Strategies Considered Effective for Transforming Business Education Programmes to the Needs of 21st Century Workplace in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose: The study was conducted to identify the strategies considered effective for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace.

Methodology: One research question and two hypotheses guided the study. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of 122 business education lecturers in tertiary institutions in Delta state. A 17-item questionnaire was used. Mean and standard deviation and z-test were used in the analysis of data.

Findings: The study revealed that all the 17-item statements on the strategies for transforming business education programmme to the needs of the 21st century workplace were considered effective.

Conclusion and policy recommendations: The study concluded that unless these effective strategies are adopted business education will have little capacity to adequately develop Nigerian graduates of business education to meet the challenges and complexities of the 21st century workplace. The study recommended among others that a closer collaboration between academicians of business education and business executives should be implemented continually in order to help students acquire the necessary 21st century workplace competencies while in school.

Keywords: _Strategy, Business Education, 21st century Workplace._

Introduction

Strategy is a laid down framework of plans and actions of an organization geared towards achieving its set objectives in the short and long run. Odo (2013) defined strategy as the techniques or mechanisms consciously put in place to maintain a standard or degree of excellence of a product or service. Strategies are the techniques an organization adopts, the path they follow and decisions they take in order to reach certain levels of success (Thomas & Strickerland, 2003).

In the context of education, strategy entails how institutions of learning equip students with the desirable competitive advantage beyond mere classroom performances to deal with the problems

of the society. To achieve an effective educational strategy, emphasis should lie on the dynamics of the society, methods of teaching and learning and the feasible objectives of educational programmes relative to the demands of a nation. Thus, educational strategy must anchor on achieving sustainable and practical acquisition of knowledge and skills in order to improve students' competitiveness in the society.

The scourge of unemployed graduates in the nation has accelerated all forms of intervention schemes by both federal and state governments across the nation aimed at curbing this menace. On the other hand, academicians believed that introducing entrepreneurship education programme and maintaining quality assurance systems across existing educational programmes are some realistic strategies for transforming the education sector of the nation. Fundamentally, providing students with self-reliance skills, job creation awareness and wealth development through Information and communication Technologies (ICTs) are the antidotes to ill-perceived educational sector of Nigeria.

Remarkably, business education programmes which is not one of the glamorous courses of study in Nigeria is built on making its recipients become job creators, wealth providers, workplace ICT consultants, entrepreneurs of small and medium enterprises and executive managers of business entities. That may be why; Ugwoke (2011) posited that the package of business education is a work-focused, skill-based, result-oriented and technology-based programme. Therefore, business education is designed to expose and equip students with necessary awareness and skills with which to cope with the intricacies and dynamics of the unpredictable challenges of the business environment.

Graduates of business education programmes are expected to possess the academic awareness and the technical competencies needed to survive and compete in the global business world. Hence, Onyesom and Okolocha (2013) defined business education as the intellectual and vocational preparation of students for earning a living in the contemporary industrial and business environment.

Presently, the unstoppable waves of ICT and globalization have led to the creation of the 21st century workplace. The 21st century workplace is a paperless office with a global outlook of efficient workforce ready to handle all sorts of technological and socio-cultural needs of their clients. According to Osuala and Okeke in Okeke (2014), the 21st century workplace is an automated office that utilizes modern technologies for efficient, accurate and faster office duties. Similarly, Okwuanaso (2004) opined that 21st century workplaces are automated offices that provide new and alternative ways of performing daily business activities.

Transforming business education programmes is necessitated by the aftermath effects of ICT and globalization in the society and in the workplace at large. In addition, business education programmes have been criticized for its inability to prepare students for the innovative needs of the 21st century workplace. Perhaps, the teaching and learning processes undertaken by students of business education are not congruent with the everyday complexity of today's workplace.

In their views, Pfeffer and Long (2002) opined that the core curriculum of business education program is irrelevant and has small relationship to what is needed for succeeding in the 21st century workplace. This stark reality may be responsible for the un- employability of business education graduates in the world of works upon graduation. Correspondingly, Reiner in Chigbuson (2011) added that employers of labor are in need of employees who can operate comfortably with the

technological and cultural demands of the 21st century workplace. It is in this regard that the study sought to assess effective strategies for transforming business education programme to the needs of the 21st century.

Statement of the problem

The changing trend in the labor market has not only generated various requirements for entry into today's workforce but has also threatened the position of business education graduates that are ill-equipped with the specialized knowledge and dynamics of the 21st century workplace. As a result of the innovative demands of the labour market, there has been a consistent global call for educational programmes (including business education) to equip students with relevant 21st century workplace requirements through restructuring of the academic programmes of tertiary institutions. What constitutes effective strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace is the problem of this study.

Purpose of the Study

i.   The purpose of the study was to identify effective strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace. Specifically, the study sought to identify the effective strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace.

Research Question

i.   What are the effective strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

i.   There is no significant difference between male and female business education lecturers mean rating of the strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace.

ii. There is no significant difference between universities and colleges of education business education lecturers mean rating of the strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace.

Method

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. According to Esene (2009), descriptive survey method is appropriate, especially for seeking individuals' opinions, attitudes and perceptions in their natural setting. The population of the study comprised of 122 business education lecturers in Delta state. There was no sampling since the population was manageable. The instrument for data collection was named Strategies for Transforming Business Education Programmes Questionnaire (STBEPQ). The questionnaire had a four point scale of Highly Effective (HE), Effective (E), Ineffective (I) and Highly Ineffective (HI). Section A of the questionnaire had 2 items on demographic variables of the respondents (gender and school type). Section B had 17 items based on the research question. Content validity of the instrument was carried out by two experts in business education and one expert in measurement and evaluation all in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Test-retest method was used to determine the reliability of the items. The reliability test was done by administering the questionnaire to 20 business education lecturers in

Anambra state which were not part of the study after which a reliability co-efficient of 0.78 was obtained. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research question. Mean rating above 2.50 indicated effectiveness while mean rating less than 2.50 indicated ineffectiveness. Z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. If the calculated value was less than critical value, the hypothesis was retained or alternatively, the hypothesis would be rejected.

Results

Research questions one: What are the effective strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace?

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard deviation of respondents on the effective strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace

(N = 122)

S/N	Strategies for Transforming Business Education Programme	$\overline{x}$	SD	Decision
1	Business educators ability to balance theory with practice in their instructional procedures and delivery	3.85	0.97	Highly Effective
2	Integrating practical projects on what the 21st century workplace are practicing to business education classrooms and groups.	3.90	0.93	Highly Effective
3	Aligning the programmes of business education with real world of work practices and standards of the 21st century workplace.	3.93	0.93	Highly Effective
4	Aligning the programmes of business education with standards of competencies and training needs of the 21st century workplace	3.96	0.91	Highly Effective
5	Integrating job certifications from professional business bodies on business education courses	3.98	0.91	Highly Effective
6	Adopting job licensing by professional business bodies on business education graduates	3.99	0.94	Highly Effective
7	Introducing of classroom business oriented seminars and workshops as part of the teaching and learning process	3.10	0.90	Effective

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8	Bringing in experienced and recognized business guru as visiting classroom consultants in the teaching and learning process	3.81	0.77	Highly Effective
9	Adopting smaller business education classrooms	3.92	0.89	Highly Effective
10	Using business-oriented quantitative models in teaching business education courses	3.93	0.77	Highly Effective
11	Utilizing results of applied business research in teaching business education courses	3.04	0.82	Effective
12	Enforcing and implementing adequate no holds barred internship programmes for business education students	3.00	0.98	Effective
13	Redesigning business education programmes to provide comprehensive training on technical skills needed for graduates to get 21st century office jobs	3.83	0.89	Highly Effective
14	Engaging business education students to take a particular job professional licenses or certifications on practical examinations upon the completion of their business courses.	3.93	0.93	Highly Effective
15	Constantly sharing information with executives of business empires on innovative business competencies and challenges	2.98	0.82	Effective
16	Adjusting goals of business education programmes should to be flexible to accommodate the needs of the business environment and the society at large	2.85	0.72	Effective
17	Using appropriate business education literature with in depth analysis of how to compete in the business world	2.78	0.79	Effective
	GRAND MEAN	**3.58**		**Highly Effective**

The data in Table 1 show that 11 items were highly effective while six items were effective. The grand mean of 3.58 indicated that business education lecturers considered all the strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace highly effective. The standard deviation values ranging between 0.72 and 0.98 indicate that the respondents were homogeneous in their opinions.

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Hypothesis 1

Table 2: z-test summary analysis of effective strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace based on gender

(N=122)

Gender	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	α	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Male	68	3.95	0.89					
				0.05	120	0.39	1.96	NS
Female	54	3.89	0.80					

The result in Table 2 shows that male respondents (68) had a mean response of 3.95 and a standard deviation of 0.89 while the female respondents (54) had mean response of 3.89 and a standard deviation of 0.80. The calculated z-value of 0.39 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 120 degree of freedom. This revealed no significant difference and therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means that male and female respondents do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the effective strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace.

Hypothesis 2

Table 3: z-test summary analysis of effective strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace based on institution type (N=122)

Gender	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	α	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
University	9	3.79	0.89					
				0.05	120	0.72	1.96	NS
Colleges of education	113	3.57	0.70					

The result presented in Table 3 shows that the calculated z – value of 0.72 is less than the critical z – value of 1.96 (0.72 < 1.96) at 0.05 level of significance and 120 degree of freedom. This means that respondents from universities and colleges of education did not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the effective strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace and hence the null hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The findings proved that all the items raised in Table 1 were effective strategies for transforming business education programmes to the needs of the 21st century workplace. This implies that business education lecturers should adopt more of practice-driven instructional strategies and business-oriented quantitative models in teaching business education courses as well as adopt smaller business education classrooms. Business education programmes should also integrate job licensing and certification practices from relevant professional business bodies in their preparation of undergraduates.

Findings of the study are in consonance with the report of Akpomi (2009) which stated that the present framework of business education is too anachronistic due to wrong pedagogies used in teaching business education courses to students. Earlier, Okoye (2007) had stressed that business education programmes can always fail if its entire instructional strategies cannot produce graduates that are trained on the basis of the prevailing business circumstances at the 21st century workplace. In addition, Odu in Okolocha and Ile (2012) had emphasized that a good school-industry link will lead to effective transformation of business education programmes.

The findings of the study also show that respondents shared the same opinions regardless of their gender and the institutions of learning. If effective strategies such as aligning the preparation of business education practitioners with real world of work practices, competencies and requirements of the 21st century workplace and adopting smaller classrooms among others are not enforced, then such business education programme is in the wrong track (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005).

Conclusion

From all indications seen in literature utilized for this study and the analysis and interpretation of the results obtained, it was concluded that all the items in Table 1 were effective strategies for producing suitable business education graduates for the 21st century. By implication, business education has little capacity to adequately develop graduates to meet the challenges and complexities of the 21st century workplace if those strategies are not adopted. Those strategies, if adopted will reduce the difficulties of business education graduates who are presently not able to meet the expectations of employers of labor in their performances in the workplace and who therefore are usually under-employed.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, it was recommended that business education programmes in tertiary institutions in Nigeria should adopt all those stated strategies to ensure qualitative transformation of business education graduates to the needs of the 21st century workplace. Most importantly, a closer collaboration between academicians of business education and the business executives should be encouraged continually in order to help students to practice the necessary 21st century workplace habits, develop competencies and have better attitudes while in school.

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