, Home Economics, Industrial Technical and Technical are all listed under Science Education while Business Education is listed under Social Science Education. This is just as well and our educational planners should take a cue from this that a social science course cannot be subsumed under a science course. It is not logical.

At professional level, courses should be designated by their area of specialization i.e. Business or Technical, as adopted by Technical Colleges. For teacher education programmes all the courses/programmes should be subsumed under their generic name of vocational such that it becomes Vocational Teacher Education. Vocational because it deals with preparing students for career; and Teacher Education, as cited by Afe in Afe (2002), is that "component of any educational system charged with the education and training of teachers to acquire the competencies and skills of teaching for the improvement in the quality of teachers for the school system". Therefore, Vocational Teacher Education should be used to embrace all the fields under vocational education for teachers so as to distinguish them from general professional courses. Such that the organogram for business education becomes:



At a glance, it is obvious that all courses that are supposed to teach teachers for occupational-oriented courses are subsumed under Vocational Teacher Education. Each area of specialization is given its rightful place. This will enhance the status of business education and correct the erroneous belief of its being inferior to technical education.

Suggestions

The nation's education planners are on the right track to correct all the misconceptions about vocational education as shown in the new National Policy on Education (NPE, 1998) and should not rest on their oars. The following are, however, suggested:

- a) It should be made mandatory for all institutions offering vocational education and those for teachers' preparation in vocational education to adopt the structure proposed in this paper. This would enable all the components of vocational education to be rightfully positioned in the educational scheme. This should, hopefully, put a stop to the practice of subsuming one programme under the other either to 'enhance' its image or connote the intention of one being superior to the other.
- b) Anyone that wants to embark on vocational teacher education as a career, should have attained the initial vocational skills in the secondary school. A case where five '0' level credit passes in subjects other than vocational subjects are accepted as entry requirements for university admission should be discouraged. For instance, apart from the two or three compulsory subjects, the remaining three or two should be strictly relevant vocational subjects.
- c) Allowance, similar to that being paid to science teachers, should also be paid to vocational teachers as a way of encouragement.

Conclusion

It is envisaged that this gesture would go a long way to solving the dearth of teachers in vocational education. Also scholarship awards should be introduced to the school system to encourage students to take vocational courses just as the government is doing through the Technical Teachers' Training Programme to encourage the teachers.

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