Policymakers' Backbench Syndrome and Realities of Business Education in Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State

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Abstract

The study determined the difference in the mean rating of students on policy makers' backbench syndrome (perception) and the realities of business education in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study was 722 final year business education students from the three (3) tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The sample size of the study was 653 final year business education students which represents 90% of the entire population. A researcher developed instrument captioned "Policy Makers Backbench Syndrome and Realities of Business Education" (POMABASRBE) were used to collect data for the study. An expert in Measurement and evaluation and two specialists in Business Education validated the instrument by checking the clarity and appropriateness of the instrument, their input and suggestions led to the modification of the instrument. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined by using Cronbach alpha method, thereby arriving at the coefficient index of 0.87. Out of the 722 copies of the questionnaire which was distributed only 653 of them which represent 90% return rate was retrieved with the help of nine (9) research assistants. The data retrieved were processed, organised and analysed to answer the research questions and hypothesis formulated to guide the study. The null hypothesis was tested using Analysis of variance (ANOVA) at 0.05% level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that the initial concept of business education was to provide citizens with necessary skills required to obtain gainful employment, there exist definitional confusion about business education: the course content, programme and prestige differs according to schools; the misconception about the course outweighs it's reality which led to the total neglect of the programme by government, policy makers, parents and the students. The study sees the reality of business education as a tripartite programme of instruction that is the fusion of pedagogical and managerial preparation. It further suggests or proposed a model tagged 'school-work mix which will serve as a panacea for achieving quality and functional business education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Backbench syndrome, Perception, Realities, Business Education, Definitional confusion.

Introduction

In the traditional Nigeria society Business Education was run through the apprenticeship system. Young people were trained in the art of learning the trade such as buying and selling, carpentry, mason, sculptor, wood carving, weaving etc. They acquired these skills not necessarily from their parents, but from relations and experts who ensued discipline and perseverance in their learners. Historically, Business education can be traced back to the development of technical education since it is an off-spring of craft and engineering education. Ulinfun (1986) in Akpan (1997) asserts that the major milestone in the history of

Business education in Nigeria includes Phelps Stoke commission of 1925, which examined the educational policy of the colonial government. This attracted some increase in the finding of technical education and some private sectors were allowed to start commercial centres, where commercial arithmetic, bookkeeping, business communication skills, business English vocabulary and typewriting skills were learnt for the purpose of facilitating business transactions. They were also expected to learn simple proportion, invoicing, records keeping and profit and loss concepts. Thus it could be said that early Nigerian entrepreneurs pioneered business education in Nigeria.

Business Education is designed with the primary purpose of upgrading skills or providing citizens with necessary skills required to obtain gainful employment; and the programmes are thus geared towards entry into particular jobs and administration of the programmes towards the achievement of the goal (Ene, 1986 in Akpan, 2007). There had been no lack of efforts to improve vocational-technical/ business education in Nigeria because several reports such as Ashby commission of 1960; Banigo commission of 1961; Oldman commission of 1961; and Dike commission of 1961 have been commissioned and written both for the Federal and regional governments (Adetoro, 1986 in Akpan 1997). These reports however failed to live up to expectation and exert any meaningful impact on the quality of Nigeria business education because of the ideology that this was mainly an area for those who could not make it in the grammar schools (Akpan, 2001). This assertion constitutes one of the major problems confronting business education in Nigeria today. It therefore becomes necessary and important to re-orient the people by correcting the negative impression and misconception the society has about business education by x-raying its realities.

Statement of the Problem

The problems confronting business education as an educational programme in our tertiary institutions is noticed and recognised as policy makers and administrators claim that business education was mainly an idea for those who could not make it in the grammar schools, too expensive to run and a second chance course (Akpan, 2001). Osuala (2004) asserts that the department in many schools are dominated by interlopers with few professionals; this constituted a definitional problem of the course as the scholars define the course from their various backgrounds. This has metamorphosed to inadequate funding of the problem, insufficient facilities and equipment for effective running and implementation of the programme; inadequate intakes in the period of admission and some universities uses the department as a dumping ground for those students who were unable to meet up the entering requirements in other departments. To buttress this point (Oweh, 2015) asserts that Minister of education has identified poor public perception of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as part of the constraints hindering Nigerians from fully embracing the concept, and poor understanding of TVET also hinders government effort at repositioning the sector for greater productivity. The purpose of the study is to determine the difference in the mean rating of students on policy makers' backbench syndrome and realities of business education in Rivers State.

Research question and hypothesis

Only one research question and a null hypothesis was posed and formulated to guide and provide answer to the study stated as follows; how could policy makers backbench syndrome (perception) influence the realities of business education?, and there is no significant difference in the mean rating of students on policy makers backbench syndrome (perception) and the realities of business education.

Policy makers' backbench syndrome (perception)

Backbench as it relates to this study is a situation where policy makers in the higher institutions flood business education department with students who do not choose the department as first choice, but as the last resort of gaining admission for the fact that they had low composite scores in post University Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). In the past the proprietors of education were more interested in producing clerical officers to meet their immediate needs. But when the provision for expanded curriculum was designed, the interest and attention shifted away from the satisfaction of immediate needs to technological buoyancy by establishing the technical trade schools. Initially business was seen and tagged commercial education. This misconception led to the neglect of business education in Nigeria educational system (Akpan, 2001). Some schools of thought perceived business education to comprise only office and secretarial studies. Others perceived it as business studies especially in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, they have Business studies department, but the curriculum is designed to awards business education degree, what a mix-up. These contentions have led to an indebt study, search and analysis of the uniqueness of business education in higher institutions. Most tolerate perception about business education according to (Marzano, 1992) in his study, discovered that 50% of male and 68% of female high school students believed that with a four-year degree, they would have a nice professional job by the time they are 30 years old. No wonder the school of business education has the highest population of students in Federal College of Education, Omoku. The reverse is the case in Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt, the explosive population in business education department is characterized by the policy makers' backbench syndrome as they graft students from other departments especially management sciences who had low composite scores to business education as the last resort of gaining admission because of offering related courses and programmes. See below the summary of admission 2016/2017 cut off point result of Rivers State University of Science and Technology.

Table 1. Summary of aumission 2010/2017 cut off point.							
Faculty	Department of Domicile	Cut-off					
Agriculture	Agric. & Applied Econs./Extension	38					
	Animal Science	46					
	Crop Science	42					
	Fisheries & Aquatic Environment	47					
	Food Science & Technology	38					
	Forestry & Environment	47					
	Home Science & Management	44					
Engineering	Agric. & Environmental	39					
	Chem./Petrochem	53					
	Civil	52					
	Electrical	54					
	Marine	54					
	Mechanical	54					
	Petroleum	53					
Environmental Science	Architecture	55					
	Estate Management	38					
	Quantity surveying	-					
	Surveying & Geomatics	40					

Table 1:Summary of admission 2016/2017 cut off point.

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	Urban & Regional Planning	40	
Law	Law	60	
Management Sciences	Accountancy	54	
	Banking & Finance	52	
	Management	57	
	Marketing	42	
	Mass Communication	55	
	Office & Information Management	50	
Science	Applied & Environmental Biology	50	
	Biochemistry	52	
	Chemistry	41	
	Computer Science	53	
	Mathematics	43	
	Medical Laboratory Science	59	
	Physics	39	
Technical & Science Education	Business Education (all options)	39	
	Educ. Founds. (Adult & Comm. Edu.	37	
	Science & Technical Education	40	

From table 1, business education domiciled in the Faculty of Technical and Science Education of the University has one of the least cut-off point of '39'. The implication is that candidates who choose courses in management sciences as their 1st choices with 39-41 composite scores will automatically be pushed to business education on mere obtaining of a supplementary form because of offering related courses. Presently, the department has the highest number of students in the schools and this negates the principle of adequate acquisition of the required skills. This attitude has posed in the minds of the public and the students a poor perception about the business education. The researcher further affirms that business education programme is designed to accept the best during entry point and turn out same as output, but the reverse is the case as the policy makers push the 'bad', 'good' and 'better' to the department with the expectation to have the best output. This directly increases the work load of the instructors, teachers and lecturers and making instructional delivery a herculean task. Bishop (1995) opined that there is strong evidence that generic technical and occupational specific skills provided in vocational education can increase workers' productivity, skill transfer, job access, job stability, when vocational graduates divide training-related jobs. Oweh (2015) cited the comments of Rufa'I, the Minister of Education who identified the problem of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as poor public perception. These constraints have hindered Nigerians from fully embracing the concept, and poor understanding of TVET also hinders government effort at repositioning the sector for greater productivity.

Overtime, the initial concept of business education has changed. No wonder the term business has been prone to definitional confusion for some time now. The term has been so freely used, misinterpreted by many and clearly understood by few. The confusion associated with the appropriate definition of the term originally derives from the confusion of whether it is business education or education for business or indeed business teacher education. A generally acceptable definition has been difficult to arrive at because research and theoretical formulations have continued to grapple with the issue, providing as many definition as there are experts (Otamiri, 2014).

Definition emerges and increases according to the number of experts. Osuala (1998) cited the definition of American Vocational Association (AVA) defines business education as a programme of instruction, which consists of two parts:

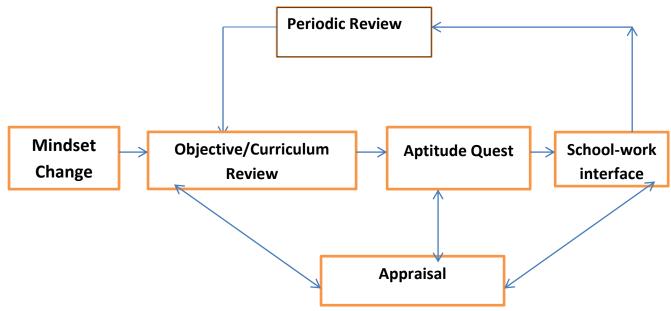
- (a) office education, a vocational education programme for office careers through initial, refresher, and upgrading education leading to employability and advancement in office occupation and
- (b) general business education, a programme to provide students with information and competencies which are needed by all in managing personal and business affairs and in using the services of the business world.

Ubulom (2004) opined that business education is an aspect of educational process which gives an individual the pedagogical and business competencies necessary for teaching and practising business attitudes, concepts, skills and knowledge for personal use, for entry into business world as employer or employee and for participation as a business teacher. It is observed from the above definitions that business education is supposed to prepare individuals for smooth transition from school to work. It is education needed to teach people how to handle personal affairs in order to be good citizens of the society. This certainly is the philosophy behind setting up department of business education in schools that originally had business administration department, business studies department. It is in the spirit of this combined objective and philosophy that business education students go for both teaching practice and students industrial work experience scheme 'SIWES'. Considering the present day business education programmes in our schools, the researcher therefore defined Business education as a tripartite programme of instructions which prepares the recipient or the learner to be (TOS) a teacher, an operator or to be self-reliant. The acronym TOS'T' stands for Teacher, 'O' stands for Operator and 'S' stands for Self-reliant. No wonder the department of business education in Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt outline the philosophy of business education thus: 'In consonance with the National Policy of Education, the department of intends to produce teachers who can effectively teach all business subjects at the post primary level of education and obtain gainful employment in the private and public sector. In furtherance of the above philosophy the department has the following objectives:-

- a) To produce teachers to teach business subjects in secondary schools
- **b**) To produce teachers who will engage in professional studies in Business education.
- c) To produce strong advocates and promoters of viable industries and business enterprises.
- **d**) To enable graduates of the programme to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of business'.

With regards to pedagogical approach to business education, the definitional and backbench syndrome may continue if we the business education experts (Business educators) overlook the misconception and flooding of the department by the society and policy makers. Therefore it is imperative that business educators need to re-orient the people, change the mind set to focus on the realities of business education. Otamiri (2014) is of the view that since we are involved and for the purpose of securing the future of our children, the task of ensuring quality business education must be won. We need to approach this war by adopting 'school-work mix model of business education. This school-work mix is seen as a proposal

which will serve as a panacea for achieving quality and functional business education. These six (6) stages can be followed to ensure that effective skills are acquired both in delivery and outcome.



School-work mix model of Business education (Source: Otamiri, 2014).

The pedagogical approach should begin with the preparation of the students' mind-set to become a teacher, operator or to be self-reliant at the end of the programme. In model for entrepreneurship generation (Ottih, 2013 as in Otamiri, 2014) posit it that mind-set change reengineering was the first step to adopt, by building pride in themselves as human engineers vested with the responsibility of producing future leaders in education and industry. Secondly the objective of business education should be harmonized and reviewed to represent the realities of the society. The goal as stipulated since 1975 need to be overhaul and the curriculum in Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities should be same. Emphasis must be placed on sound pedagogical principles and practical skills that package wholesome business education. Umoru (2013) asserts that there was the need to set up a committee comprising very experienced Business Educators to prepare a benchmark minimum academic standard for Business Education undergraduate programmes in Nigeria Universities having discovered disparities and inconsistencies in the curriculum content as currently operated by some universities. Curriculum is often the object of reforms intended to broaden its mandate with a view to encouraging greater standardization and consistency across board. In the realization of this objective, this document is offered to be adopted by all universities in Nigeria offering business education programme so that beneficiaries will be equipped with relevant knowledge, skill and competencies needed in the world of work. While the Association encourages diversification in business education offering as may be occasioned by institutional peculiarities, this curriculum should provide the required basics for such but certainly nothing else. Similarly, it is recognised that constant review is an essential feature of an enduring curriculum and this will be pursed diligently at the appropriate time.

Students who passed the University Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and post UTME screening test with the zeal and quest for business education should be admitted into the department, instead of admitting candidates who did not meet up the entry requirement compulsorily into the department. The students should be monitored regularly in order for school activities to interface with the world of work to confirm that what is taught is relevant to the demands of work; and there should be inbuilt appraisal system that will regularly check the accomplishment of the desired objective. After five (5) years the curriculum need to be looked into to see areas that need to be reviewed, because there is need to bridge the gap between school and work, therefore stakeholders must continue to create constant awareness among learner, families on the possibilities for progression, employment and self-fulfilment that TVET has to offer. In view of the negative public perception of technical/vocational education which business education is part of there is constant need for creating public awareness, especially to attract the young ones.

Method

The survey research design was used for the study conducted in the three tertiary institutions offering business education in Rivers state namely Rivers State University of Science & Technology, Port Harcourt, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt and Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku. The population of the study consist of all the 722 final year business education students in the three institutions. The choice of students is that they made the career choice at the entry point. The sample size of the study was 653 final year business education students in the three institutions stratified thus: RSUST 220, IAUE 264 and FCE (T) 169. A 12 item guestionnaire captioned "Policy Makers Backbench Syndrome and Realities of Business Education" (POMABASRBE) were designed for data collection. The response option used for the study was 4 point rating scale as follows: Strongly Agreed (SA)= 4 points, Agree (A) = 3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SDA) = 1 point. The respondents were required to tick in the boxes provided for their responses. The validation of the instrument was done by a Measurement and Evaluation expert and two Business Education experts while the internal consistency of the instrument was determined by using Cronbach alpha method and the coefficient index of 0.87 was obtained. The instrument was administered by the researcher together with the help of 9 research assistance. Out of the 722 copies of questionnaire distributed only 653 were retrieved which is 90% return rate which served as the sample size of the study. The research question and the null hypothesis were answered and tested using the analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine the difference in the mean rating of student in the three schools studied. The summary of the analysis of variance indicated no significant difference in the (complex) mean rating of students in tertiary institutions in Rivers State on Policy Makers Backbench Syndrome and Realities of Business Education. The decision rule states that the Ho: will be rejected when the calculated value is greater than the critical value and will be accepted when the calculated value is lesser than the critical value.

Results

Research Question: How could policy makers backbench syndrome (perception) influence the realities of business education?,

	(N=653)									
S/N	Policy makers backbench syndrome and the realities of business education	RSU (N=220)		IAUE (N=264)		FCE (T) (N=168)		Tot. Res-	Mean Score	Remarks
		Tot	X	Tot	X	Tot	X	ponse		
1	Students find themselves in business education programme as their first choice of course	370	1.68	992	3.75	588	3.47	650	2.96	Positive
2	Students' score in UTME and post UTME qualified them for business education programme	361	1.64	972	3.68	569	3.36	634	2.89	Positive
3	Population of students in business education is greater than the population of students in other departments?	831	3.77	1018	3.85	634	3.75	827	3.79	Positive
4	Business education is only interested in producing clerical officers to meet their immediate needs	420	1.82	530	1.92	602	3.52	517	2.42	Negative
5	Business education programme in your institution is very expensive to run?	564	2.56	615	2.32	527	3.11	568	2.66	Positive
6	Business education students within their years of their studies feel inferior to students in other departments	520	2.36	465	1.76	188	1.11	391	1.74	Negative
7	Business education department in your institution has a block of their own	322	1.46	348	1.31	628	3.71	432	2.16	Negative
8	Business education programme prepares students to be teacher, operator or entrepreneur	687	3.12	819	3.10	586	3.46	697	3.22	Positive
9	Business education graduates are likely to be employed and earn more than non-business education graduates?	576	2.61	582	2.20	538	3.18	565	2.66	Positive
10	A related set of beliefs about the labour market reinforce the poor perception of policy makers about business education?	631	2.86	671	2.54	481	2.84	594	2.74	Positive
11	Business education programme had their attention focused on career preparation?	700	3.18	600	2.27	454	2.68	584	2.71	Positive
12	Business education programme place greater emphasis on teaching skills relevant to the job market?	589	2.67	605	2.29	440	2.60	544	2.52	Positive
	Grand Mean								2.70	

Table 2: Response on how policy makers' backbench syndrome (perception) can influence the realities of business education?

Results

The findings from table 2 above shows that business education departments in the three institutions are highly populated, only students from IAUE and FCE (T), secured admission into the department of business education as first choice, their scores in UTME and post UTME screening gave them admission into the department, reverse is the case with respect to the students of RSUST who found themselves in the department as the last resort this subjected them to look inferior among their folks. The findings also revealed that apart from FCE (T) others institutions has no building or block of their own irrespective of the dense population of students in the department. It is also observed that business education programmes in our institutions prepares students either to be a teacher, operator or to be self-reliant (an entrepreneur) which indicates that the programme's attention is on career preparation of the recipients or learners and the outputs of the programme are likely to secure job, earn more than their counterparts in other fields.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the mean rating of students on policy makers' backbench syndrome (perception) and the realities of business education.

Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)								
Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	dF	Mean Squares	F-ratio Cal	F-ratio Crit.			
Between Groups	376.31	2	188.15					
				1.16	4.60			
Within Groups	105462	651	162		<u>.</u>			

Table 3: Difference in the mean rating of students on Policymakers' backbench syndrome (perception) and the realities of business education

Table 3 shows the calculated f-value of 1.16 is lesser than f-crit. of 4.60 which means that there is a significant difference in the mean rating of students on policy makers' backbench syndrome (perception) and realities of business education in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. Therefore the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference was rejected and the alternate accepted.

Discussion

A critical look at business education programmes in tertiary institutions shows that the course has not been accorded its real position and attention; this neglect is a thing of concern; in the midst of this, the lecturers give their best while the students persevere to acquire the needed skills and knowledge. The study revealed that the three institutions studied that only one of them had a building of their own, while the other two are still tenants to other faculties. It is also observed that the departments in the three institutions studied are highly populated. Students from IAUE and FCE (T), secured admission into the department of business education as first choice, their scores in UTME and post UTME screening gave them admission into the department, while the reverse is the case with respect to the students of RSUST who found themselves in the department as the last resort. The finding of the study is in consonance with the view of (Akpan, 2001) who posited that the perceived importance of this type of education by most Nigerians is still distorted. The study shows that the calculated f-value of 1.16 is lesser than the r-crit. of 4.60 at 0.05% level of significance which indicates that there is a significant difference in the (complex) mean rating of students on Policymakers, backbench syndrome (perception) in Rivers State University mostly at the early of the programme. Therefore the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship was rejected. The implication is that the more the policy makers adopt positive perception about business education, focusing on its realities the higher the students will embrace the course in Rivers State University. The study also revealed that the cut-off point allotted to business education at the entry point is inadequate with referenced to other departments that offers similar and related courses. The study revealed that there is a serious misconception held by Policymakers, parents and other educationists that business education is for the training of clerical workers guarantee students a place in the middle class and expensive to run. The study discovered that the concept of business education according to (Akpan 2007) who posits that business education is usually designed with the primary purpose of upgrading skills or providing citizens with necessary skills required to obtain gainful employment is distorted by the Policymakers since they push students with low

scores to the department, thereby increasing the work load of the lecturers. This finding is in support to the assertion of (Okoroma, 2017) who considered this grafting and over populating of students in the faculty of education as policy summersault. This call for the view of Umoru (2013) who asserts that there was the need to set up a committee comprising very experienced Business Educators to prepare a benchmark minimum academic standard. Therefore the school-work mix model is advocated for business educators to correct the misconception. The model will help to re-position the mind-set of the Policymakers, administrators, students, and the society about the importance and potentials of business education. The implication of the finding is supported by the view of (Marzano, 1992) who stated that for students to learn, they need a positive attitude and atmosphere towards learning. This assertion is supported by the opinion of (Otamiri and Adiele 2004, Otamiri and Odigie 2009) that business education involves the study of technologies, related science and the acquisition of practical skill including teaching skills.

Conclusion

The study determined the difference in the mean rating of students on policy makers' perception and realities of business education in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

The population of the study was 722 final year business education students from the three (3) tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The sample size of the study was 653 final year business education students which represents 90% of the entire population. The findings of the study revealed that there is a lot of misconception about business education contrary to the initial concept of business education which is to provide citizens with necessary skills required to obtain gainful employment. The study revealed that there exists definitional confusion about business education: the course content, programme and prestige differs according to schools; the misconception about the course outweighs its reality which led to the total neglect of the programme by government, policymakers, parents and the students. The study also revealed that the cut-off point appointed to business education at the entry point is inadequate. The study sees the reality of business education as a tripartite programme of instruction that is the fusion of pedagogical and managerial preparation. It further suggests the employment of professional in business education department and also proposed a model tagged 'school-work mix which will serve as a panacea for achieving quality and functional business education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study it is recommended that:

- Business educators should be employed to teach business education courses in order to correct the negative perception.
- Only students with the quest and zeal for business education who passed their UTME and post UTME screening of the institutions are admitted to the department.
- The adoption of school-work mix model is sacrosanct
- Study should be conducted to correct the misconception of the students about business education but to see the realities.
- A committee comprising Business Educators should be set up to prepare a benchmark minimum academic standard for business education programmes.

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