New Technologies in Business Education for Instruction and Practice: Imperatives for Quality Assurance

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Abstract

Quality assurance in business education for instruction and practice with the emergence of new technologies is a multi-faceted problem involving all the aspects of business education programme. The paper highlighted the concept of quality assurance, business education and quality assurance, new technologies in business education, technological changes and some challenges on instruction and practice of business education. Two ways through which the new technologies have changed instruction and practice in business education that provide quality assurance in business education were outlined and discussed. The conclusion drawn was that, in order to achieve quality assurance with these new technologies, business educators need to re-strategize in their methods of instruction and practice. Based on these, the paper proffered some recommendations that will help to improve quality in instruction and practice in business education with the emergence of new technologies.

**Keywords*:* Quality Assurance, Technology, Instruction, Practice, Business Education

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, developments in the economic, social and technological environment have led to far-reaching changes in the way organization operate. In particular, advances in Information Technology (IT) have assisted the emergence of new organizational forms, work practices and training methods. As a result, in recent years teaching and learning methods have started to change in educational institutions in general and in business education in particular (Okwuanaso, 2004).

Change is the only constant factor in life. This characterizes the dynamism in the competitive business environment. Education is seen as a document per excellence in preparing citizens for effective roles in the society. One form of education that equips its recipients to adapt to the changing world of work is business education. According to the American Vocational Association (AVA) in Osuala (2009), business education is a programme of instruction which consist 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. For Business Education programmes to remain relevant in providing the needs of individuals and that of the society; it must embrace current trends in the academic and economic demands of the society.

For our educational systems to deliver on their mandates, the quality of the training given to individuals passing through a course or the other should be such that can give adequate skills and information needed in the real world sense. If Business Education should serve this purpose of providing the needs of the learners and the society, there should be continuous review in its curriculum in order to ensure that the quality of education provided is in line with societal demands. This review of the curriculum will be to integrate new technologies that can help in passing the desired and required skills to the learner to make him/her employable and as well relevant in the ever-changing business environment.

New technologies in business education are designed to prepare students for variety of careers in high-tech business offices. It is not easy to develop taxonomy of new technologies in business education because of their diversity and evolution in structures and functions. New technologies have been typologies differently by various authors. According to McLoughlin and Clark (1997), they may be classified into process and product technologies. According to Mazda's (1993), there are core and application technologies. To Haag, Cummings and McCubbrey (2002), new technologies are grouped into four categories, namely: new technologies for all the senses; new technologies for internet explosion; new technologies for the wireless revolution; and new technologies for personal use.

No doubt, the emergence of new technologies such as the computer, word processor, the internet, automated teller machines, reprographic machines, micrographic machines, accounting machines, modern telephonic systems including handset and multimedia, among others, have not only revolutionized the office environment but have also brought changes in the ways people are doing things. The computer is one of the most visible of the new technologies. Much as new technologies are indispensable in business education programme delivery, the subject of quality assurance is of utmost importance.

2. *Quality Assurance*

Across the globe, it has been observed that countries that thrive in all sectors of their economy did embrace education as their bedrock (Meisinger and Wagner (2006). It is, therefore, not far-fetched to understand that a nation is as good as the kind of education system it operates.

For quality of education to be guaranteed, emphasise should be placed on the quality of teaching and learning in order to ensure impressiveness, efficiency and productivity of education. When focusing on quality, the possibility of national and international level comparability should remain and improve. It is also necessary to control the quality of education by using the relevant agencies such as the National University Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) as well as National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), among others. These agencies were established in order to ensure the quality of education in Nigeria.

Over the years, there has been a serious erosion of teacher's respect and this applies to all levels of education since quality and relevant education depend on what teachers do with learners. It should be pointed out that quality of education is now an issue of global concern. The famous four pillars of the dealer(s) report on education for 21st century (learning to know, learning to do, learning to live and learning to be) are intended to link education to development, the aim of which should be the complete fulfillment of the individual's personality (Onyiliofor, 2009). The goal of education is to achieve the purpose for which is a need for quality assessment.

Onocha (2002), is of the view that quality or minimum standards for education sector require the establishment of a set of quality assurance indicators, measuring instruments and time-frame for measurement. He is also of the view that in order to have quality assurance in education, there is need for quality learners, quality learning environment, quality teaching and quality outcomes.

Generally, quality as a concept is rooted in comparison and standards. Bisong (2000) aptly describes quality as relating to standards, and that standards constitute the essential yardstick for the assessment of values and comparability, interpretability and harmonization. Therefore, quality forms an intricate part of education which focuses on the ability to conform to certain acceptable and institutional basis with respect to time periods, practices and locations. It is no exaggeration that the educational enterprise and programme delivery is dedicated to establishing and maintaining standards.

Viewed conceptually from a process, McKinnon, Walker and Davies (2000) identified three aspects that define quality assurance to include: setting of prescribed minimum standards or benchmark, quality assurance and quality improvement. Benchmarking has to do with comparing a set of products or services against the best that can be found within the relevant industry. It is the process of identifying and learning from good practices in other organizations by regularly comparing aspects of performance, identifying gaps in performance, seeking fresh approaches to bringing improvements in the performance and implementing the improvements and following up by monitoring progress and reviewing the benefits.

Quality assurance is comparing the quality of a product or service with a minimum standard set either by the producer or provider or by some external government or industry standard. Finally, quality improvement concerns with raising the quality of a product or service. Here, current standard of a product is compared with the standard being expected.

From the above definitions, it could be seen that quality assurance is a designed systematic measurement approach which an entity follows so that quality requirement of a product or service will be achieved. Quality assurance is the baron for measuring society's efforts aimed at answering the critical question of customer satisfaction and improvement in standard of living. Quality assurance has much to do with our educational systems, processes in which knowledge and skills on production process and service delivery are the main focus. The concern here is quality assurance and new technologies in business education instruction and business practices.

3. *Quality Assurance and Business Education*

Business education as an integral part of vocational and technical education is a form of vocational education according to Idialu (2007) that is directed towards developing the learner to become productive in teaching, paid employment and self-employment. Amoor and Udoh (2008) noted that business education plays a significant role in the economic development by providing knowledge and skills to the learners thereby enabling them to adequately impart knowledge into others, and handle sophisticated office technologies and information systems. The goal of business education is primarily to produce competent, skilful and dynamic business teachers, office administrators and businessmen and women that will effectively compete in the world of work (Odunaike and Amoda 2008).

The emergence of Vocational education in the global scene is necessitated by the need to provide the society with a form of education that promotes lifelong learning, needs of the community, innovation, employability and self-reliance (Okorie, 2004). Business education is rooted in Vocational education with specific mandate of providing skills, attitude and knowledge needed for employment or running a business. According to Anao in Oliver (2011), business education is the sum total of the knowledge, skills and attitude that are required for successfully promoting and administering business enterprises. The need for business education as a form of education is crucial especially in this era of globalization and information and communication technology (ICT) in which work processes and organizations are getting increasingly flexible, multi-tasking and performance-base.

Business Education as a programme needs to meet up with the needs of the learner and the society. And if that be the case, assuring quality of what is taught both skills and knowledge is very vital. Quality assurance is a process centered approach to ensuring that organization is providing the best possible products or service. If knowledge were stagnant in business education without improvement in what the learner learns in order to be relevant in his society, there would have been total abandonment of the programmes in Business Education since it may appear not to be providing the needs of the learners and that of the society. But since there is always content improvement through introduction of new technologies and approaches in the method of teaching and in what is learnt, the discipline has always provided for the needs of the society, hence maintaining a high standard in providing manpower for the industries in the economy. It will be pertinent in this regard to generally say that education quality is measured by the usefulness of or the compensation for opportunity cost for learners from the education to achieve learning objectives.

The demand of education is based on its ability to provide marketable skills that will help individuals to engage in meaningful occupation. Business Education having upheld this idea of providing marketable skills to learners has remained relevant in the world of study. Many factors are influencing the effort to make business education relevant today, one of which is the spate of technological advancements being witnessed. Technology has become the nexus of operation in the business world. Consequently, business education is affected in terms of instruction and delivery and in skills and competencies needed to adapt to these evolving technologies used for operation in offices.

Quality assurance refers to the planned and systematic activities implemented in a quality system so that quality requirements for a product or services will be fulfilled. Idialu (2007) described quality as standards of something as compared to other things, that is, the degree of goodness or excellence. Quality assurance generally means all the procedures, processes and systems that support and develop education (Kontio 2007).

4. New Technologies in Business Education

Business Education has embraced enormous changes in technology in a bid to providing quality education to students. The E-How (2012) identified some of the new technological changes to include:

4.1 Changes in KeyBoarding

Traditionally, keyboarding has been the primary course taught by Business Education programmes at the secondary school level. Because of the computer, keyboarding is seen by many as a basic skill needed by all students. In fact, Toppe in Business Education Forum (1991) refers to keyboarding as an "enabling skill tool needed by almost every worker in all types of organizations and at every level in the hierarchy of these organizations". In addition, because of the wide spread prolific use of computers by younger students, the need for keyboarding has presented more challenges to Business Education programme.

4.2. E-learning environment

The Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia (2012) identified some quality classroom delivery to include: Computer in the classroom, Class web site, Class blogs and wikis, Wireless Classroom Microphone, Mobile Devices and Interactive Whiteboard. These technologies interact with the teacher in a friendly manner as to motivate students into learning achievement. Also other technologies geared towards enhancing learning achievement of students are now available. These are in hardware and software forms and include: learning software in different areas of business, iPod, CD ROMs, Modems, Laser printers, You-tube software, Digital cameras, Digital scanners, (e-How 2012).

The electronic environment now in vogue has necessitated the need for electronic teaching infrastructure. A prominent tool is the smart board which commands respect as it eases the use of multi-media and greater interactivity. A significant and unique feature of the smart board is that it allows teachers or instructors to make illustrations of those business concepts that hitherto were difficult to be illustrated.

5. Technological Changes and Challenges in Business Education on Instruction and Practice

Technology, according to Nwoji (2012), could be defined as the application of the scientific method to solving problems in our daily life. Put in the perspective of business education, however, technology is the application of scientific method to solving problems regarding impartation of skills to learners to meet the changing needs and demands of the society. In business education, there existed technology in a crude form but there has been a dramatic and significant change in the methods used by Business education to address the changing needs of the society.

According to Olson in Nwoji (2012), technology is a many-faceted phenomenon in materials created and advanced by man to free himself from endearment by nature, but which, when undisciplined, enslaves its own creator. By this definition, technology helps to advance man's course in his environment but moderation and control should be exercised to direct its use to solving problems of man, if not, may be misleading in itself.

The technological changes in business education are basically from information and communication technology (ICT) perspective. The society generally is ICT-driven and in order to keep abreast of this change, there must be a restructuring in the knowledge and skills given to learners/students in Business Education. Electronic office (e-office) is one of the phenomena of the 21st century which is a paperless office approach in which every office work is done with the use of computer. It is based on this that most Business Education departments across Nigeria's tertiary institutions are building ICT centers, improved computer laboratories and as well as offering professional courses in computer studies to produce students/graduates that can easily adapt in their ever-changing business environment. The use of typewriter is almost going into extinct as the computer is fast taking over.

There is a nexus between the employability skills and business education curriculum design and implementation as curriculum attempts to provide the best possible learning opportunities. The restructuring of the business education curriculum to adapt with these changes in technology is seen as quality assurance. It is the curriculum that conveys the environment for effecting the effective realization of technology impartation and adaptation on the part of business educators. The curriculum therefore stands out as a strong factor for consideration in ensuring quality assurance and or re-assurance in business education.

Curriculum as a planned programme of learning experience which seeks to develop the abilities of a learner under the supervision of the school has a laudable contribution in assuring quality in Business education. According to Olaitan (2009), three aspects of the curriculum determine the achievement of objectives, namely; Input, Process and Output. These three stages highlight the role of human and material resources needed for implementation of the curriculum, methods and techniques used by the teacher and the learners and the quality of change that has taken place in them from the interaction.

These three factors are continuously assessed in the system in order to establish quality assurance. According to Moreno (2006), educational reforms all over the world are increasingly curriculum-based as mounting pressures and demands for change tend to target and focus on both the structures and very content of the school curricula. As a result of the constant change in the society and in the world over, it becomes absolutely necessary that the content of the curriculum be adjusted to suit the inevitable changes. This change brought about the introduction of new technologies in education which Business Education has a fair share of these changes. Modern business education curriculum provides the introduction of ICT in the form of ICT literacy, Application of ICT, Infusing of ICT skills and ICT specialization. These reforms have added good quality to business education curriculum content which is geared towards meeting the demands of the society.

In the area of instruction, new technologies which revolve round the use of Internet and resources have emerged that are aimed at improving productivity. Typical examples of internet teaching and learning media that facilitate teaching and learning in business education include: Projectors, E-mail, Smart boards, Mimeo boards, Teleconferencing, Video Conferencing, E-book Reader and Streaming Videos (EHow, 2012).

In addition to the use of the Internet in business classroom, the business educator can enhance learning through the use of Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI). According to Osuala (2004), CAI assumes that all people learn different materials in different ways at different rates of speed and thus promotes individualized instruction.

6. Some Challenges Associated With New Technologies and Quality Assurance in Business Education

Some challenges associated with new technologies and quality assurance in business education has been identified. The first to consider relates to teacher. Teachers are faced with myriad challenges occasioned by the changes caused by technology. Global philosophy on education now includes these new changes in society. Their teaching strategies and training must therefore be altered and changed completely. The teacher's approach to the classroom has got so much to do with what the learner learns. The concern, therefore, should be to drive the lesson home in the most interesting way to the learners. For example, the use of Power point presentation helps in consolidating learners' knowledge in any topic taught. However, the teacher requires the know-how of using these ICT resources.

The challenges facing business education are very complex and enormous. The most important challenge is for teachers to accept society's entrance into the information age. For business education to realize the goals of training they need to be knowledgeable workers. It has been observed that the role of business education is to prepare knowledgeable workers. The changes in the business education programme have not shrunken the demand for business education but enlarged it. Business educators continue to prepare workers in every phase of the information cycle. One way of targeting this is for business teachers to focus on all students and its constituents. With every aspect of the society being touched by technology, the opportunity presents itself for the shaping of a new and more relevant curriculum. However, it is the educators' response to these changes that is critical to the growth and success of business education programme.

Modern offices have since transited from the manual operations, through mechanical and then to the present electronic era (Agomuo, 2005). Modern organizational practices have broadened tremendously to include the challenging need of workers to adapt to the rapidly changing techniques, new equipment and work processes. Oliver (2008) observes that since modern offices and organizations operate with and employ e-office processes, only workers who possess electronic office operations skills will be remain relevant. Today's office workers require the ability to interact with information using appropriate technology in an expert and friendly manner. According to Drucker (2010) knowledge workers are now needed by knowledge organizations that operate in knowledge economy.

Many constraints bedevil effective instruction and practice of business education. One major challenge is that there appears at present no co-ordinate policy for harmonizing the curriculum offerings in different institutions (Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities) with different minimum standards (Benchmark).

Another area of challenge is the reluctance by institutions to arrange for refresher training for updating the skills of workers and teachers for improved performance. Peretomode in Egbule (2009) advocated that organizations should put in place policies for promoting staff renewal. Staff renewal comprises activities which lecturers and non–academic staff in tertiary institutions are involved in while on the job as they seek to clarify and modify their attitude, behavior and skills in a favourable manner so that they can grow.   Staff renewal with respect to business education would mean opportunity to acquire new instructional methods, techniques and technologies and bridge the skill-gap already existing.

7. Conclusion

Having surveyed the trends in new technologies in business education which covers the need, adaptation and prospects, it is inferred that globalization era has necessitated individuals and organizations to key into the on-going technological race in order to compete favourably. This will require today's business workers, managers and educators to have the skills and competencies in interacting with the vast world of knowledge and specifically the skills and know-how in handling and working with these evolving technologies. This paper revealed that the economy is changing and business education students should be trained to meet the market demands of the various occupations. In order to achieve business educators' needs to re-strategize in their methods of instruction and practice; it becomes imperative that business educators and institutional authorities provide requisite new technologies for effective instructional task management of business education. Business educators have to be challenged to provide their students with experiential base for developing requisite skills, knowledge and attitudes to live and work in a technologically and dynamic society and this would serve as quality assurance approach.

8. Recommendations

1. Teachers should endavour to always update their skills on new methods in instruction and knowledge to improve on their performance.
2. Institutions and organizations should upgrade facilities and equipment for studios, laboratories and workshops where the facilities are considered obsolete.
3. Government should expedite action on the legislative frame work for the proposed National Commission for Quality Assurance as this would go a long way to harmonising and improving quality assurance at the different levels of education sector in Nigeria.
4. Government should also be ready to allocate substantial amount of money to education from the annual budget. This would greatly improve quality and standard of education in the country.
5. The curriculum of business education programme should also be reviewed to reflect the current developmental and technological changes in the country.
6. Business Education teachers should also be recruited and should be allowed to go on regular training and retraining in order to be relevant.
7. The image of the business education programme should be improved by making the programme to be attractive and rewarding.

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