

READINGS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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THE NEED FOR COMPUTER LITERACY IN BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMME

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INTRODUCTION

The world of business is a dynamic one. Effective social systems plan for changes and other systems in the society react to such changes. The electronic office for instance has virtually seized power from the traditional office in the developed and some developing countries. Authorities in office automation have stated that in the early 1980s, it was estimated that there was one electronic keyboard per every nine office workers. These same authorities are today painting a different picture of the situation. They now put the ratio at one electronic keyboard per three white-collar workers and they predict that the outlook will drastically step up with the passage of time through the 1990s and beyond.

Automation refers to the application of any mechanical or electronic device on the performance of routine tasks with the absence or minimum of human supervision. The ever-increasing volume of business activities coupled with the accompanying large volume of raw data and paper work to be handled created serious problems for man. One of such problems is record keeping. Pressure has therefore continuously been put on him to daily seek improvements in his methods of handling and coping with the large volume of routine paper-work and mathematical figuring.

The birth of the industrial revolution gave way to the conceptualisation, development and improvements on machines. Man's continuous quest for higher standards of living has continued to propel him to new discoveries that will aid him in tapping the resources of nature that will assist him further in man's problem-solving ability and ingenuity has continuously spurred him forward in the field of devising adaptations of his technological and scientific discoveries to alter and also manipulate his environment.

The invention and introduction of automatic mechanical and electronic equipment and more significantly the computer into the modern day office is a giant step forward in devising better methods to aid man in carrying out repetitive and routine tasks quickly and efficiently.

The Need for Computer Literacy

At present, one major cause for concern is the fact that while the job market is yearning for proficiently qualified skilled personnel to man the automated offices of today which are growing at an alarming rate, most of our Business Education Departments from the secondary to the tertiary levels have continued to train and turn out graduates with job skills and knowledge that have become obsolete and incapable of keeping pace with the present day office technologies and techniques. The situation today is such that our educational programmes have not come to terms with any tangible institutional arrangements that will make it possible for our today's schools, colleges, institutes, polytechnics and universities to train professionals to tomorrow's jobs.

Specialisation and division of labour paved way for increasing physical output of goods and services. This unprecedented increased demand for goods and services created the need for man to become more specific about his role in the production and distribution process. It then becomes necessary that our business as well as other students enter our schools and colleges with much more defined and relevant structural goals and objectives. These should be based on the tasks and roles which the students will eventually be expected to play on graduation from school. Behavioural objectives in our schools need to be defined more clear in order that individual students will become aware of where and how their training and expected job placement relate to the ongoing stride forward in the socio-economic emancipation of our society.

Job Opportunities for Computer Skills

The computer is an electronic manipulating system that is designed and organized to automatically accept and store input data, process them, and produce output results under the direction of a detailed step-by-step stored programme of instructions, (Sanders 1985). In the electronic or automated office of today, the computer seems to be the most widely used and accepted device.

Owens (1982) predicted that "career paths may change dramatically as a result of office automation". Taking a look at the office jobs, over two thirds are information processing jobs that require basic keyboarding and clerical skills. Kanu (1987) in his own contribution maintained that just as it is an administrator's obligation to provide the business community with educated employees, business educators were those responsible for giving students the skills of computer and word processing for the incoming age of

office automation. With this realisation of a changing work office, all business education departments should make an entry-level computer literacy course a must. Giving the concept of the automated office or office of the future and the fact that Nigerians are bound to absorb such impact of advanced technologies in their business culture and practice, it becomes obvious that our education should be dynamic to reflect these positive changes to catch up with the developed nations. This can be confirmed by the evidence that most banks and other financial institutions and business organisations are in a hurry to change over to computer and the computerisation of their operations.

Computer and Business Education Curriculum

The current trend of office automation or computer is filled with implications for business education programme at their different levels. The business education is sub-divided into office occupations, accounting occupations and distributive occupations.

With the increasing recognition of business education and the employment of competent business graduates into the labour force, the business education outlook has greatly changed. The New National Policy on Education (1981) and the National Board for Technical Education Handbook have greatly affected the business education curriculum. The most crucial issue on the minds of business educators is coping with changes taking place in the community. The more business occupation is involved in communication process, the more it will be affected by the on-going technological revolution. It, therefore, creates a strong need to prepare students, not for the office of the 1970s and 1990s but using the present as a base to prepare them for the office of the 21st century.

In view of this, Stubbe (1982) suggested that business education curriculum must be redesigned to better meet students' future needs. The changes suggested include:

1. A new course offering called Introduction to Computers.
2. Emphasis on keyboarding rather than traditional beginning typewriting.
3. Integrating the micro-computer into a greater variety of business education classes.

This calls for a related training for business teachers in computer technology, that is, being computer literate. School administrators also need to be convinced that the business department should play an

important role in developing computer literate students. This will lead to gaining job skills such as word and data processing and keyboarding skills that are valuable and marketable today. According to Owens (1982) this positive attitude towards continuous updating of knowledge will contribute strongly to the personal and professional development of today and tomorrow's students. To achieve this, it will be necessary to coopt, at the beginning, the help of computer professionals.

The Need for Computer Studies in Business Education

Kano (1987) quoting Bunch (1982) asserted that when the computer fever caught America, the National Business Education Association (NBEA) Task Force on Computer Literacy saw the urgent need for Business Education to take the lead in providing computer literacy instruction, not only for students preparing for business data processing careers, but for all students in order to prepare them for effective participation in an information-orientated society.

In the same way the situation in Nigeria in relation to computer literacy may be easier. Kano maintained that in order to bring about the effective use of micro-computers in the classroom, it is imperative to ensure that teachers have a sufficient maturity level of computer knowledge.

The current trend of the automated office or electronic office is filled with implications for Business Education at their different levels. The more a business occupation is involved in the communication process, the more apparent it will be affected by the on-going technological revolution, hence we need to prepare Business Teachers who will in turn train students in these areas for the office. This needs to be done with the revolutionary technologies in view, with the mind of flexibility and adaptation. As the functions of an office are integrated into one computer system, emphasis will be placed on a distributed processing approach to the office of the future.

Emuwa, et al (1985) share one common view they said since everybody was going computer, we need to go computer. That is with the enormous technological strides being made in the computer industry, they maintained that there was ever-increasing need for trained personnel in system research, action analysis, development and design.

Computer literacy is necessary in business education programme to meet the expected needs and desires of the society in the technological

advancement in business world. Okorie and Ezeji (1988) projected increased requirements for manpower with specialized educational qualifications.

The application of the computer extends virtually to every facet of life, work and play. Unfortunately, despite their use and growing popularity in the business industry and education, most people are still practically unaware of the uses of the computer to the development of their business, education and agriculture. The Government should assist the private computer companies develop programmes to enhance the newly introduced 6-3-3-4 educational system toward computer skills and technology. The graduates of 3-3 level (that is, the JSS and SS graduates) are about to go into the universities with no solid proof of practical skill acquisition. To achieve the desired objective for the future, adequate computer facilities should be provided in the classroom, not a situation where one or two computers serve a whole university etc. Experience has shown that some institutions that offer courses on computer literacy have very few facilities with a large student population. This, therefore renders the supposed training ineffective e.g. where two or three computers serve a class of 400-500 students. Since the business education programme aims at producing graduates for the teaching and professional field, then the input should be such that students are properly trained in skill acquisition and not just paper work.

Muscat and Lorton (1982) have recommended that a computer literacy course with the business education department should have three characteristics.

- (a) No pre-requisites
- (b) Some hands-on-experience
- (c) A career orientation

As word processors are becoming standard equipment in the office, an introduction to information and word processing should, therefore, be a standard in business education.

In conclusion, therefore, business educators should be alert of the technological advancements going on in Nigeria. Although business education either in post-primary or tertiary levels seems to be neglected in funding and equipment. This is supported by authors like Agu (1990) who stated that out of 217m import 7,304 sets of equipment for the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria, none of such equipment was for the furtherance of

Business education yet Business studies is a major component of the skills that must be learned and developed within the first 3 and later 3 years of the 6-3-3-4 system. If this situation continues, we cannot hope to catch up with the modern trends in office automation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enough funds should be made available by the government for Business education departments for practical laboratory work and equipment to produce efficient and skilled personnel.

Business teachers should be adequately retrained on the new and modern technologies for which they intend to train their students.

Business teachers should also keep pace with the current trends and events in the business and academic world for the improvement of their training. This can be achieved if Business Education departments and University Libraries provide Business Journals often.

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