

Business education in Nigeria for value re-orientation: a strategic approach for poverty alleviation and national development

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Abstract. Business education is a systematic programme of instruction that prepares students for the world of work and further studies at graduate and post-graduate levels. Business education has witnessed unpleasant setback, over the years, probably because of the inadequate allocation of resources, coupled with the low public interest accorded to it. Parents and elites appeared to shun business education, for they erroneously believed that it is a programme meant for the less academically endowed. This situation has consequently made Nigerian youths to lack the requisite attributes that would help in generating high income capacities for meeting their basic needs as well as the development of Nigerian economy. Based on this unpleasant situation, the authors decided to embark on a theoretical discourse. The first discussion is centered on the resource-based theory, followed by an overview of value orientation. Next, the concept of poverty alleviation was discussed. The concept of national development was also looked at. Finally, the relationship among business education, value re-orientation, poverty alleviation, and national development was discussed. Consequently, the authors drew a logical conclusion, and it was recommended, among others, that government should endeavour to formulate the policies that would help in ensuring the effective implementation of business education and expansion of business skills in order to produce a new generation of skilled and competent workers who are analytical and innovative, and can serve as the driving force for poverty alleviation and national development.

Keywords: Business education, inadequate resources, national development, poor societal perception, poverty alleviation, value re-orientation.

INTRODUCTION

Business education may be described as a systematic programme of instruction that is usually offered at the secondary and tertiary levels for the purpose of:

1. Preparing recipients for careers or advancement in office occupations and professions.

2. Equipping recipients with the relevant skills for job creation and entrepreneurship.

3. Providing recipients with knowledge about business, including a good blend of office technology which incorporates Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The first two purposes involve the education 'for' business aimed at equipping recipients with requisite attributes to become gainfully employed, while the later addresses education 'about' business aimed at providing a sound basis for further studies. From the foregoing, it is clear that business education is far more than preparing students to become more employable, but equipping them with requisite attributes for lifelong learning. Maclean (2008) agreed that an effective skills development for employability and sustainable livelihood is essential if sustainable development is to be achieved, and this also provides a foundation for peace building through poverty alleviation and rising levels of income. Despite these laudable roles in human resource and national development, researchers and educators still continue to point out that business education has been viewed with disdain by the general public (Ekpenyong, 1992; Ekpenyong and Nwabuisi, 2003; Oladunjoye, 2016). The general perception about business education is that it is meant for those who are academically less endowed. This situation has made parents and elites to shun this type of programme for they erroneously believe that it is meant for the never-do-well, a class they do not want their children or wards to belong.

The low status associated with business education has made parents to have a strong preference towards white colour careers (Gambo, cited in Idialu, 2007). Parents and elites clamor for other types of education and only opt for business education as last resort. Most parents prefer their children to study more prestigious courses like medicine, engineering and law (Federal Ministry of Education, 2005). Parents are further discouraged by the low quality of business education, which seem to be attributed to a number of factors, such as the inadequate provision of financial, human, and material resources. Today, business education does no longer command prestige in Nigeria. Rather it is generally regarded as a blue colour programme often reserved for dropouts (Nwoachokor, 2002), or people with low intelligent quotient (Osuala, 1995).

As mentioned in the above discussion, poor societal perception and inadequate supply of resources has been the major challenges facing business education in Nigeria. Since business education has not been accorded with much recognition by general public and has been starved with financial, human, and material resources, it naturally follows that majority of youths would lack the requisite attributes for gainful employment. Unfortunately, this situation, over the years, has been contributing to the shrinkage of industrial outputs, low level of commercial activities, and lack of employment opportunities for millions of Nigerians, which has further contributed to the rising level of poverty among youths as well as hindered the entire development of Nigeria. The scarcity of human basic needs or the inability of a person or a society to acquire basic human needs, such as food, Medicare, protection, clothing and shelter for survival has

necessitated the need to devise a strategic approach for the alleviation of absolute poverty and underdevelopment.

Sadly, the debate at the national assembly over the budget may have shown that Nigeria appreciates the current level of poverty in the face of the pressing needs of 191.8 million people as recently estimated by the United Nations (Worldometers, 2017). It is disheartening to see that Nigerian economy is retrogressing and not moving forward in a land that is once considered to be flowing with milk and honey. Programmes embarked upon by governments, aimed at giving majority of youths economic lifeline, end up empowering the few, which in turn leaves the larger number of youths not empowered, which eventually creates all manner of social ills (Adeyemi and Titiloye, 2014). The National Bureau of Statistics (2011) has pointed out that more than 72% of Nigeria's population lives under abject poverty, meaning that they are living below a poverty line, while one-third are said to survive on less than \$1 per day, part of a condition for absolute poverty. This figure includes an army of youths in urban centres who struggle to earn a living by hawking chewing sticks, sachet and bottled water, compact disks, belts, etcetera. The sales-per-day and profit margin on such goods are so minimal that they can hardly live above poverty line.

The existence of all manner of social ills (unemployment, hunger, social vices, militancy, etcetera) are mere pointer to the fact that greater percentage of young youths lack the requisite attributes that would help them in generating high income capacities for useful living in Nigeria. This situation may continue because youths seem not to be interested in business education, and governments do not appear to provide the adequate funds to source for qualified staff and procure material resources. The poor perception of the vast majority of the populace and the inadequate provision of resources (both human and non-human) for business education has posed a major hurdle in the Nigeria's journey towards becoming the second richest in Africa and the twentieth richest in the world by the year 2020. Therefore, policies to re-orient the mindset of the people and to ensure the effective implementation of business education programme as well as the expansion of business skills for the poor and the underprivileged are needed. This effort will further help in producing a new generation of competent and skilled workers, who are analytical and innovative, and can serve as driving forces for poverty alleviation and national development.

Positive interests in a country where negative attitude towards business education programme are dominant can only be achieved through the change of people's mindset. This change of mindset can only occur through the orientation of values held by the people. Value orientation would help in changing the mindset of people, particularly the targeted stakeholders. Starting from the parents who usually lead the way on how business

education is regarded, to the students, both the youths and the adults who may need re-training, and the business education implementers and the policy makers. In this paper, the researchers argued that business education for value re-orientation can serve as a strategic approach for poverty alleviation and national development. But first, the authors need to hinge the paper on a theoretical framework. This is followed by an overview of value orientation. The concept of poverty alleviation was addressed. The concept of national development was also discussed. The relationship among business education, value orientation, poverty alleviation and national development was finally discussed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is hinged on the Resource-Based Theory (RBT) developed during the 1980s and 1990s by chains of theorists. Prominent among these theorists are: Lippman and Rumelt (1982), Wernerfelt (1984), Rumelt (1984), Teece (1984), and Barney (1986b, 1991). The RBT was developed from a strategic point of view considering a resource as the strength that firm can use to formulate as well as to implement their strategies (Ferreira et al., 2011). The RBT is a dominant theory that emphasized the possession and utilization of resources of a firm in formulating and implementing strategies for the achievement of sustained competitive advantage (Grant, 1991; Hart, 1995). A central premise of the RBT is that firms compete on the basis of possession and utilization of unique resources and capabilities (Wernerfelt, 1984; Rumelt 1987; Peteraf and Bergen, 2003; Barney, 1996, 1991, 1986a, 1986b). It means that if a firm is to achieve a sustained competitive advantage, it must acquire and control valuable, rare, inimitable, non-substitutable resources and capabilities, and the organization must be ready to develop and utilize them in order to compete with other firms (Barney, 1991a, 1994, 2002). The aforementioned propositions, has invariably implies that the possession and utilization of unique resources allow organizations to produce quality output, which in turn influences firm's competitive advantage.

The possession and utilization of specific resources and capabilities varies among firms and these differences matter. This variable strongly influences the actions of customers, because firms utilize available resources in order to continuously compete favourably with other firms. It is how a firm competes with other firms in the marketplace that explain to a better understanding how value is created. Sustained competitive advantage is the ability of a firm to receive returns on investment consistently above average (Porter, 1985). Barney (1991) pointed out that a firm is said to have a sustained competitive advantage when it is implementing a value creating strategy not simultaneously being implemented

by any competitors and when these other firms are unable to duplicate the benefits of this strategy. Resources are inputs that enable a firm to carry out its activities effectively and efficiently. Where a firm in the same industry has similar resources but differing performance, one might deduce that they vary in the extent to which they utilize their resources. Resources confer no value to a firm; it is only when they are put into productive use that value is created. These resources are categorized into two: tangible and intangible resources.

Miller and Shamsie (1996) asserted that tangible resources are legal properties possessed by firms, and can be categorized as human and non-human resources. Intangible resources refer to a firm's know-how. Intangible resources are not easily imitable or copy owing to the intrinsic nature of knowledge and skills. This may be the reason why Barney (1991) and Peteraf (1993) suggest that valuable resources are usually scarce, imperfectly imitable, and lacking in direct substitutes. Hence, the possession and utilization of resources becomes a strategic necessity, if a firm is to realize a competitive advantage. For Barney (1991), if all firms were equal in terms of resources and capabilities there would be no profitability differences among them because any strategy could be implemented by any firm in the same industry. The underlying logic holds to the fact that the sustainability of a competitive position rests primarily on the cost of firm resources and capabilities utilized for implementing the strategy pursued. These resources and capabilities can be important factors of sustained competitive advantage and superior firm performance, if they possess certain or special characteristics. They should be valuable (increasing efficiency and effectiveness), rare, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable (Barney 1991). Clearly, the RBT indicates that any resources and capabilities that a firm could possess that are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable, must be included in a review of resources since they can be the basis of sustained competitive advantage of firms (Barney, 2001).

The RBT has contributed to this research in that it has helped to understand the need for all stakeholders to invest their resources on business education in order to be capable of producing skilled and competent graduates that are useful for poverty alleviation and national development. As earlier indicated, business education have been starved with human and non-human resources and has affected the production of competent and skilled graduates. However, this unpleasant situation has devalued the image and reputation of business education, both in the education and labour market. Hence, the accumulation and utilization of resources would help in ensuring the production of qualified graduates, who are useful for the betterment of the society. This effort would further help in re-orienting the mindset of people to know the worth of business education.

AN OVERVIEW OF VALUE ORIENTATION

The term 'value orientation' is often used interchangeably with the term 'value creation' in the strategic management literature. However, the notion of value, on the one hand, cannot be defined without making reference to some kind of values; and on the other hand, values cannot be realized without some form of value orientation (Kraaijenbrink, n.d.). According to Igbuzor (2013), values are deep seated beliefs that influence people's actions and the rules by which they make decisions within their society. He added that values determine people's attitude which in turn influences their behaviour. Todaro and Smith (2011) pointed out that values are principles, standards, or qualities that a society or groups within it considers worthwhile or desirable. Okoh (2012) averred that values influence people's behaviour and serve as a yardstick for evaluating the actions of other people in the society. Odunayo and Olujuwon (2010) identified values as two types, namely: pragmatic and absolute values. They defined pragmatic values as values that an individual develops as a result of doing something in a particular situation, while absolute values are metaphysical values which are neither bound by the physical world as perceived through the senses, nor by time and place. In a different study, Beller (2002) classifies values into two types: social and moral values. He claimed that social values includes, dedication, sacrifice, teamwork, and loyalty, while moral values includes honesty, fairness, fair play, justice, and responsibility.

Eromosele (2014) and Gandhi (2014) see value as the worth of something, or principles or standards of behaviour, or one's judgment of what is important in life. Value according to Bolarin (2005) is the worth, merit or esteem given to a person or an object or an idea. Eromosele (2014) defined orientation as a person basic attitude, beliefs or feelings in relation to a particular subject. Orientation means to adjust someone or something to the surrounding or situation... to turn or guide in a specified direction (Webster Dictionary, 2010). Accordingly, value orientation is a motive force that drives positive achievement (National Orientation Agency, 2009). Value orientation may be seen as a process of directing the interest and passion of people towards the desired issue that promote useful living within the society. The main goal of value orientation is to influence people to adjust, turn to, or conform to specified standards needed by the society.

Strategic management reports on the factors that help in creating longer-term value date back some years. For example, the International Integrated Reporting Council (2013) recently stated that a Special Committee on Financial Reporting established by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants in 1991 recommended that information companies should provide to investors and creditors and focus more on the factors that create

longer-term value. It pointed out that value can be created through an organization's or firm's strategy, which takes inputs and transforms them through business activities to produce outputs or outcomes that within a short, medium and long-term, create value for the organization, stakeholders, society and environment.

CONCEPT OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Having looked at the overview of value orientation, we can now turn our attention to the concept of poverty alleviation. However, poverty alleviation cannot be directly defined without clarifying the meaning of poverty. Nevertheless, poverty can literally be defined as a condition where the total annual income (that is the total funds) available to individuals, groups of people, family or a society, for expenditure on feeding, clothing, shelter and provision of other necessary services is below a certain minimum standard (Aliyu, 1999a). Ndem (2010) also defined poverty as the deprivation of the basic needs such as food, shelter, education, and employment, among others. Okonjo-Iwuala (2013) defined poverty as the failure to achieve basic capacities such as being adequately nourished, living a healthy life, possession of skills to participate in economic and social life, permission to take part in community activities. Poverty is a state of absolute economic deprivation in which the individual cannot independently have access to the basic human life-sustaining essentials such as food, clothing, and shelter (Adenutsi, 2009). Ogbuanya and Izuoba (2015) define poverty as a state of living where basic needs of the people are grossly inadequate. They added that people who cannot afford the basic needs of live such as good food, clothing, proper Medicare, among others, owing to lack of money is said to be poor and suffers poverty. They further added that, a nation is considered poor if it fails or do not have the ability or technology to utilize its resources for the well-being of the citizens. From the above chains of definitions, it is obvious that poverty is far more than financial insufficiency and can manifest in the form of unemployment, homelessness, hunger, inability to access education and healthcare.

Sachs (2009) pointed out that poverty can be categorized into three: absolute, moderate, and relative poverty. When poverty is said to be absolute, it is described as a lack of resources to meet the physical needs for survival, a lack of basic security, the absence of one or more factors that enable individuals and families to assume basic responsibilities and enjoy fundamental rights (Misango and Ongiti, 2013). Absolute poverty is a situation where a household is unable to meet the minimum levels of income, food, healthcare, shelter, and other essentials (Todaro and Smith, 2011). Omoniyi (2013) added that the people living in such a house are perpetually hungry, unable to access healthcare; they lack amenities of safe drinking water and

sanitation. Omoniyi (2013) also opined that moderate poverty refers to conditions of life in which basic needs are barely met. Nweze and Ojowu (2002) define relative poverty as a situation where an individual's income is less than the average income of the population in the society which they belong. According to Omoniyi (2013), relative poverty is construed as a household income level below a given proportion of average national income. Consequent upon this, is that such an individual or a person possesses goods lower than those of other individuals or persons in the society.

Accordingly, Ekwuruke (2013) opined that poverty alleviation involves the efforts made to improve the living standard of people who already are poor and to reduce the level of poverty. Ezeji et al. (2015) defined poverty alleviation as a substantive reduction of any negative effect of poverty on people. They added that it is a process which seeks to reduce the level of poverty in a community or a nation. They further remarked that poverty alleviation is aimed at removing the social and legal barriers to income growth among the poor. Poverty alleviation may therefore be seen as the outstanding effort made by governments, individuals or groups to improve economic competitiveness, standard of living, and self-reliance.

CONCEPT OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Every nation across the globe (including Nigeria) strives towards development. Economic growth is an essential component of development, but not the only component. So, development is not purely an economic phenomenon. In an ultimate sense, it must encompass more than the material and financial side of people's lives, to expand freedom. As Amartya Sen, one of the leading thinker on the meaning of development put it, "Economic growth cannot be sensibly treated as an end in itself, development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy" (Sen, 1999:14). Todaro and Smith (2011) also pointed out that development has to do with the process of improving the quality of all human lives and capabilities by raising their levels of living, self-esteem, and freedom. Sen (2008) affirmed that development means the removal of main sources of civil unrest, poverty, tyranny, poor economic opportunities, systematic social deprivation and neglect of public facilities. However, the concept of national development represent implicit as well as explicit value premise about desirable goals for achieving what Mahatma Gandhi once called 'the realization of the human potential'. In effect, Amartya Sen argued that poverty cannot be properly measured by income or even by utility as conventionally understood; what matters fundamentally is not the things a person has, or the feelings these provide, but what a person is, or can be, and does, or can do (Sen, 1999).

From the foregoing, it is possible, then, to define or broadly conceptualize what we mean when we talk about national development as the sustained elevation of an entire society towards a 'better' or a 'more humane' life. According to Todaro and Smith (2011), there are three basic components that serve as a conceptual basis and practical guideline for understanding the inner meaning of development. These three basic components (sustenance, self-esteem and freedom) represent common goals sought by all individuals and societies. When any of these components is in critical short supply, a condition of 'absolute underdevelopment' exists. Sustenance is seen as goods and services such as food, clothing, protection and healthcare that are necessary to sustain an average person at the bare minimum level of living. A basic function of all economic activity, therefore, is to provide for as many people as possible, the means of overcoming misery and hopelessness arising from lack of food, clothing, healthcare, and protection. To this end, one may agree that national development is a necessary condition for the improvement of the quality of life. Without sustained and continuous national economic progress at the individual as well as the societal level, the realization or achievement of human potential would not be possible.

A second universal component of a good life is self-esteem (ability to be a person, of not being used as a tool by others for their own ends). Self-esteem means the feeling of worthiness that a society enjoys when it's social, political, and economic systems promote human values, such as: respect, honour, dignity, integrity, recognition, identity, and self-determination. All peoples and nations seek some basic form of self-esteem and the nature and form of this self-esteem may vary from society to society and from culture to culture. To this end, one may agree that increasing level of self-esteem would help in contributing to economic development.

A third and final universal component that was suggested above to explain the meaning of development is the concept of human freedom (ability to be able to choose). Freedom here is to be understood in the sense of emancipation from alienating material conditions of life and social servitude. Freedom involves a situation in which a society has at its disposal a variety of alternatives from which to satisfy its wants and individuals enjoy real choices according to their preferences. Lewis, cited in Sen (1999) had stressed the relationship between national economic growth and development and freedom from servitude when he concluded that 'the advantage of national economic growth and development is not that wealth increases happiness, but that it increases the range of human choices. Todaro and Smith (2011) posited that wealth can enable people to gain greater control over nature and the physical environment (for example, through the production of food, clothing, and shelter) than they would have if they remained poor. They also argued that wealth gives people the freedom to

choose greater leisure, to have more goods and services, or to deny the importance of these material wants and choose to live a life of spiritual contemplation. The concept of human freedom also encompasses various components of political freedom, including personal security, the rule of law, freedom of expression, political participation, and equality of opportunity (Heritage Foundation and Wall Street Journal, 1997).

From the foregoing, we may conclude that development is both a physical reality and a state of mind in which a nation has through some combination of social and economic processes, secured the means for obtaining a better life. Whatever the specific component of this better life is, development in any nation (including Nigeria) must have at least the following objectives: (1) to increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life-sustaining goods such as food, clothing and shelter, health, and protection; (2) to raise levels of living, including in addition to higher incomes, the provision of more jobs, better education, and greater attention to cultural and human values, all of which will serve not only to enhance material well-being but also to generate greater individual and national self-esteem; and (3) to expand the range of economic and social choices available to all individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude.

BUSINESS EDUCATION, VALUE RE-ORIENTATION, POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Business education can be defined as a programme of instruction that offer various skills in accounting, marketing and office technology and management. Soneye (2000) and Osuala (2004) both agreed that business education is a programme of instruction that consists of two parts, namely: (1) Office education, and (2) General business education. Osuala (2004) further opined that office education is a vocational programme that prepares students for employability and careers in office occupation or profession, while general business education provide students the information and knowledge for the management and operation of personal business affairs.

A critical look at the above definition shows that business education is a skill-oriented programme that prepares recipients for useful living within the society. In spite of this potential impact, which some countries across the globe have used to their advantage in ensuring useful living within their society, Nigerians still view business education with disdain, while successive governments do not appear to give business education the required attention. A search through literatures revealed that business education in Nigeria have been starved with adequate funding, which seem to have led to the inadequate supply of manpower, inadequate

provision of material resources and utilization of outdated curriculum (Ekpenyong and Nwabuisi, 2003; Ekpenyong and Edokpolor, 2015; Edokpolor et al., 2016; Edokpolor and Imafidon, 2017). Ekpenyong and Edokpolor (2015) further argued that the inadequate provision of resources (both human and material) has consequently hinders the production of skilled and competent graduates that are useful for poverty alleviation and national development. This unpleasant situation has devalued the image and reputation of business education, both in education and in labour market.

As pointed out in the theoretical framework, resources in and of themselves confer no value to an organization. It is only when they are put into productive use that value follows. As such, there is the need to devise a strategic means of ensuring adequate provision and utilization of resources in order for business education to possess the capability of redeeming Nigeria from the problem of absolute poverty and underdevelopment as well as to save our young youths from a bleak future. The adequate provision and utilization of resources in business education would help in the production of skilled and competent graduates, who are useful for the betterment of the society. This strategic means of ensuring adequate provision and utilization of resources in business education would specifically help to improve the quality of human lives and capabilities by raising their levels of living or sustenance (ability to meet basic needs), self-esteem (ability to be a person, of not being used as a tool by others for their own ends), and freedom (ability to be able to choose). The realization of these basic components of national development through the effective provision and utilization of inputs (resources) in business education would further help in enhancing people's belief about the usefulness of business education programme in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to outline the potential role and impact of business education in the preparation of recipients for useful living within the society through the acquisition of requisite attributes such as, skills, knowledge, values, and competences. The paper also portrayed that business education, over the years, has witnessed a setback in this role, due to the negative perception accorded to it, as well as, the inadequate provision of funds to source for qualified manpower and procure infrastructural facilities. This situation has also affected the production of skilled and competent graduates that are useful for poverty alleviation and national development. As such, this unpleasant situation has devalued the image and reputation of business education in education and labour market. To re-orient the mindset of the vast majority of Nigeria's populace, there is dare need to ensure adequate provision and

proper utilization of resources (both human and non-human) in business education. It is the researcher's contention that the possession and utilization of unique resources would allow business education to produce skilled and competent graduates, who in turn, will be able to meet their basic needs, from a variety of opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper therefore recommended that:

1. Government should endeavour to formulate the policies that would help in ensuring the effective implementation of business education and expansion of business skills so as to produce a new generation of skill and competent graduates who can serve as the driving force for poverty alleviation and national development.
2. Government should endeavour to partner with major stakeholders of business education to help in ensuring adequate provision and utilization of resources in order for youths to: (i) acquire requisite attributes for poverty alleviation in Nigeria; (ii) to acquire requisite attributes that would improve the levels of living, self-esteem, and freedom; and (iii) to improve the image and reputation of business education in education and labour market.
3. Individuals should strive to be business-oriented in order to help in generating high income capacities for quality living, self-esteem, and freedom.
4. There is need for non-governmental organization to sanitize each community on the importance of business education programmes and entrepreneurial careers. This will further help to alleviate the high level of poverty as well as contribute to sustainability in terms of development of Nigerian economy.

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