

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE RELEVANCE OF SHORTHAND IN BUSINESS EDUCATION CURRICULUM

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Abstract

Many research findings have revealed that shorthand is no longer meeting the market demand for employment. This paper explains the concepts and objectives of Business education. The relevance of shorthand in information technology era was examined. The paper also discusses the argument for the teaching of shorthand to be scraped from business education curriculum, because students are biased since shorthand is hardly needed in the office after graduation, students do not have interest in the course, and most institutions of learning do not have adequate learning and teaching materials needed for inculcating the skill. Some recommendations like the curriculum should be enriched in line with what now operates in the technological age were proffered.

INTRODUCTION

Business Education is a subset of education that deals with business opportunities. It is concerned with education of individuals for and about business. The broad aim of business education is to train youths and unemployed persons for jobs and also to help workers update their job skills. According to Aliyu (2000) business education programme at any level has two major purposes namely, to provide training in specific jobs and to develop a learner's ability to use these skills in the business environment. Business education is a programme of courses that offers knowledge and competence required for entry into various kinds of business occupations and advancing in them. It covers a host of learning experiences that prepare individuals for occupations in clerical, distributive business, data processing, word processing and secretarial fields Jimoh-Kadiri (2011). A recipient of business education can fit into or be employed in four occupational areas: namely, book-keeping and accounting jobs, clerical and general office jobs, office technology and management jobs, distribution and marketing jobs (Okwuanaso and Nwazor, 2000).

Business studies an aspect of business education comprises subjects like book-keeping, typewriting, shorthand, office practice, commerce, general business and others at the junior and sub-professional level, while at the professional level, business education comprises the following:

- a. Accounting Education
- b. Secretarial Education
- c. Information Management and Office Education
- d. Marketing/Distributive Education
- e. Purchasing and Supply Education
- f. Agro-Business Education
- g. General Business Management Education

Osuala (2002), stated the following as the objectives of Business Education:

- To enable students to explore and learn about the world of work and the relevant interest and career areas of their choices.
- To provide the students with the necessary occupational information to enable them to understand the various occupations found in the world of work.
- To enable students to acquire skills in the fields of their choices.
- To enable students prepare for, choose, enter into and progress in occupation of their choices.

The above objective reveals that they are in agreement with two of the National educational aims and objectives as contained in the New National Policy on Education (2004). These are:

- Inculcation of the right types of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society 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 the society.

Writing of shorthand involves representation of word sounds by the use of special signs known as outlines. Any conventional shorthand sign written to represent a word or group of words is an outline. Such outline could be written to represent a word form such as uncommon word, frequently mis-spelt word, homophones and most frequently used words in business communication. Shorthand, the bedrock of stenography which enables a secretary to take down spoken words at high speeds and transcribe them speedily and accurately on a typewriter has been with us for so long as to require no introduction. There are, of course, some who hold the view that the business education curriculum must be redesigned to reflect the progress that has come to the business world through information and communication technologies. In the opinion of such critics, the skill of shorthand is a dead wood in the business education curriculum (Ndinechi, 1984).

The Relevance of Shorthand in Information Technology Era

In the present day Nigeria, the relevance of shorthand in Information Technology Era has troubled the minds of many, especially secretarial students, employers, professionals and non-professionals, and so on. Whether shorthand should be dropped from business education curriculum has continued to generate controversy among business educators. While some such as Nte (1996), Ndinechi (2001) and Osuala (2004) had contended that with the advent of modern technological developments, the study of shorthand is no longer relevant, others including Iredia (1998), Mbaezue (2000) and Balogun (2002) were of the opinion that shorthand is still essential in spite of the modern technological developments. The purpose of training and development is to enable an individual acquire the skill and knowledge that will be relevant for his or her job performance. Every curriculum is expected to make beneficiaries apply the skills acquired in solving problems in the work place.

In the new edition of his book titled *Principles and Methods of Business and Computer Education*, Osuala (2004) stated:

In this New Edition, shorthand and transcription were deliberately left out in view of the heightened impetus on word/data processing globally in business education.

According to Ndinechi (2001)

Shorthand is one of the trees in the forest of titles under the business education rubric. It has grown steadily over many years and now is dying a slow aimless death caused by rotting pockets of irrelevance.

There is need for a quality programme to adjust its curriculum to technological change in business and industry, and the requirements of labour. According to Obayi (2006), curriculum is so designed that the experiences the individuals acquire adequately prepare them to become responsible citizens capable of making contributions to the needs of the society, organisations/industries, and individuals. There is need for better preparation of vocational students for the world of work. Okwuanaso (2004) reported that, the more the changes in information and communication technology occurring, the more new occupational opportunities emerging. He added that new occupational opportunities demand training and retraining that will enable the beneficiaries to meet the challenge of ever changing skill requirements. There is the urgent need for the introduction of new technologies into the classroom, therefore the curriculum should cope with rapid changes.

Igwe (1992) cited in Obayi (2006) affirms that the input of employers (industries) in vocational education curriculum revision is mandatory because industrial education programmes are in constant change due to technology and the optional source of information to determine new priorities for instruction in the work setting in the industry.

Argument for the teaching of shorthand to be scraped from business education curriculum

The use of shorthand in modern offices is declining at an alarming rate and students' performance in shorthand has gone down too. According to Isiefeh-Okpokwu and Nwanewezi (2003) the following reasons are responsible for the recent poor performance in shorthand:

- **Students' biases** – students are biased because (a) shorthand is hardly needed in the office on graduation. (b) The learning environment is not conducive for effective assimilation and so on.
- **Interest** – A good percentage of students accept admission into secretarial studies because they have no other alternative.
- **Level of language** – To be good in shorthand, the student must be above average in English language. If the level of the student's English language is poor the tendency is to fail shorthand.
- **Ability to concentrate** – Shorthand skill requires absolute concentration at all levels of learning. To concentrate, the individual needs to be free from all worries.
- **Material/equipment** – A good percentage of institutions do not have adequate learning and teaching materials and equipment. The students on their part cannot afford to buy the correct and complete materials for learning.

On graduation the secretary is handicapped in the modern office because the shorthand skill so acquired is hardly used while she would be introduced to sophisticated office machines, which she was not trained to use. According to Nwosu (2003) there should be a reasonable degree of correlation between the curriculum in use and the knowledge and skills required by employers. This means that the business education curriculum should be updated as new technologies emerge. Also Azuka (1999) opined that, a course is considered suitable if it meets the needs of an individual, and relevant if it provides the student with the knowledge and skill, which he perceives to be realistic according to goals and aspiration; and adequate if the knowledge and skills acquire can be used to enter an occupation.

In today's modern offices, large numbers of data are created, processed, stored, retrieved and disseminated daily because of technological innovations. On this note, Nwosu (2000) observed that, in Nigeria, several governments and business offices are already being computerized. According to him, although many offices are still using the old office technologies, the new technologies are increasingly being introduced. What is required is to embark on an analysis of the situation to ascertain inadequacies, strengths and limitations, and provide functional training that will enable the secretary not only to secure a job but also to progress on it.

Before the advent of technology and even in the recent past, advertisement for the post of secretary was usually done with shorthand speeds as a criteria and word-processing as an added advantage. But with the influx of automation, the reverse is the case, and in most cases, no mention is made of shorthand. It is difficult now to secure a post of a secretary in a business organisation without excellent word processing and computer skills. It therefore becomes pertinent to instruct/train the students on the skills and attitude required to operate the word processor and computer proficiently, if they are to remain competitive in the labour market upon graduation.

It is surprising to observe that inspite of the efforts teachers and educational planners are making to simply the teaching and learning of shorthand, both teachers and researchers still complain of poor performance in the course. Most authors have made efforts to identify the causes of poor performance in shorthand note taking and typewritten-transcription, Ugoji (1991) identified students' background in English language, students' negative attitude to shorthand, inability to co-ordinate the head, the heart and the hand, and so on.

Most of the causes of high failure rate identified by researchers and authors centered mainly on poor teaching and learning environment. Researchers have not fully addressed the effect of level of knowledge of word forms and time saving devices on the errors made by the students in shorthand note taking. Shorthand is a skill subject. For effective mastery of the art, therefore, students must acquire and exhibit the appropriate skill competencies. According to Isineyi (2004) in the performance of any complex skill the performer is consciously or unconsciously basing his movements on acquired knowledge. Without the appropriate basic knowledge one or more of the characteristics of a skilled performance may be lacking. In order to master shorthand up to vocational level, the student must play adequate attention to details and develop interest in the subject.

Okeke (2004) pointed out that clustering together in the curriculum all aspect of business education into business studies at the junior secondary school level to the extent that sufficient emphasis may not be given to teaching and learning of shorthand is a problem in inculcating the skill to students.

Conclusion

The use of shorthand in modern offices today is declining at an alarming rate as a result of the emerging technological developments, therefore, less emphasis should be given to shorthand in business education curriculum. To secure, remain employed and succeed productively, an individual must be trained to meet the market demands of the occupation.

Shorthand teachers should be encouraged to use adequate strategies for effective teaching and go for further training with modern facilities were proffered.

Recommendations

In the light of the above, the following recommendations are made:

- Shorthand teachers should be encouraged to use adequate strategies for effective teaching and go for further training with modern facilities.
- The curriculum should be enriched in line with what now operates in the technological age. Business Education must continually assess and raise its programmes, incorporate in them the values that are basis to business in order to produce well trained and better informed citizens.
- Government should support the review of business education, especially secretarial education curriculum of Nigerian institutions to inculcate ICT skills so as to enhance the effectiveness of the products in the work place.

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